

# The Trick to Staying Motivated in School – and Life!

Finding it difficult to stay motivated in school? Maybe it's difficult to stay on top of schoolwork, work, and life, and you can't just motivate yourself to keep up with all of it? The first step to motivating yourself, both in life and in academics, is to understand what you value what you need to do. In order to do this, you must develop a sense of intrinsic motivations and locate your core values.

## Intrinsic Motivation

It's difficult to stay motivated for a task that seems utterly meaningless to you. To find more meaning in what you do, make a moment to locate why that task is important to you. If you have a hard time figuring out what is meaningful to you through simple brainstorming, try asking yourself the following questions:

### Why am I doing this task?

- In this step, begin with the more immediate reasons. This should be the first answer that comes to mind once you ask yourself "Why?". For example: "Why am I researching for this course paper?" "Because if I do not, my paper won't have a strong argument".
- Ask yourself continuous "Why?" questions until you gain a thorough understanding of why you're doing the task. "Why does your paper need to have a strong argument?" "Because if it doesn't, it won't be a strong paper."

### What meaning does this task have to me?

- Think of your personal values and follow the succeeding train of thought. ▪ "Why do you need to have a strong paper?" "Because enjoy the feeling of success in a job well done", or "Because I need to get a good mark on this paper in order to do well in this class. I need to do well in this class in order to gain the skills necessary for my job in this field."
- If it's difficult for you to think that far down the line, it's okay to use more quantitative reasoning, such as: "I need to write a persuasive paper because it'll give me a good mark in the course, which I need to make my program requirements."

### What internal desire will completing this task spark in me?

- Intrinsic motivation may stem from an internal desire to engage in behaviors or actions that bring intrinsic rewards (feelings of pride, joy, increased self-esteem, or personal satisfaction).

Your overall incentive for being motivated to complete the task varies for each person – so long as you can create a reason that motivates you to get to work, you're all set!

Intrinsic motivation is helpful but can be difficult for the drudgery of classes you don't enjoy as much. In cases like this, it's helpful to give yourself rewards for getting work done. Here's an activity you can do:

- Make a list of 7 - 10 things that give you joy or pleasure.
- Next to it, write the date you last experienced each activity.
- Place a \$ next to the more costly activities. (Ex. Purchasing a food you like)
- Place a P next to activities that require planning. (Ex. A fun day out/in with friends)
- Place an S for activities with others. (Ex. Discord calls with friends)
- Place an A next to activities you do alone. (Ex. A walk with music, reading a fun book)

Once you've understood how to locate your intrinsic motivation, the next step is to develop goal-setting skills.

## Goal-Setting

It's difficult to stay motivated when you don't know where you're going. Some intrinsic motivation techniques involve looking deep into your future, but if you don't have a clear idea of that far out, it's a good idea to improve goal-setting skills for smaller things, like courses or individual assignments.

Without a clear understanding of your objectives, it's hard to stay motivated. Likewise, if a goal is too big and indigestible, it's easy to lose sight of the objective and give up. Thus, it's important to have a higher, over-arching goal, broken down into smaller pieces that you can use to guide you on a weekly basis.

You can access the separate board for goal setting [here](#).

## Active Inspiration, Motivation Routines and Rituals

One important factor to work into your daily routine is *active inspiration*. You can't wait for inspiration to teach you to gain the motivation to do work, because in doing so you may just spend all day waiting around for inspiration to strike! To aid with this, you can schedule your motivation so you can feel prepared to begin. Develop a consistent schedule to train your brain to be more motivated before and after through motivation routines and rituals. Here's how it's done:

- Keep a consistent waking and sleeping time (ex. Wake up at 8 am and be in bed by 12 am every day).
- Write out a list of calming activities that you typically do after waking up and before bed. Then, write out a list of short but calming activities.  
Ex. 10-minute meditation, a short walk or workout
- If you choose to meditate, some great free apps are:
  - [Smiling Mind](#)
  - [MyLife](#)
  - [10% Happier](#)
- Next to the tasks, estimate how much time all your necessary tasks take. Try to stay within a 15-to-45-minute timeframe so as to not waste too much time.
- Repeat daily!

Once you continually do your ritual, you'll train your brain into realizing that it's a motivation routine – a series of steps or a consistent routine that helps you to get started on a task, moving you into the studying mindset. For example, your study ritual could be mindfulness, creating a task schedule, or a warm-up activity.

In winding down before bed, be sure to follow a consistent sleep schedule and allow yourself to power down before bed without electronics -- do something relaxing that allows your brain to slow down after a day of work. In implementing both, you train your brain into realizing there's a set waking window for motivation.

Here's a helpful YouTube video on how habits are formed: [How to break habits \(from The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg\)](#)

## 3 R's of Habit Formation

It's difficult to create habits like rituals and task schedules. To help, try following the 3 R's of Habit Formation.

- **Reminder:** The cue or trigger to start the habit.  
The activity in your ritual is the cue to your brain that productivity will soon begin. This is what causes you to form the positive habit!
- **Routine:** This is the action or habit you form in order to trigger feelings of motivation.  
For best results, do this activity around the same time daily.
- **Reward:** The benefit gained from the habit.  
Your goal in implementing these rituals is motivation!

## Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Remember to believe in yourself! Motivation is increased based on how much you expect to complete a task. If you believe it's unlikely, you're not motivated to complete it.

This is the **Expectancy Theory of Motivation**. To believe in yourself, you must increase self-efficacy, the belief in your abilities to accomplish a specific task. To increase self-efficacy, you must plan to succeed. This is why good goal-setting skills are necessary for motivation – in having a distinct plan, it's easier to motivate the self. Create clear goals and plans of action as you approach new learning tasks. Go to our goal-setting worksheet in order to learn how, but in the meantime, use our SMART goals worksheet for day-to-day studying.

[AACCC SMART Goals Worksheet](#)

To increase self-efficacy, learn to create an **internal locus of control**. The locus of control theory is how the individual perceives the responsibility they have on the events around them.

To have an *external locus of control* is to believe that events or outputs occur outside of the individual's control, whereas an *internal locus of control* is to believe you have control on the events and outcomes of the world around you. If you believe you have actual control over your behavior, you increase your expectancy of completing the task, resulting in higher motivation!

Watch the video below for a greater understanding of how the locus of control can affect your motivation.

[Self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control | Individuals and Society | MCAT | Khan Academy](#)

## References:

- Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Self-management Approach
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Resource developed by Kauthar Mohammad (Study skill peer coach)

