

5 tips to keep motivated when learning online

As we're all learning very quickly, learning online is different from traditional learning. It can feel harder to stay engaged, especially the longer we stay in social isolation. These 5 tips can help keep you motivated and on track for success.

1. **Keep up the connections:** Online learning can often feel isolating, so efforts to feel like part of a learning community can help. Complete your online profile with a photo and your interests. Reach out to other students on discussion boards, and keep conversations going via email, video call or messaging apps. Your instructor is also a resource; it may seem intimidating to email them, but your instructor is there to help.
2. **Take control of your own learning:** Some aspects of online learning are requirements, like making sure to keep up with your reading or doing quizzes. But you often have a good deal of autonomy in other ways, like in how you respond to discussion boards, or managing larger projects. Since you have more say in those, find ways to connect them to your own interests and goals!
3. **Set good goals:** When you think about what you want out of your class, what kind of ideas come to mind? For most of us, the first response will be somewhat vague like "get a good grade" or "make progress on my career plan." Research has found that more concrete goals can help increase motivation and persistence, so consider getting more specific, like "I want to get at least a 92%" or "I want to improve my communication skills by creating effective class presentations."
4. **Help yourself stay on track:** It can help to get specific about how you will deal with obstacles in your way. Spend some time thinking about things that might make it difficult to stick to your goals, and then come up with some concrete plans for how you will deal with those (e.g., "If I see a notification that my friend is playing a game I could jump into, I will turn off notifications for the next 2 hours and go back to studying.") Planning these "if → then" kinds of rules ahead of time has been found to be really effective for helping people stick to their goals. If you fall behind, don't be too hard on yourself. Change is challenging for everyone, but it is not too late. Get in touch with your instructor and make a plan for catching up.
5. **Establish productive routines:** One of the benefits of online learning is the flexibility it allows - in many cases, you are free to log on whenever it is convenient to do your coursework. However, this freedom can be a double-edged sword. Be realistic about your time - maybe you have to balance study around childcare now - and set up a consistent schedule that works for you. Make sure those in your household are aware of it: sharing a commitment with someone else makes it more likely that you will follow through. Resist just trying to cram your online learning in when you can, or while you are multitasking.

Authored by:

Dan Belenky, Director of Learning Science Research, is part of the Efficacy & Learning Research team at Pearson, which focuses on the science behind how we help people make progress in their lives through learning. Prior to joining Pearson in 2014, he was a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. Dan earned his PhD in Cognitive Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, where he studied how student motivation interacts with (and is impacted by) innovative instructional methods. His current research projects explore how insights from cognitive psychology and behavioral science can be used to improve learner outcomes, at scale.

