

Staying Motivated

Many students report that they experience difficulty in maintaining momentum with their study often around the mid-point of their course. Motivation prompts us to keep going in pursuit of our goals, even when we experience difficulties, setbacks, boredom and frustration along the way.

Tips/Strategies for creating and maintaining motivation

- **Create a routine/study schedule:**

The human brain is programmed to work most effectively with a plan. Our bodies also work to a routine – hunger, work, exercise and sleep register as part of our daily cycle.

Establishing and maintaining a routine will help to solidify good practices so that study becomes habitual, rather than something that requires major effort to get started.

- **Include self-care and enjoyable tasks in your schedule:**

A common mistake in creating a schedule is to only include activities that *have* to be done.

Balance the tasks you have to do, with relaxation, self-care and enjoyable activities. Allocate time to them – otherwise there will be a temptation to get distracted by these enjoyable activities and procrastinate.

- **Break down tasks - start small:**

Looking at a task as a whole can sometimes be overwhelming. Getting started is often the hardest step. It can be helpful to break the task down into smaller steps, and start with the easiest part first. This can help with confidence and motivation to keep going, as well as a sense of achievement as you progress. Focusing on small steps can make the task appear much more achievable. It's easier to tell yourself, "I just need to write a 200 word introduction" than "I have to write a 1500 word essay."

- **Take regular breaks:**

We don't have infinite energy, so we need to give our body and mind time to rest and reenergise regularly. A good system is to take a 10 minute break every hour. This will also allow your brain time to process information and make it more likely that you will retain it long term. So, take the time to move around, have a coffee, stretch and do something different. This will also make it less likely you that you will do such things in the middle of the task - interrupting your 'flow'.

- **Get Creative:**

Studying can be repetitive and monotonous. To help you stay motivated and enjoy the content (as much as possible), get creative with the way you study. Create visual representations of information in the form of diagrams, pictures, charts and so on. Record yourself reading the text and then listen to it as you go about your day. Create quizzes and flash cards, use mnemonic devices and mind maps. Using a variety of study methods will keep you engaged and enhance your capacity to retain the information.

- **Positive self-talk:**

It can be easy to become demotivated when you tell your self that you 'can't' do something, it's 'too hard' or you are 'not smart enough'. Practice regular positive self-talk - remind yourself that you can do it and that you can achieve whatever you want. It can be helpful to say these positive affirmations out loud (or write them down). Thoughts are constant but by saying something out loud you are adding an auditory/visual layer of memory.

It may seem simple but negative self-talk can be enough to stop you from trying in the first place, if you don't try then there's no chance of success.

- **Surround yourself with motivational reminders:**

We all have our own unique reasons for studying, and it is worth putting some recognisable reminders of these reasons around your study space. An image which represents what 'success' looks like for you can be a powerful motivational reminder. For example, if you are studying to be a nurse, you might include a photo of a nurse carrying out the type of work that you aspire to do.

- **Avoiding Procrastination**

Procrastination is tempting but the reality is it leads to stress. All of the tips already mentioned are procrastination busters. If you find yourself lost in a fog of procrastination revisit some of the ideas above. Add to these rewards for achievements – building in big and small rewards on a daily and weekly basis (eg a coffee when you have written the introduction, a celebration when you complete a unit).

Another idea is to combine things you like to do with those you need to do (eg listen to music while exercising, study outside in the sun, listen to a lecture while going for a walk etc.)

- **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism can be debilitating, as a 'perfect' standard is generally unachievable. The best way to learn is to make mistakes. You would not be studying if already knew everything about the topic, subject information and career requirements. The feedback you receive about deficits in your assessments builds on your knowledge. Challenge your perfectionistic tendencies – they will not serve you well.

- **Stress**

A disproportionate amount of stress can make it difficult to focus and prioritise tasks appropriately. Refer to the help sheet **Managing Stress** and remember that Student Life are available to provide additional support if you need it.

- **General Wellbeing & Sleep:**

Motivation requires energy and mental fortitude. It is important that you take care of yourself both physically and mentally. Healthy eating, good sleep, regular exercise and effective self-care strategies can assist in maintaining effective energy levels, concentration, alertness and mood management. Please see the help sheet **Health, Lifestyle and Mindset** for more information.

- **Ask for help:**

If you find yourself struggling, reach out and ask for support as soon as possible. Your teachers are here to assist you with all your academic concerns and Student Life is here to help with any personal, welfare or wellbeing matters.

Asking for help can seem daunting at times but remember things can't change unless you seek to change them.