



Elmhurst University

LEARNING CENTER

# MOTIVATION TECHNIQUES

## Change Your Thinking

- **Figure out why it's important to get this done.** See the big picture behind what you're doing and think about the long-term impact of your actions. How does this step/project/exam connect to your goals and values? Write down the reasons you need to get this done.
- **Develop intrinsic motivation.** Are you excited to learn? Fascinated or curious about something? Want a new challenge? Strive to master something? What will you gain from doing this work?
- **Identify the issue or roadblock.** What's keeping you from working on what you need to? Can you isolate the issue, or remove/remedy the problem?
- **Recognize your own patterns.** Identify your stall instincts, internal dialogues ("I'll start my paper once I beat this level"), and procrastination techniques so you can call yourself on them. If you're up for it, invite friends or family members to call you on it when they see them.
- **Develop a mantra.** Find a statement, picture, poster, or saying that motivates you. Find creative ways to remind yourself of it! Increase your positive self-talk/messages and stop any negative self-talk. Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right."
- **See the successes you've already accomplished.** Add a few items to your to-do list just to cross them off. Build up some momentum – even if it feels a bit phony.

## Create Rewards & General Accountability

- **Find a partner.** Find someone who is working toward the same goal that will motivate you. Letting yourself off the hook is one thing, letting down a friend is something you're less likely to do. Surrounding yourself with motivated, energetic, and positive people will get you started too.
- **Create a support system.** What will help you keep moving forward with your projects? Asking for help or sharing what you're working on can increase your accountability. Tell a friend or family member about your goal. You're more likely to follow through if someone is going to ask you about it later.
- **Establish a rewards system.** Select a reward that will get you motivated to get something done. Don't finish the task? You don't get the reward. Find realistic rewards and be creative.
- **Measure your progress.** Find a way to track what you've accomplished so you can see your progress and results. Checking things off of your list can help motivate you to get more done. Celebrating your accomplishments will increase your motivation to do more in the future.



## Make Things Easier for Yourself

- **Plan the steps that get your project done.** It's easier to see the project as a series of small steps and knowing the first step makes it easier to get started. A GPS only tells you about one turn at a time for a reason. Make the steps small and attainable.
- **Plan a time to get started on it.** If you schedule time to do it, you're more likely to actually get started, rather than waiting until you feel like it. When do you feel like doing something you don't want to do? It also helps to think ahead about where you will make time to get things done.
- **Plan time for fun breaks.** It's not realistic to study for 5 hours, so you might as well plan when you'll take a break, what you'll do, and for how long so you maintain control of your schedule. An impromptu 6-hour marathon of Grey's Anatomy will work against your productivity.
- **Minimize distractions and other things you have to say "no" to.** Our ability to resist temptation diminishes each time we are faced with another temptation. It's easier to not eat ice cream if you don't buy it in the first place. Set up your surroundings and schedule so you make good decisions. One student had a friend change her Facebook password for her until finals week was over.
- **Point yourself downhill.** At the end of the day or the end of the study session, make notes about what you have left to do and what you need to do next so it's easy to start up again. By "pointing your skis downhill", you're set up in the right direction next time you begin.

## Just Get Started

- **Just start with 10 minutes.** Just getting started is the hard part. So commit to doing it for a few minutes. Chances are you'll keep going once you've started, but if you don't, you've still done 10 minutes more than you would have.
- **Don't take it all on at once.** Set a timer for yourself. It's easier to commit to something if you know you're only going to have to do it for a limited amount of time. Set a goal to read for 30 minutes. Even if it's only a fraction of what needs to get done, it feels more do-able.
- **Do it first.** Do it right away. If you want to go to the library, go first thing in the morning or right after class – it's much easier than deciding to go back out after you've gotten home or started a movie. Decrease the number of times you have to decide to study. Instead, make it a natural part of your schedule.
- **Start Easy or Start Hard?** Starting with the small, easy task will help you gain momentum and feel accomplished which can lead to further productivity. On the other hand, getting the biggest, hardest task out of the way early will make the rest of your tasks seem easier. Which would work for you?
- **Play pretend.** Think about someone who gets done what needs to get done. Now act like they would – pretend you're productive. Michelle Obama doesn't say she isn't in the mood to get things done. This is your chance to live out the mantra you created.