



Motivation Matters

Research [1] shows that students' motivation levels are strongly related to how they approach their study and how they feel about themselves as learners. Highly motivated students are more likely to be self-directed learners and therefore are likely to be successful. Essential to being a self-regulated learner is establishing clear goals, developing good time management, using effective learning strategies, setting priorities, reflecting on your learning, and, most importantly, being an active learner. These steps in becoming and staying motivated are explored in this resource.

[1] Bandura A., & Locke, E. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(1), 87-99

Key steps to motivation

- Establish clear goals
- Develop good time management
- Be an active learner
- Set clear priorities
- Reflect on your learning
- Reward yourself!

Establish clear goals:

What short-term, medium-term and long-term goals do you want to achieve? For example, short-term goals should include meeting assignment deadlines, and passing exams, and might include cultural or sporting activities. Medium term goals might include being accepted into a particular course, going on an exchange programme, or other personal or study ambitions. Long-term goals will undoubtedly include successful completion of your degree, possibly travel, further study, and/or career plans.

Write down your goals and put them where you can readily see them so you can regularly revisit your list, especially if you feel your motivation lagging.

Develop good time management

A common reason for losing motivation is feeling overwhelmed by your workload and other commitments. Time is like money: there's never enough and it has to be budgeted. The following tips will help you to organise your time effectively:

- Set semester plans, weekly plans, and daily plans.
- Organise your study timetable so that you meet assignment deadlines.
- Avoid procrastination: if you're finding this a problem, just get started: making even a small effort is better than doing nothing.
- Balance study with leisure, sport or exercise.
- Avoid too much time spent on Facebook, Twitter, etc.—use these as mini rewards after study sessions.

Be an active learner

To motivate yourself, and maintain motivation, approach your learning "actively", as opposed to "passively". An "active" approach is to engage with information in a creative and meaningful way. For example:

- Relate new information to what you already know.
- Ask yourself questions to identify what you don't quite understand, and seek answers to fill in the gaps.
- Revisit the learning objectives for a module or course to work out what ideas are important. The content of your lectures has levels of importance and establishing a hierarchy or order of importance of information will help to focus your study.
- Try different techniques to work with your notes. For example, give yourself a mini lecture, explain a theory to a friend, create a concept map or diagram, or write a summary of key points.
- Add more detail to information where appropriate. For example, if a lecturer has emphasised some ideas over others but you have scant detail about them, expand on your existing information by referring to assigned readings, or handouts.

Set clear priorities

The ability to prioritise commitments is another key to maintaining motivation. Balance study and personal life as much as possible, but keep in mind important things that must be done as opposed to things that you might like to do. Remember your goals and make clear priorities to achieve them. A social life is important but be prepared to say "no" when necessary: other people's demands on your time will not necessarily fit with your goals.

Reflect on your learning

Essential to self-regulated learning and maintaining motivation is the ability to actively reflect on what you're learning. This can be done quietly by yourself or in discussion with others. Ask yourself:

- What do I know about this topic?
- What do I need to clarify so I understand it better?
- Why is this information important?
- What other examples could I apply it to?
- How does this information fit into the "big picture"?

Important to reflecting on your learning is taking into account feedback on your assignments from your tutors and lecturers: can this feedback help you to do better? What do you need to improve upon?

Such reflection will help you to identify and develop any further skills you feel you need, and encourage you to monitor your progress. However, if you believe you're progressing as well as you can, this in itself is motivation to continue the good work! This reflective approach will improve your motivation, which in turn will help you become a more confident and engaged student. The strategy of self-reflection is not only important to your ongoing learning, but is also a valuable attribute in professional life.