



Find Your Motivation & Translate it Into Action

What does it mean to be motivated, and how can you positively impact your own motivation?

What do you want

First, think about what you want. To learn more about the subject? To get a good grade? You might want both. And, face it – you may just want to get through the class. What you want is also influenced by your specific expectations for success. If you believe that you're just not very good at math, for example, you may focus on just getting through the class rather than excelling in it.

Why do you want it

Next, think about why you want that something. If the course is part of your major, you might want to learn about it because you know it will enhance your future career plans. If the course is just a requirement that seems meaningless or purposeless right now, then focus on just getting through it with a good grade. A clear purpose is important because it gives you a motivational anchor point that you can refer to again and again. For more information on developing a clear purpose, see our "SMART goals" handout.

Now it's your turn. Take a moment to write down your own "what" and "why," and check out the exercises below to help you stay motivated.

What:

What:

Getting (and staying) motivated

Use this for any of your classes, for your academic or career goals in general, or even for a personal goal. Some tasks or goals will require more reinforcers than others. So, for example, you might want to reward yourself after doing 10 calculus problems rather than after finishing the entire homework set.

What outcome do I hope for?

Other than getting a good grade, are there other ways to measure my success?

Why do I want this? What value can I find in the task?

What reasons are there for thinking I'll succeed?

What can I use to motivate myself – to reinforce my behavior? Think about things you enjoy – taking a nap, going to a movie, hanging out with friends, watching TV, visiting your favorite websites, listening to music, reading a novel. You may want to save these activities for a job well-done so they'll have real meaning for you.

What's under my control? How could I make the task more enjoyable?

Get in the habit of thinking about motivation as a cyclical process: determine what it is you want and why you want it; plan your rewards and pay attention to which ones are the most motivating for you.