Hi graduate friends,

There are a lot of emotions related to reading in grad school; excitement about learning something new, frustration over not understanding, hope from a theory you can use, or anger from how difficult a text is. Emotions can impact how much you understand a text and how much you think you understood it.

Negative emotions like anger and hopelessness are often connected with lower reading comprehension (Prinz-Weiß et al., 2023). This may be because negative emotions can lead to more task-irrelevant thinking, leaving you with less cognitive resources to use to actually comprehend the text (Pekrun et al., 2007). But positive emotions aren't necessarily linked to better comprehension, so just try not to fall into negativity when reading!
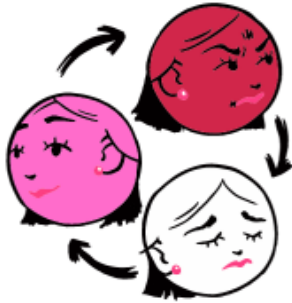
After a text has been read, students with positive emotions (pride, enjoyment, hope, etc.) have shown to be more overconfident and overestimate their comprehension while students with negative emotions (shame, anxiety, hopelessness, etc.) were underconfident and underestimated their comprehension (Prinz-Weiß et al., 2023). After students were tested on the contents, underconfidence increased but their judgements of their comprehension became more accurate.

The moral of the story is that emotions just aren't a good sign for whether you understood something or not. This is good news because when you read something and feel really bad about it, it's possible that you understood more than you thought! The bad news is that if you read something and feel great about it, it might not mean you understood it as well as you thought. Unfortunately, students typically don't have accurate judgements of their learning (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012). But with practice, you can get better at this. Use diagnostic cues instead of your emotions. For example, test yourself to see if you can explain the concept out loud in your own words, try to apply the concept to another setting, explain why you agree or disagree with the author's stance, etc. Research shows that after being tested on concepts, judgement accuracy goes up (Pierce & Smith, 2001) and a more accurate judgement about your learning can help you regulate your learning and in turn, enhance your comprehension (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012).

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Reference:

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Pierce, B. H., & Smith, S. M. (2001). The postdiction superiority effect in metacomprehension of text. *Memory & Cognition*, *29*(1), 62–67. https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03195741

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