

Maintaining Motivation To Study

“I’m not Motivated” can be a catch-all phrase for a lot of different reasons why you are not engaging productively with your studies and university life. Let’s unpack some of the usual reasons:

It’s not what I expected

Frequently students come to university with some well developed preconceptions of how their life will change for the better while they are at university. That is, that my studies will be fascinating, I’ll have a wide range of new friends, I’ll fall in love, be more independent, and have a clearer direction to my life. Yes this is all very good and possible to achieve, but it is a process towards which you have to dedicate time and effort. It begins firstly with acknowledging how much you miss the old certainties and routines of school and friends; secondly, it involves reflection upon how to create more of a routine, friendship group and dedicated time on your studies; thirdly, it means considering whether you are in the right course for you, and finally ends after much consistent well intentioned effort spread over the entire length of your course.

Talk over why you chose to come to university with a trusted friend, sympathetic older person or a counsellor. What could make your commitment to your course something that you will stick with?

It’s all too hard

Sometimes the stress involved in just getting to and from university; supporting yourself financially, and balancing family, friends, work and study can be a real drain on your efforts to settle in and enjoy university. This can be amplified further by a move away from home for the first time, bereavement or significant worries about a family member, or being the first in your family or friendship group to come to university. Yes it can be very hard; but so might any alternatives such as looking for full time work, or staying at home while all your friends have study and work responsibilities. What could make it easier for you? Write down briefly how your day went every day for two weeks and then analyse where the recurring “bottlenecks” occur. Note your usual ways of managing stress; e.g. pulling the blankets over my head, and avoiding showing up, or perhaps it is the clash of family, friends and work with uni. Think carefully about what might make a difference, speak to the people concerned, or consider changing your own behaviour. If things continue to feel overwhelming then see a counsellor.

It’s so boring.

Perhaps you are finding the hours of lectures absolutely deadening, and the tutes too quiet or too competitive with the same nerds droning on. Perhaps you are facing the fact that the course you dreamed of doing has hours of

tedious reading to be done each week, or that you have to take subjects that you have no interest in whatsoever in order to get the major you want. Perhaps you are facing the fact that there are lots of really bright people here and your past strategies of just cramming before exams are not going to work. Or maybe your course just isn't the one for you, but you need to get good results in order to transfer to a better course.

Yes university is hard, whichever course you take, and involves hours and hours of dedicated time to achieve your best. But then you wouldn't have been selected unless you hadn't already demonstrated a capacity to learn. Rise to the challenge. Face the facts: **You're bright and will probably be bored doing a lot of things unless you commit to developing and using your intelligence and capabilities.** Services which may assist you with your learning are the learning advisors whom you can consult through your Faculty Student Centre, or the Careers Service, for ideas on different courses and career options.

I'm lonely and I miss my friends.

Learning occurs best when people feel secure in their environment, knowing they can trust the people around them, and can talk to someone who shows a continuing interest in them. Learning is both a "thinking" and a "feeling" process. How we feel about ourselves in a particular context, such as a subject tutorial, may determine whether we will choose to persevere and overcome the difficulties and uncertainties of that subject.

Underachievement is frequently linked to this feeling of not belonging, or of not feeling noticed. Many people in new situations sustain themselves when faced with uncertainties by remembering past experiences of support and mastery and by being their own best friend. This works for a short period but at some point each of us deeply feels the need to have the ongoing presence of people we like, and with whom we share experiences on a day to day basis. "Do I fit in here?" is a question most students ask themselves at some time, as the university is a very large, culturally diverse and socially complicated place. Make an effort to stay on campus outside of class time, and dedicate time and energy to getting to know a group of students. Persevere, even if your efforts aren't initially bringing results. Stay positive and smile your way through every day, signalling your interest and goodwill to those around you.

I'm quite distracted by.....

This is a pretty common occurrence. A sample of likely causes might be:

- that special person, and your own ruminations on sex.
- partying hard and feeling hung over frequently.
- hours on Facebook.
- playing computer games most nights, unaware of the hours passing.
- needing to respond immediately to all texts and emails, day and night.
- responding to the needs of friends irrespective of the impact on you.
- working long hours because I can't say "No" or I'm in debt.

- off campus sports and other recreational activities

Maybe you've been up so late so regularly that you are now on "Perth time", and feel jet lagged if you get up for your 9.00 AM classes.

Step one is to admit that you have a problem and that you must analyse the consequences of not facing it and taking action. Think about what has caused your fascination with "your distraction". Set up your own behaviour guidelines so that time for "your distraction" is managed and reflected upon. Get reinvolved with studies, particularly those that give you satisfaction and a sense of achievement in an area with which you identify.

NB Repetitive video game viewing and "the early months of a new love relationship" trigger brain activity and chemistry similar to a drug addiction so don't be surprised if changing your behaviour seems difficult at first. Track your hours spent and see a counsellor if you and your "distraction" are in an intractable destructive dance.