

# Giftedness

## Facts & figures, focus points, tips & tricks



### 1. Facts & Figures

- An unambiguous **definition** of giftedness does not exist. Giftedness is considered to be a result of an **interaction** between **ability** (high IQ) on the one hand and **environmental and personality characteristics** on the other. High intelligence is usually not considered as a sufficient condition for giftedness. If an individual has an IQ above 130, one increasingly speaks of a highly intelligent individual. The average giftedness in the population is indicated by an IQ of 100. In addition to a high IQ, gifted students usually have a **faster information processing** and stronger analytical abilities than students without giftedness. **Non-cognitive personality characteristics** and **environmental factors** such as, for example, coping with stress, achievement motivation, work and learning strategies, (failure) anxiety, coping skills, the family climate, and the quality of instruction, **facilitate or hinder** the development of the giftedness factors.
- An estimated **3% of the population** is gifted.
- Giftedness is **not a disability or disorder**. However, giftedness does occur at an **increased rate in combination with disabilities** such as ADHD or autism. Gifted students may also experience **specific barriers** in the transition to higher education.
- Much research has been done on giftedness by children. There are **few studies** of giftedness by **students in higher education**. Studies on gifted students are often qualitative in design, with a small sample size and no reference sample of normally gifted students.
- Gifted students in higher education are a **heterogeneous group**. While many gifted students do very well in higher education, there is also a group that,

despite the potential to achieve strong academic results, [underperforms](#) and/or experiences [specific obstacles](#) in the transition to higher education. Research on school careers of gifted students in Flanders shows that 38.6% of gifted students experienced delays within higher education.

- The group of gifted students who underperform are also a [heterogeneous group](#). While many gifted students are selective achievers or intrinsically motivated students who use their skills in specific areas that meet their interests and personal goal orientation, quite a few gifted are often not motivated or less motivated for easy subjects. A low academic self-concept and perfectionism are more often reported in gifted underachieving students. Highly gifted students may also feel lonely because they do not connect as well with other students. They feel "different" and report difficulties with superficial social interactions (small talk) and building a social network.
- Giftedness is rarely the [registration complaint or help request](#) of a student in higher education. More often than not, students come with questions concerning difficulties with study methods, writing assignments, fear of failure, or with complaints of not feeling good about themselves.
- Whereas creating an [autonomy-supporting, well-structured, challenging, warm and responsive environment](#) for gifted students provides positive outcomes in terms of perseverance, well-being and academic performance, targeted [study support and psychosocial support](#) is an effective way to address specific barriers.

## 2. Focus points & tips

### □ Study choice and study trajectory

#### Focus points

- Gifted students often have [multiple interests](#) and sometimes find it difficult to choose one study programme.

- Gifted students may need an **extra challenge**, but sometimes have insufficient insight into the expectations of a study programme and into their own learning process.
- While certain gifted students look for a challenge in **depth**, others look for a challenge in **broadening**.

### Tips

- **Specifying the expectations and learning outcomes** of the courses helps to set realistic expectations.
- An **individual trajectory** tailored to the strengths can be supportive. Taking up multiple credits per year, taking courses across faculties, (broad sphere of interest) / electives from other disciplines, experience abroad, an Honours Programme (a programme on top of the study program) or an English trajectory or joint degree can meet the needs of these students.
- It can be supportive to build up the study trajectory **step by step** so that support can be offered for pitfalls with a study method, time management, writing skills and / or group work.

## □ Attending classes

### Focus points

- Highly gifted students can **make connections easily** and can be immediately involved in the lesson, understanding and following along with the **teacher's accents and comments**.
- The strong cognitive abilities and fast information processing can lead to the subject matter being perceived as **too easy** or the **pace of learning too slow**. This can lead to boredom and a lack of challenge, which can have a negative impact on the student's **motivation** and **concentration**.
- The critical attitude can lead to **frequent** and **unmeasured questioning**. Sometimes gifted students formulate their **opinions too**

directly without considering the feelings of others. This can make them appear threatening or aggressive, which can lead to conflict or misunderstandings with teachers and/or fellow students.

### Tips

- The provision of the [course material, presentations and in-depth contributions](#) allows the student to set the pace and to focus on deepening and broadening the subject matter.
- [An additional task, extra study material or a challenging project](#), provide opportunities to further develop skills and potential.
- Monitoring the need for [autonomy](#) such as giving the opportunity to look up something about a certain theory, giving the responsibility to set their own goals and where possible giving freedom of choice, can be stimulating.
- Clear [agreements](#) on how and when questions can be asked can be supportive of an open dialogue in class.

### □ Processing and rehearsing study materials

#### Focus points

- Highly gifted students can [easily make connections](#) and like to study subjects that require a great deal of [insight](#).
- Insufficient challenges in the earlier school career may result in poorly developed [study methods, study skills](#), and/or [study attitudes](#). Possibly there was no need previously to develop a learning routine.
- Specific interest in certain study content may be [distracting](#) and may lead to difficulties in distinguishing between main and minor issues.
- [Motivation](#) for easy subjects or subjects outside the field of interest is often difficult.

## Tips

- Study guidance can be a help to set up a [realistic study planning](#) and to realize an efficient organization of study time.
- During study support, [techniques for distinguishing between main and minor issues](#) and [structuring](#) learning materials can be used.
- [Learning objectives and sample questions](#) can aid in the processing of learning material and can promote self-testing strategies and self-direction.

## □ Assignments

### Focus points

- Understanding an assignment and figuring out the [exact expectations](#) of questions can be difficult.
- Some gifted students are [perfectionists](#) and set high expectations for themselves. On the one hand, this can lead to better performance because it motivates them. On the other hand, it can cause [stress and fear of failure](#), which can lead to [overachievement or avoidance behavior](#).
- Highly gifted students may lose themselves in the pursuit of [perfection or certain details](#) and avoid certain challenges if they think they will not be able to achieve the intended goal.
- Highly gifted students may appear [overwhelmed](#) in their enthusiasm by asking many questions and coming up with many ideas.
- [Getting the message across concisely and coherently](#) can be a concern. Their quick thinking sometimes puts them several steps ahead of others, which in addition to [communication](#) can also make [group collaboration](#) difficult and can cause frustration. In groups, a lot of energy sometimes goes into coming up with ideas and coordinating with fellow students.

## Tips

- Providing **clear instructions** on assignments is supportive. Instruction on the extensiveness of the assignment prevents working in too much detail.
- Texts offered **optionally** by instructors can provide an opportunity to go deeper into the subject matter.
- The opportunity to choose one's **own topic** for master's thesis/bachelor's thesis can be stimulating.
- For large assignments such as a bachelor's thesis or master's thesis, **additional interim feedback** may be needed.
- For **group work**, support in coordinating ideas and following up on the group process can be supportive.
- **Giving choice in** an assignment, e.g., paper, film, presentation, or variation in assignment forms can be stimulating.

## □ Exams

### Focus points

- With an exam, it is sometimes difficult to assess **expectations**.
- Thinking differently can lead to certain things **being understood differently** or to **multiple possibilities of interpretation**.
- Difficulty with **main and side issues** can cause the answer to not be concise.

## Tips

- Providing **clear instructions** on exam questions is supportive. Instructions on how deeply the material should be known prevents working in too much detail. Referring to the **assessment criteria** can also be helpful.
- Providing **sample questions and model answers** is an aid to proper preparation for the exam.

- Guidelines on the [length of the exam/exam questions](#) provide guidance for assessing expectations.
- Providing feedback and commitment to [self-assessment and learning strategies](#), to learn from disappointing results, can be supportive. It is important to learn to adjust study methods when necessary, to dare to push boundaries, and to learn that achieving something takes time and practice.
- Answer the questions [step by step](#) so that the student makes fewer mistakes and the reader can follow the reasoning.

## □ Student life

### Focus points

- [Connecting with peers](#) can be challenging. Gifted students may have a sense of being different because of different interests, for example. They often experience misunderstandings about giftedness among peers. Communication and 'social talk' are sometimes experienced as difficult and this brings uncertainty and doubt.
- [Additional problems](#) can occur such as fear of failure, stress, low self-esteem or loneliness. The gifted often put great pressure on themselves (do not want to disappoint themselves or others) and often overthink a problem (brooding). Expressing emotions and formulating a request for help can be difficult.

### Tips

- Student services staff offer [coaching for psychosocial problems](#).
- [Contact with other gifted students](#) in the form of group offerings, study sessions together, or mentoring, can be supportive. It allows gifted students to feel recognized, and to give being 'different' a better place. It can also promote insight into one's own functioning.
- It may be important to explicitly give the student the message that gifted students are also allowed to [make mistakes](#) or 'fail'.

### 3. More information

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