

GETTING MOTIVATED TO STUDY

While external factors have an influence on your studying performance, the same is true for internal, that is, emotional aspects. Cognitive abilities are also an issue. All of the above play an important role for reaching your studying goals. Motivation to study

Your motivation to study will depend on your focus, concentration and perseverance. All these rely on the following factors:

- * Do you find the subject interesting?
- * Do you have a specific goal you would like to work towards (passing an exam, for example)?
- * Do you consider studying to be meaningful and to be a factor for success?
- * Which inner beliefs do you have? (see paragraph below)
- * When studying do you rely on your self-discipline?

If you find the subject matter interesting, it will be easier for you to focus and to create positive conditions for successful studying. Rewards are also good for motivation because everything that touches us emotionally eventually translates into success. With the following visualization exercise, you can support your goal-finding mission and strengthen your solution competence: we recommend doing the visualization exercise described below to help you define your goals and improve your problem-solving skills:

Exercise for increasing your motivation

- * Choose a quiet place, sit down, close your eyes and breathe deeply for a few moments.
- * Picture your goal as realistically as possible (passing the exam, finishing a seminar paper, etc.).

- * Try to activate all your senses and to make the mental picture as compelling as possible.
- * Now visualize present obstacles that could prevent you from reaching your goals (little interest, limited time for studying, learning methods, etc.).
- * Analyse possible solutions and alternatives. Who or what could help? Reflect on the changes you need to make (creating a new schedule, finding a different studying environment, joining a study group, etc.).
- * Finish the visualization and then set up a specific plan that specifies how you will approach your new solution one step at a time.
- * If you can't find a solution, ask yourself if your motivational challenges lie deeper (choice of major, work overload, personal problems, etc.).

MINDSET TOWARDS STUDYING - INNER BELIEFS

Whether you have a positive or negative mindset regarding studying often depends on earlier experiences and pressure you might have experienced in the past and the resulting resistance to further studying. Moreover, if people you care about have negatively assessed your studying skills, this can be a factor too.

All of the above will lead to inner beliefs held by you which embody your mindset and expectations. These beliefs often come true as so-called self-fulfilling prophecies. If you keep thinking things like "I'll fail" or "I'm not smart enough," these thoughts will stand in the way of successful studying. This is why it is key for you to identify, analyze and replace negative thoughts with positive and realistic self-verbalization. If you believe in yourself, you are much more likely to reach your academic goals and achieve better performance.

Here are some examples:

NEGATIVE self-verbalization

"I have to force myself to study."

"If I don't perform, I am worthless."

"I have to study."

POSITIVE self-verbalization

"I have a clear goal I want to achieve, and studying takes me there."

"I am a worthy person whatever I do."

"I want to study."

Rely on positive self-verbalization to achieve a realistic perception of yourself and a solid level of self-confidence. It is also paramount to develop a sense of personal responsibility, which means that you will independently pursue goals on your own terms and under your own responsibility. Think along these lines: "I know what I want. My studies are my thing. Obstacles are a challenge that I am ready to face and they won't keep me from reaching my goals." If you do not develop a sense of personal responsibility, you might feel self-pity, deny reality and experience a feeling of resignation. In this case, thoughts like these will cross your mind: "Poor me, I have to study. I don't really feel like it, and why on earth do I have to put myself through this?"

Summary:

NEGATIVE attitude towards studying

Pessimistic:
"I don't really have what it takes to do this."

Aimless, chaotic:
"I don't know how to do it."

Unrealistic:
"I have to master the subject matter after going through it once."

Insecure:
"I don't know if I'll manage the course-work."

Nervous, inattentive:
"I always get distracted and I don't make any progress."

Easy to distract:
"Today I just don't feel like studying."

POSITIVE attitude towards studying

Confident:
"I can do this."

Target-oriented:
"I know what I want."

Realistic:
"I will repeat it until I master it."

Self-confident: "I will master the course-work."

Serene and focused:
"I won't get distracted."

Consistent: "I will study even though I don't feel like it."

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Stand: September 2016

STUDYING: SOME HINTS FOR SUCCESS

For any studying to be successful, it is important to set realistic goals. In addition, organizing skills and efficient study techniques are key. Make sure you have a quiet place to study, stick to a study schedule and find a good balance between work and play.

CONDUCTIVE CONDITIONS

Workplace

- * Find a quiet place where you will be undisturbed during your study time.
- * Keep only those things on your desk that you will actually need for studying.
- * Whenever you take a break, walk around to relax.

Schedule

- * Determine which time of the day is your best time to study and make sure to get your studying done during that time.
- * We recommend following a regular studying schedule to get into a good flow.

Breaks

- * Breaks are necessary for you to relax. Furthermore, taking breaks helps commit what you learned to memory.
- * The longer you study, the longer your breaks should be. We recommend following these suggestions:
 - * After 30 minutes of studying: take a 5-minute break
 - * After 90 to 120 minutes of studying: take a 15-minute break
 - * After 3 to 4 hours of studying: take a 1- to 2-hour break
- * During your breaks, make sure you do something that has nothing to do with what you are studying.

- * When on break, try to avoid exciting activities that are difficult to interrupt, such as watching TV.

Physical well-being

- * Working out and being in shape has a very positive effect on successful learning.
- * We recommend working out to counterbalance all the studying. It will make you feel good and keep you active, which in turn increases your brain capacity.
- * Getting enough sleep is another important factor.
- * A healthy and light diet is also beneficial for your studying.
- * Relaxation exercises can help you stay cool when you experience stress or pressure (for detailed advice on relaxation techniques, please see our website).

Rewards

- * Reward yourself for reaching (intermediate) goals with something fun, such as going to the movies, seeing friends, listening to music, etc.

LEARNING STRATEGY

Creating an overall plan for the entire term

- * Schedule all your classes and exams
- * Allocate time and resources for the seminar papers and the presentations you will have to do throughout the term.

Dividing your coursework for a specific exam

- * Prepare everything you need to learn
- * Do a learning test run for 3 to 5 days to answer the following questions:
 - * How many hours per day can I stay focused and study?
 - * On average, how many pages can I go through during this timeframe?

- * Next, make specific plans and let these questions guide you:

- * How long does it take me to work through the entire material once?
 - * How long does it take me to repeat it?
 - * How much time will I need for the final repetition to be well prepared for the exam?
- * Then, make a detailed plan:
 - * Create a schedule for the entire week that covers your classes, your study time, your leisure time and other appointments. Reserve some time for unexpected events.
 - * Plan the program for the week. Since some subjects will be more difficult than others, adjustments may be necessary. However, your daily learning goals should be achievable.

Inaccurate planning

- * If you are not meeting your daily goals, you need to ask yourself what went wrong in your planning. You might want to temporarily reduce your leisure time, for example. In case your daily study goal is unachievable, create a new plan and be realistic about your goals.

LEARNING METHODS

For best studying results, rely on a focused and determined approach to studying, as well as on effective learning methods.

The **PQ4R-Method** (Preview – Questions – Read – Reflect – Recite – Review) is a good example of a structured approach to actively learning a chapter in a textbook.

1. Preview

Start by getting an overview of the chapter you are studying and get an idea of what it is about (structure and headings).

2. Questions

Next, ask yourself which questions you should have answers to after reading the text.

3. Read

Then, read the chapter thoroughly and try to reach a good understanding of what it is about.

4. Reflect

This step is all about associating the information you have just read with knowledge you already have.

5. Recite

Recite the information you have just read without looking at the book. If you can't remember everything, re-read the chapter and recite the information again.

6. Review

As a last step, go through the facts once again in your mind and focus on the key elements. In addition, ask yourself questions about the subject and find the right answers.

How to memorize information

While a few generally valid rules exist, successful techniques may vary from person to person.

- * When memorizing information for different subjects with similar content, interferences may occur.
- * It is not uncommon to forget what you have just learned. Therefore, we recommend reviewing the material in depth shortly afterwards.
- * The sooner you do this review, the better, because you will need fewer repetitions to commit the material to memory.
- * The more detailed the material is, the more time you will need to spend reviewing it.
- * Even if you have learned something thoroughly, you might end up forgetting it. Luckily, it is usually easy and quick to reactivate existing knowledge.

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