

# The real problem of self-assessment

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# The rhetoric of self-assessment

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- Adult education literature positions expertise as a process of effective self-reflection
  - Lifelong, self-directed learners

# The rhetoric of self-assessment

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- Adult education literature positions expertise as a process of effective self-reflection
  - Lifelong, self-directed learners
- The health professions have embraced a philosophy of professional autonomy and self-regulation
  - Demands competent and trustworthy self-assessment

# The reality of self-assessment

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- Hundreds of articles
- Many literature reviews
- One conclusion:

**Self-assessment ability  
is generally poor**

# Three key patterns of data

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- Little or no relationship between externally generated scores and self-assessed scores
- All but the very highest performers tend to overestimate ability
- Worst offenders are in lowest quartile of performance

# The response

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- Morbid fascination
- Disbelief
- Concern
- Efforts to explain
- Efforts to improve

# Today's talk

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- The situation is worse than you might imagine:

# Today's talk

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- The situation is worse than you might imagine:
  - **It's our problem too**



# Today's talk

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- The situation is worse than you might imagine:
  - **It's our problem too**
  - Why is self assessment so bad?
  - What is perpetuating the myth of good self-assessment?
  - What are the implications for effective feedback?

# Why is self-assessment so bad?

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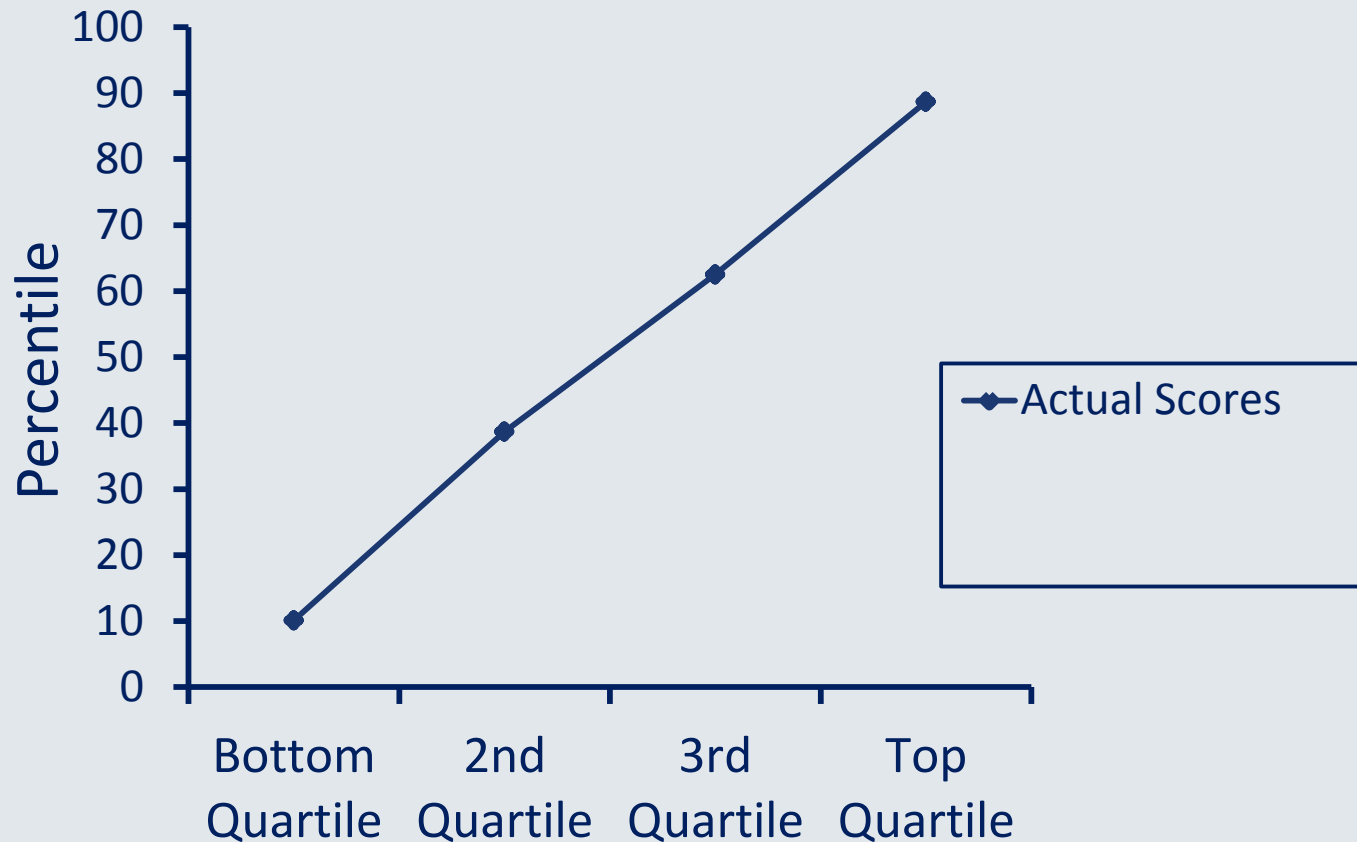
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# Why is self-assessment so bad?

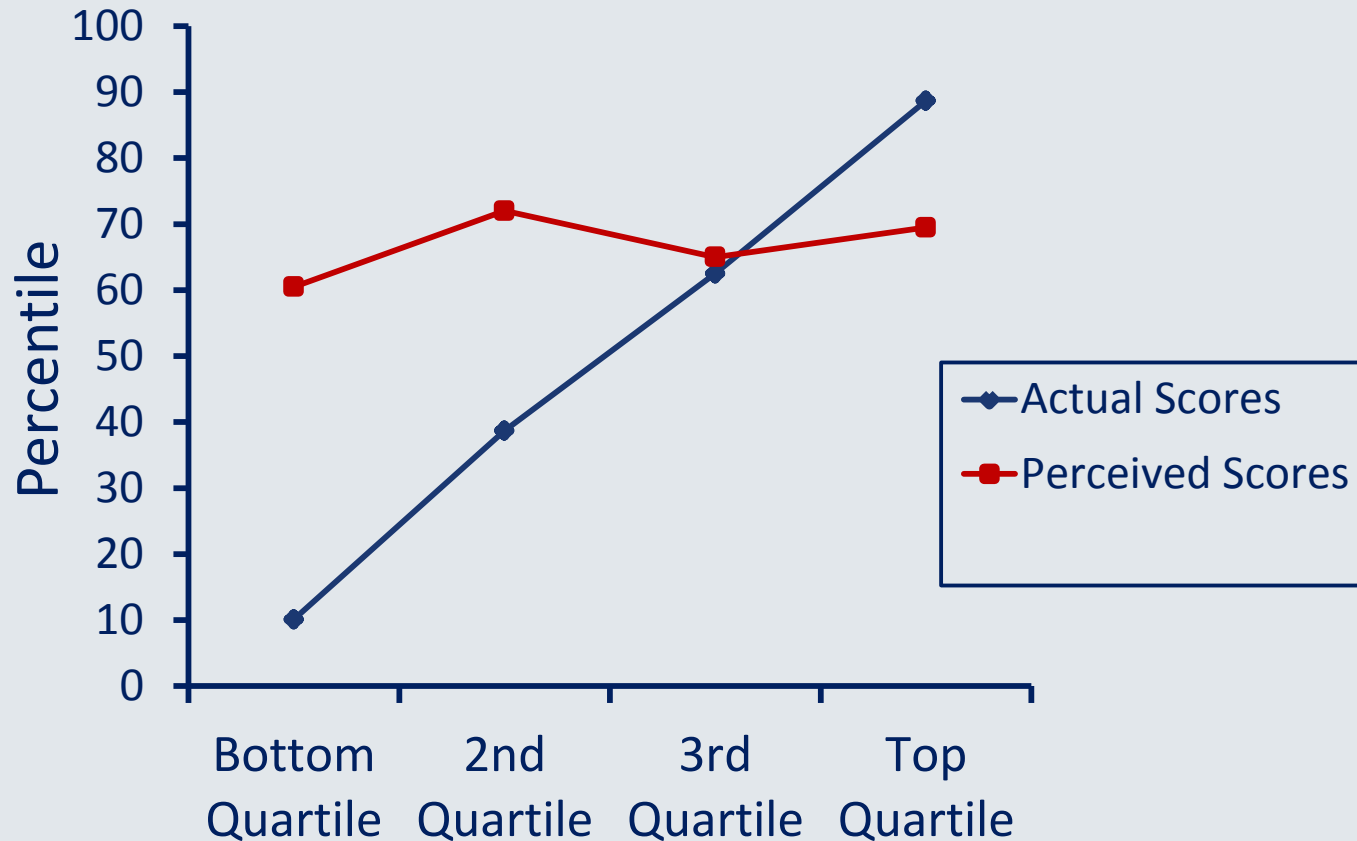
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- Kruger & Dunning (1999): “Unskilled and unaware”
  - The skills required to know whether you are performing well are also the skills required to actually perform well

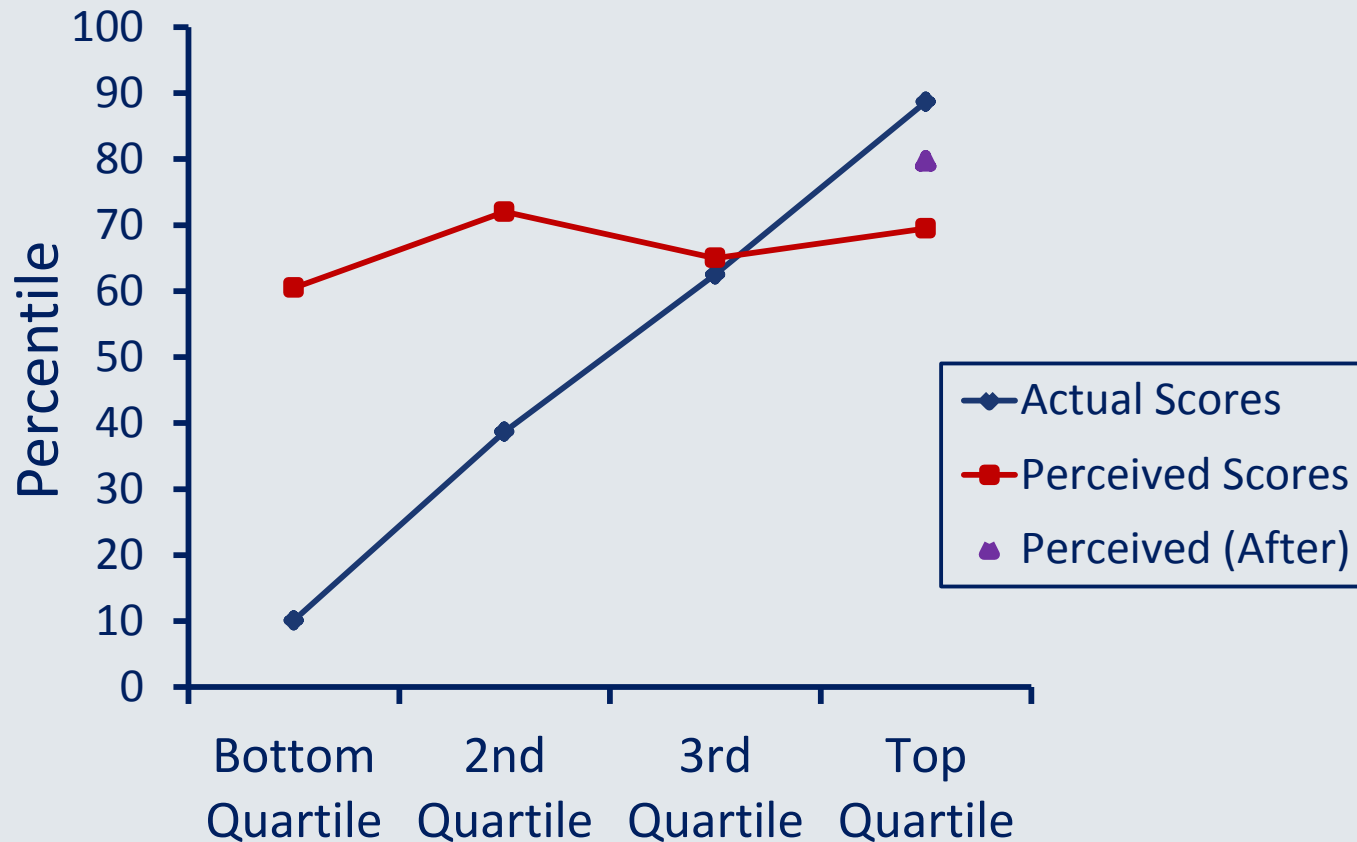
# University students' performance on a grammar test



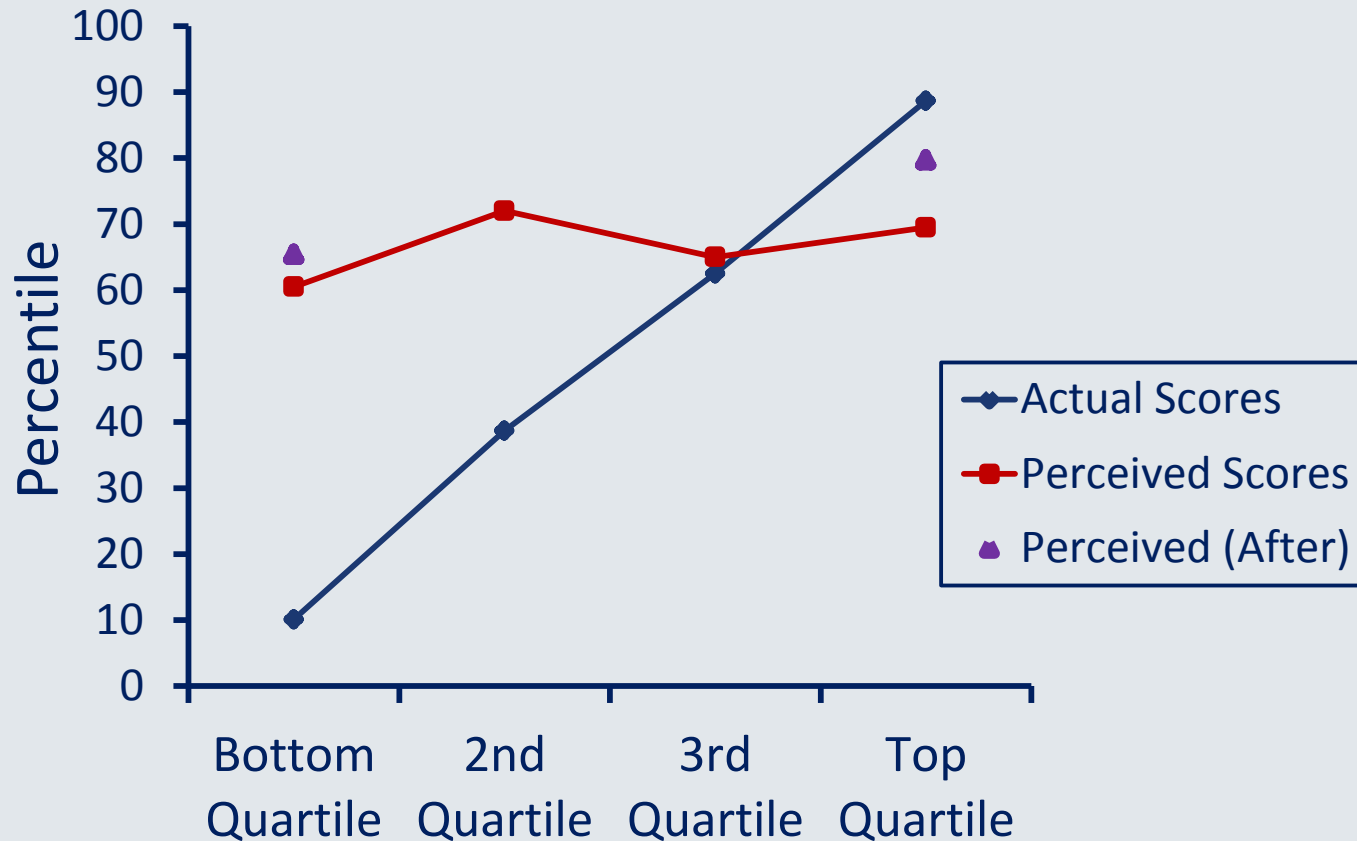
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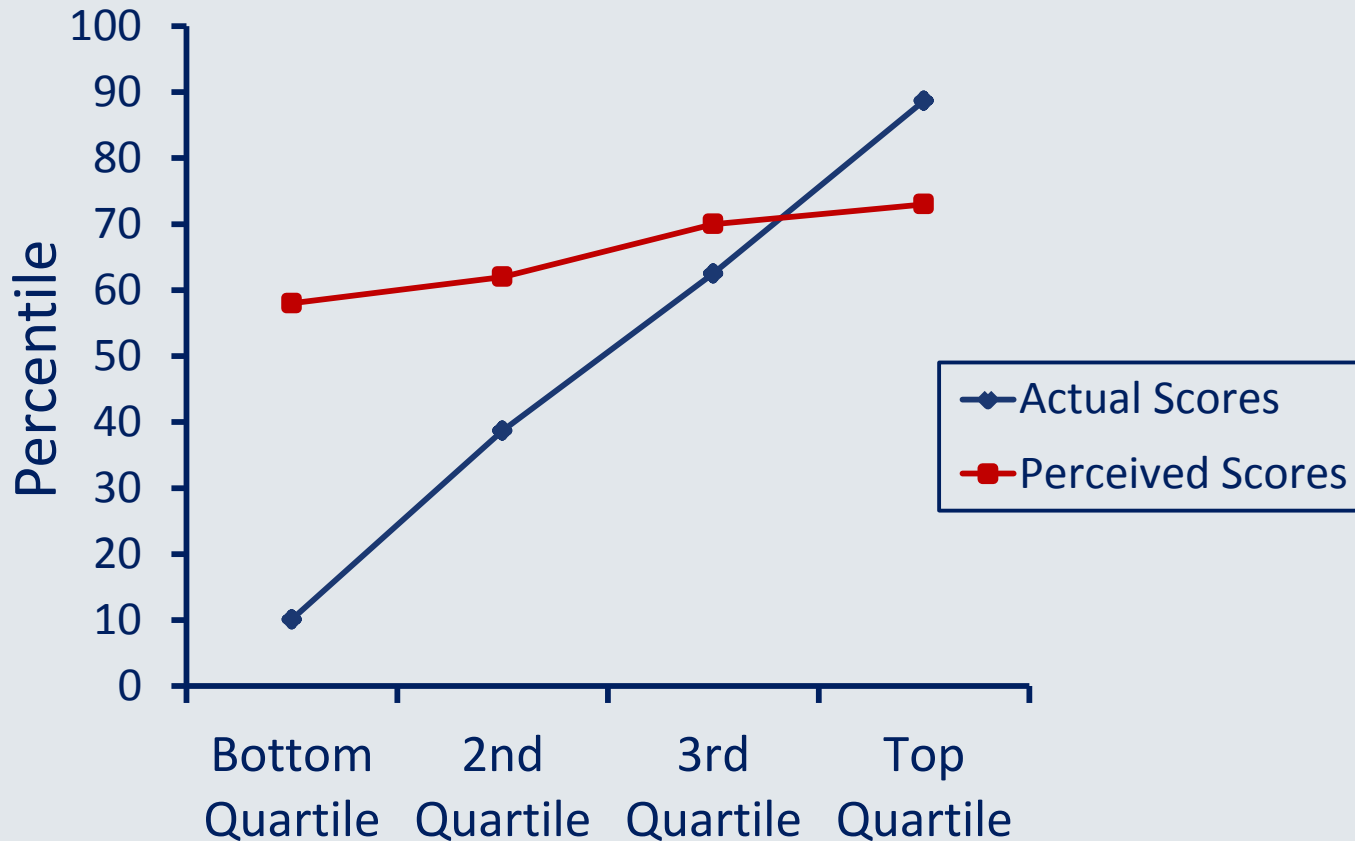
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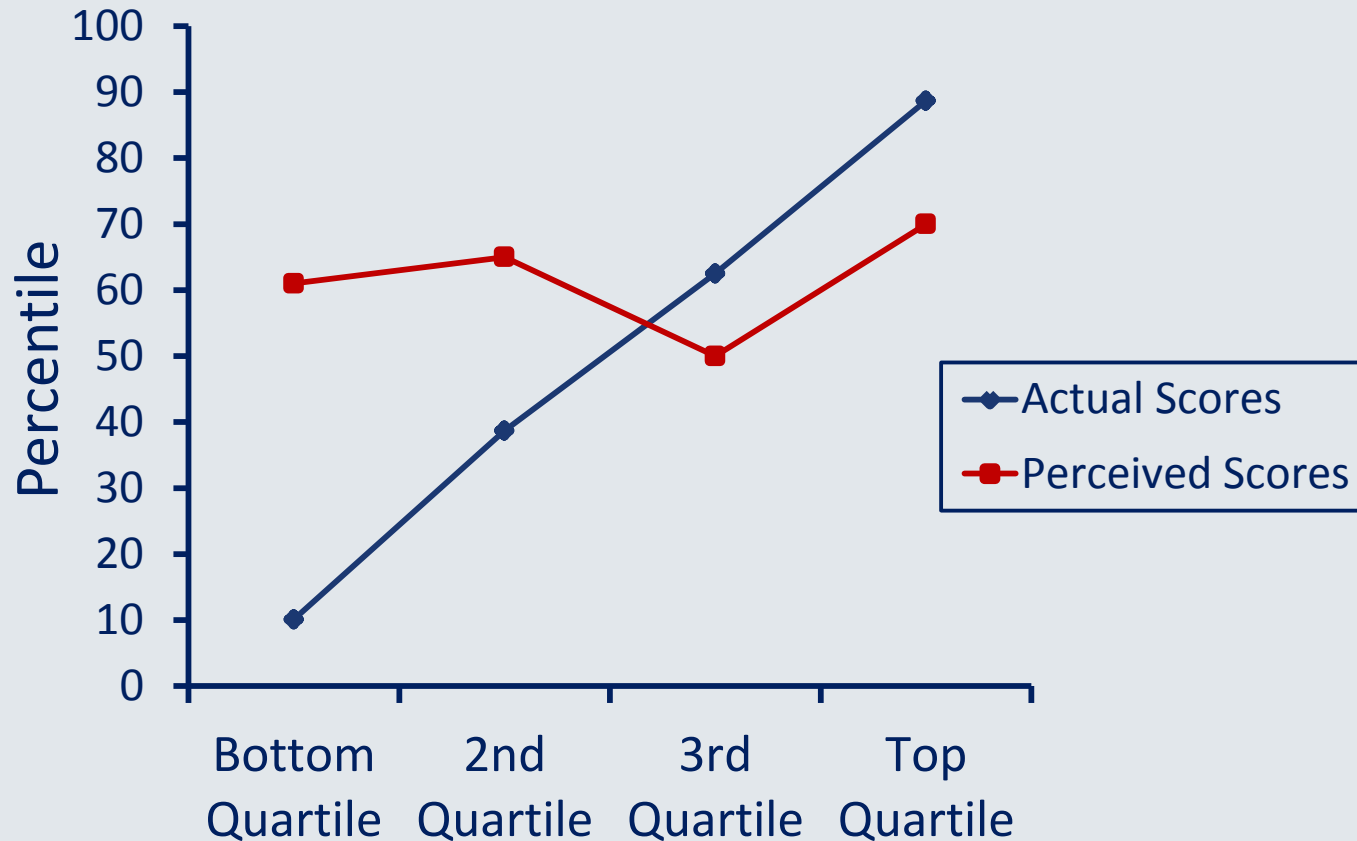


# University students' performance on a humor test

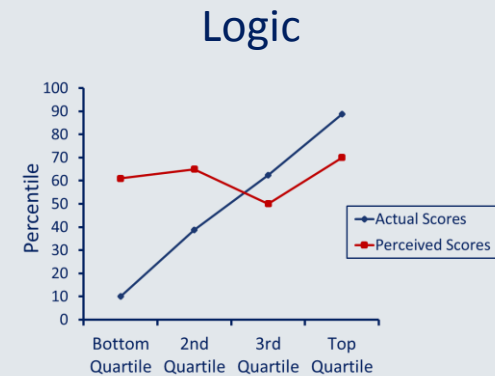
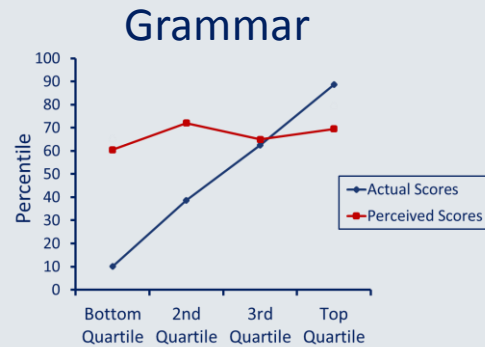




# University students' performance on a logic test



# “Domain specificity” of self-assessment



# “Domain specificity” of self-assessment

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- Self-assessment is NOT a “generalizable” trait of individuals
  - Better for domains where one excels
  - Worse for domains where one is poor
  - Often arises from “local perceptual deficits”
- Therefore:
  - Domains where you are most likely to need self-awareness are the domains where you are least likely to have it

# The irony of self-assessment

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*“It is impossible to make people understand their ignorance, for it requires knowledge to perceive it; and therefore, he that can perceive it hath it not”*

-Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

# double The<sup>v</sup> irony of self-assessment

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- Everyone thinks this is a “they” problem
  - Everyone thinks they are above average in self-assessment ability
- This is a WE problem:
  - Everyone is prone to these issues (in our own specific areas)

# Perpetuating the myth

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# Perpetuating the myth

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- Easy to find extreme examples of “knowing” where you are weak
  - I could never play professional football
  - I would never go on American Idol (obviously I have more insight than those people)

# Perpetuating the myth

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- Easy to feel confidence in “knowing” where you are strong
  - Difficulty of getting corrective feedback
    - I give good talks (people who come up always say nice things)
  - Ease of discounting potentially corrective feedback
    - “The exception that proves the rule”
    - “It’s a one time thing it just happens a lot.”
    - “Nobody has said that before”



# The 2x2 table

		REALITY	
		WEAK	STRONG
BELIEF	WEAK	Football Singing	
	STRONG		Talks

# The 2x2 table

		REALITY	
		WEAK	STRONG
BELIEF	WEAK	Football Singing	???
	STRONG	???	Talks

# The 2x2 table

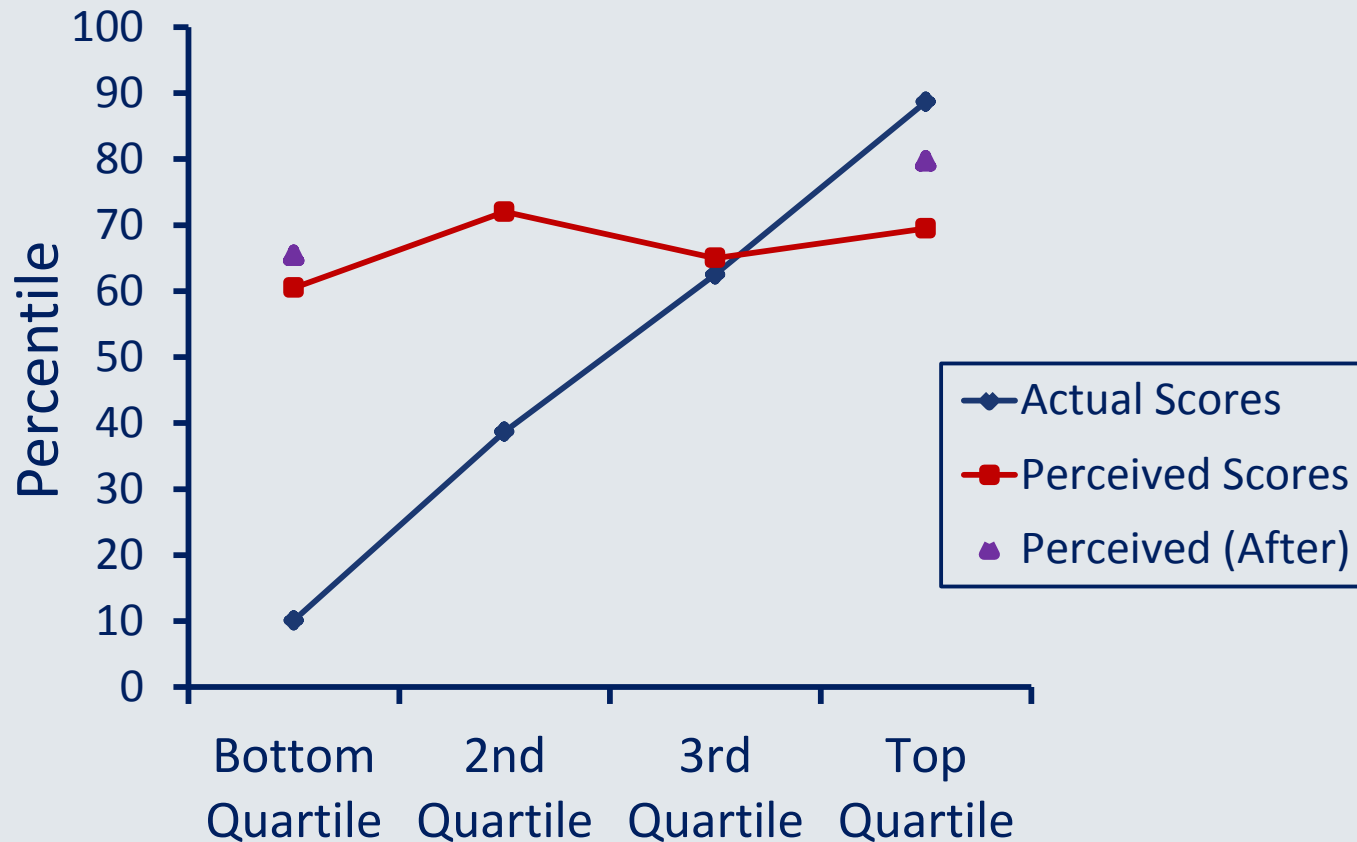
		REALITY	
		WEAK	STRONG
BELIEF	WEAK	??? Singing	???
	STRONG	???	???

# Be afraid ... Be very afraid

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- For any skill, 25% of us are in the bottom quartile and many of us who are, still think we are above average
- So if you think you are above average at some skill, how do you REALLY know?

# Which end of the curve are you?



# Be afraid ... Be very afraid

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- For any skill, 25% of us are in the bottom quartile and many of us who are, still think we are above average
- So if you think you are above average at some skill, how do you REALLY know?
- This is not a “they” problem ... it’s a “we” problem

# The difficult questions

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- What are your sources of data for developing an understanding of your current abilities?
  - What data would convince you that you are not as good as you thought you were?
  - What do you do with data that are inconsistent with your current belief about yourself?
    - “The exception that proves the rule”
    - “Nobody has ever suggested this before”
    - “It’s a one time thing it just happens a lot”

# The difficult questions

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- **Who** are your sources of data for developing an understanding of your current abilities?
  - Who is allowed to tell you what needs improving?
    - Who do you ask for feedback?
    - Who is allowed to give you feedback even when you don't ask?
  - Whose opinion do you respect so much that you would be willing to learn something hard just because he/she said you should?



# Implications for feedback

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- Performance deficits may arise from perceptual deficits
  - The student may not be able to see what the teacher sees
  - The teacher may not understand what it is like not to see
- Feedback happens in the context of a relationship
  - The “who” matters
    - Is this someone I trust?
    - Is this someone I respect?
    - Is this someone I want to think well of me?
  - Teachers not *de facto* accepted by students as a “credible” source



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