

5 tips to keep learners motivated and engaged when teaching online

As we get further into the semester where we all quickly moved to online learning, motivation, like the style of your wardrobe, may start to wane.

In addition, learning online is just different from the classroom. It's a bit more challenging for students to engage with you, the content, and each other. Plus they have something new to engage with - the technology. These 5 strategies can help keep them motivated and on track for success.

1. **Build a sense of community:** One challenge of online learning is that students often feel quite isolated. Consider how you can make direct contact, through emails, instant message and video, to as many learners as possible, helping them see how you are invested in their learning. In addition, encourage ways for learners to see each other as resources through methods like peer feedback and peer review, as well as potentially helping students find peers to study with.
2. **Help students feel like they can succeed:** When learners feel like they are capable of succeeding, they are more likely to persist. Consider how to structure tasks so that students can experience "quick wins" on the way to more difficult challenges. In addition, seeing how similar peers progressed can help motivate a student who might otherwise feel unlikely to succeed; see if any students with more experience navigating online learning would be willing to share some of their ideas for how to succeed in the course.
3. **Establish ways to monitor progress:** If students aren't sure of how they are doing, they may not engage productively. Establish and communicate explicit goals for the course, and tie student activities and progress back to those goals. Look for tools in your online system (e.g., practice questions with instant feedback, study organizers that check off when students use different resources, etc.) that can help learners stay on top of their progress. Be explicit about how you think those tools can help and recommend students use them, so that they see the potential value in them.
4. **Reward:** While it is true that learning is its own reward, everyone can use a little help now and then to stick to their goals. Think of ways to provide students with rewards, whether those are in the form of praise, points towards their grades, or some collective goal the class works towards. Focus on rewarding good effort, progress, and the kinds of learning behaviors you want to see more of, not just achievement.
5. **Relate class to students' lives:** It can be hard to stay motivated when we don't see the value in what we are doing. One important source of value for academic learning is the connection to our everyday lives. How can I use what I'm in learning in class to advance in my career, achieve my goals, or help my friends, family, and community? Offer students some potential connections like those, and also help them try to make those connections for themselves!

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