

# Motivation

Do you ever procrastinate to avoid unpleasant tasks or assignments? Do you struggle to motivate yourself to get started? Motivating yourself to go to class, complete assignments, study, and do all the other things required of you in high school can be difficult—but it's crucial to your academic.

Research shows that students can learn how to become better learners by using effective motivation strategies. Successful students know how to self-regulate (control) their own learning and the factors that impact their learning. Fortunately, there are strategies for increasing motivation and self-efficacy, which can in turn increase chances of academic success and well-being.

This handout explores common challenges when it comes to accomplishing tasks and shares several tips and strategies to improve your self-motivation.

## Effort over ability

One of the key differences between people who do and don't succeed is not their *ability level* but their *effort and motivation levels*. Few people wake up wanting to do unpleasant or boring tasks. The ones who do them and succeed in them are the ones who believe they can and motivate themselves to do them even when they don't feel like it. Here are some specific strategies you can use to develop your self-motivation and improve your overall success.

## Motivational strategies

### Strategies to set yourself up for success

**Set clear goals.** Include daily, weekly, semester, and long-term goals. Write them down somewhere easily visible. Use SMART goals to be specific and create a plan: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound. For example: Instead of saying, "I want to get better grades," say something like, "I want to get at least an 85% on my BIO exam on March 5." Even better, set up concrete goals (e.g., increased study hours, peer tutoring) that help you track your progress toward that long-term goal.

**Help yourself focus.** Eliminate or limit things that are distracting and cause you to procrastinate. Take distracting apps off your phone, turn off the TV, study outside of your dorm room, keep your phone/laptop away during class or study times, block Netflix, clear out the junk food, etc. If you know you struggle with something, make it more difficult for you to indulge in that temptation.

**Pace yourself.** Chunk your study, work, and reading times into small sections (30-60 minutes) with breaks in between. Breaks are important for your focus, health, and motivation and should be worked into any study time. If you are going to be studying or working for longer, go back and forth between one task or class and another.

**Prioritize.** Study early in the day and do the most challenging or unpleasant tasks first. Research shows that tackling difficult tasks first thing in the day can make you feel better throughout the rest of

the day and be more productive. Doing so keeps you from procrastinating all day and having that dreaded feeling of knowing that you need to do something unpleasant.

**Location, location, location.** Think about where you work best and where you will be most motivated to get to work and stay working. For most people, their bedroom or bed are not ideal, as they come with many distractions. Some students focus better in a public place like the library or a family kitchen, while others prefer silence and isolation, like a quiet and secluded room on campus.

## Self-care strategies

**Get enough sleep.** Aim for at least 7 hours a night. Sleep is important to motivation. If you aren't well-rested and are running on fumes, it's a lot more difficult to be productive, stay focused, and motivate yourself.

**Build a routine and healthy habits.** Structure healthy habits like meals, sleep, exercise, and study times into your daily schedule and then stick with it. Motivating yourself to accomplish tasks becomes easier when you make it a part of your regular routine.

**Eat and drink healthily.** Drink enough water—your body needs water to function and improve energy. Eat regularly, don't skip meals, and try to eat healthy foods. You need energy to complete tasks, and it's much easier to get started and stay focused on work if you are well fed.

## Metacognitive strategies

Reflect on what makes you happy, what fulfills you, and what you are passionate about. Try to align what you do with things that make you happy and fulfill you. If you spend all of your time doing or pursuing things that you do not like or care about, you may never be fully motivated. Choosing pathways and activities that interest you is one of the biggest ways to better motivate yourself.

Give yourself rewards for accomplishing difficult tasks or punishments for not completing tasks. Use rewards and punishments that work for you.

Think about what support you need in order to achieve your goals and then get the support you need. This could include investing in a new planner, attending peer tutoring, or making an appointment with your guidance counselor.

Accept that you aren't perfect. Many students lack motivation because they are afraid of not performing as well as they would like. Combat your fear of failure by telling yourself that your self-worth does not depend on your ability to perform. Include your image of success to include personal and social success and growth.

Write a letter to your future self to remind yourself of your goals. Read this message when you find yourself feeling unmotivated.

Reflect. When you have a task to accomplish, reflect before, during, and after. Think about your feelings towards the task, what you need to do to accomplish it, and how you feel when you are done.

Talk to yourself out loud about your dreams and goals and speak encouraging, positive words to yourself. Compliment yourself and tell yourself you can do it.

List out what is preventing you from doing what you need to do, then find ways to tackle those things. Be specific.

Think long-term. Keep focused on your long-term goals and think about them when you're feeling unmotivated. Remind yourself of how this task or step gets you closer to your big goals. Print out a picture of where you want to be in the future and post it on your wall or mirror.

If you're feeling stuck, visualize yourself as you want to be in the future. Picture yourself in your future career or situation and remind yourself of what you are working for.

Stay positive and optimistic. When your goal is to stay motivated, refuse to complain about your problems. As soon as you find yourself complaining about them to someone, stop. Focus on the positives and stay optimistic, even if it's a stretch at first.

Think about consequences. Sometimes thinking about the negative consequences of not doing a particular task you might be stuck on can be motivating. Alternatively, think about the reward of accomplishing the goal (or at least the feeling of being getting it over with) as a motivator.

## Accountability strategies

Set visual reminders and alarms on your phone and laptop to remind and encourage yourself of your goal. Consider changing the background of your phone and laptop to a motivational quote or simply to saying the goal that you want to reach. Create positive and encouraging visual reminders and motivators to hang on your bedroom wall or mirror.

Share your goals with a friend, classmate, or someone in your life. Reach out to someone and ask them to help keep you accountable with your work and goals. Check in with this person regularly to discuss your progress.

Attend tutoring to discuss the class with your professor and gain specific tips and suggestions.

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