

7 Ways to Improve Your Motivation to Study (Backed by Science)

by Winston Sieck - September 30, 2018

<https://www.globalcognition.org/improve-your-motivation-to-study/>

Just about everyone who has ever been in school knows what it feels like to sit in front of the computer, staring at a blank screen. Hoping their term paper would write itself.

Or tried reading a textbook only to find that they have read the same paragraph ten times and still don't know what they read.

Or decided they would rather clean the clutter out from under their bed than study in the first place.

Bottom line, studying can be kind of a drag. When you have a hundred other things you would rather do and an overwhelming amount of work to do, it is hard to get started and even harder to finish.

Fortunately, there are some simple, scientifically proven ways you can find your motivation and keep it.

What is Motivation to Study?

Motivation comes from a Latin word that literally means "to move." But what causes someone to be motivated to study has been a hot topic in the world of science.

Researchers believe that your motivation to study can either come from inside you or outside of you. You can be motivated by an internal drive to learn as much possible. Or, you might be motivated to study by an external reward like a good grade, or a great job, or someone promising you a car.

Recently, researchers have discovered that your motivation to study is rooted in lots of factors, many of which we have control over. Rory Lazowski of James Madison University and Chris Hulleman of the University of Virginia analyzed more than 70 studies into what motivates students in schools. They published [their paper](#), "Motivation Interventions in Education: A Meta-Analytic Review, in the journal *Review of Educational Research*.

Lazowski and Hulleman found that a number of ways to improve motivation consistently yield positive results. Here, I describe seven of the techniques that you can most readily use on your own to power through your own study barriers, and move your learning forward.

1. Set Clear Goals

You may think to yourself, "My goal is to graduate and get a good job and be rich." While that's a fine ambition, by itself it probably won't help you in school day-to-day.

In order to improve your motivation to study, your goals have to be a little closer to home. In fact, [setting clear academic goals](#) has been scientifically linked to higher grade point averages than students who set vague goals, like, "I'll just do the best I can."

Set a goal to earn an "A" on a particular test in a particular subject. Or, decide to learn everything you can about a concept because it will help you in the real world. Set a deadline for homework that will force you to finish a task before it is due so you can review it before handing it in. Whatever the goal is, be sure it is specific, relevant, and timely.

2. Don't Just Shoot For Performance, Go For Mastery

There is nothing more frustrating than studying hard for a test only to get a grade that is less than what you were expecting. At that point, lots of students throw their hands in the air and say, "If this is what happens when I study, why study?"

Resist that urge.

The grades you receive on a test are examples of performance goals. If you set a goal to get an "A", and stop there, you may only study the things that you think will be on the test, but not necessarily the things that will give you mastery of the concept.

Students who consistently [strive for mastery](#), really learning what they are studying, almost always see their grades improve as a result.

Mastery goals also help with your motivation to study. If you want to learn everything there is to know, you are less likely to put off starting that process.

3. Take Responsibility for Your Learning

It's tempting to blame your grades on other people. The teacher doesn't like you. They never taught what you were tested on. Your homework assignment doesn't apply. When you blame others for your performance, you are more likely to do poorly on tests, assignments and projects.

Taking responsibility for your own learning can make a world of difference when it comes to getting yourself motivated to study. Recognizing that you are in charge of what you learn can help you start studying, but it can also keep you going when other distractions threaten to take your attention away.

Next time you are tempted to stop in the middle of an assignment and do something else, pause. Take a breath. Then, say out loud, "No one is going to learn this for me." You might be surprised at how hearing those words affect your focus.

4. Adopt a Growth Mindset

Some people still believe that you're either born smart (or not). And there's not much you can do about it. However, research has shown that successful people tend to believe that [intelligence is something you build up](#) over your life. These folks have a growth mindset.

When your intelligence is challenged by hard assignments or difficult concepts, people with a growth mindset tend to think, "I don't know this yet, but if I work hard, I will learn it."

Researchers found that believing your brain can get stronger when you tackle hard things not only improves your mastery of what you are learning, it also improves your grades and increases your motivation to study.

The next time you are faced by a blank screen or hard textbook chapter remember, "I don't know this yet, but if I work hard, I will learn it."

5. Find the Relevance

If you ever want to annoy your math teacher, tell them algebra has no relevance in the real world. Alternatively, try to figure out how what you are studying relates to your life. Studies have shown that high school students who were asked to write down how their subject matter related to their everyday life saw a significant jump in their GPA.

Before you start studying, try jotting down a few ways this information will come in handy in the future. Making this connection will help you see value in what you are doing and get you started on an assignment or topic.

Sometimes, the connection between what you are learning and how it applies to your life is not easy to see. Try searching the web for applications of your topic to help you see the real-life relevance of what you are learning.

6. Imagine Your Future Self

Imagine what your life will be like in 10 years. Are you successful? Do you have a great career that you love? Are you living in the best city in the world?

Now, imagine how you are going to get there.

Some people automatically connect the school work they are doing now with getting into a good college or training program that will lead to their desired future. Other students have difficulty making that connection.

Having the ability to imagine your future self is a skill that has been shown to improve motivation to study. It has also been linked to higher grades, lower cases of truancy and fewer discipline problems in school.

Next time you are faced with a particularly daunting assignment, close your eyes and picture what you want your life to be like. Then, recognize that in order to have the life you want, you have to do the assignment in front of you.

7. Reaffirm Your Personal Values

What do you value most? What are the two or three most important qualities you can possibly develop? Do you strive to be honest in everything you do? Do you value kindness? Is success the most important value in your life?

Taking a few minutes now and again to reaffirm your values by writing in a journal or meditating about them can help you focus your efforts in other areas of your life.

If you value family over everything, your ability to take care of your family will motivate you to study and do well in school. If you value honesty, you will never feel inclined to cheat on a test, but will work hard to study.

Ultimately, finding the motivation to study is less about going on a treasure hunt and more about changing the way you think about learning. Even implementing a few of these seven tips can help you stay focused and keep going.

Image Credit: [PublicDomainPictures](#)

Lazowski, R. A., & Hulleman, C. S. (2016). Motivation interventions in education: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational research*, 86(2), 602-640. [DOI: 10.3102/0034654315617832](https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315617832)

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