



### Motivation

Do you ever procrastinate to avoid unpleasant tasks or assignments? Do you find it hard to get started? Do you struggle to stay focused and on task when working from your house or apartment? Motivating yourself to go to class, complete assignments, study, and do all the other things required of you in college can be difficult—but it's critical to your college success. 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 which can in turn increase chances of academic success and well-being.

Below you will find some common challenges when it comes to accomplishing tasks as well as 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 include:

**Set clear goals.** Include daily, weekly, semester, and long-term goals. Write them down where they are 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. For example, instead of saying, "I want to do well in my online classes," say something like, "I want to devote thirty minutes tomorrow to taking notes on my Spanish textbook before starting my online homework."

**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, keep your phone/laptop away during class or study times, create a designated study space in your bedroom or home, 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 unpleasant tasks first 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 start work and stay working. For most people, their house is not ideal, as it comes with many distractions. Some students focus better in a public place like the library or a coffee shop, while others prefer silence and isolation, like a quiet and secluded room on campus. Some students benefit from blocking off an area in their home that they use exclusively for studying and working on projects.



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#### Self-care strategies

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

#### 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 find it difficult to be motivated. Choosing pathways and activities that interest you is one of the best ways to motivate yourself.

**Give yourself rewards** for accomplishing difficult tasks and for identifying strategies that help keep you accountable.

**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 an Academic Coach at the Student Success Centre.

**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. Expand 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 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.

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

**Stay positive and optimistic.** Avoid complaining or negative thinking at times when you planned to make progress towards your goals. If the problems or obstacles can be set aside till later, it may help to write them down to ensure you get back to them. If there's a problem that cannot be set aside, seek out resources and support to help you address what's wrong.

**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 task (or at least the feeling of getting it over with) as a motivator.



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#### Accountability Strategies

Set visual reminders and alarms on your phone and laptop for encouragement and to remind yourself of your goal. Consider changing the background of your phone and laptop to a motivational quote or simply to state the specific 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 important in your life. Ask them to help keep you accountable with your work and goals. Check in with this person face-to-face or online regularly to discuss your progress.

Material in this section was sourced from:  
The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
<https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/motivation/>