

MOTIVATION TO STUDY

Not only external factors, but also internal, emotional aspects have a high influence on studying behavior, as well as cognitive abilities. For this reason, they are significantly contributing to achieving learning targets.

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Attentiveness, concentration, endurance and capacity are influenced by the motivation to study which results from the following factors:

- * Am I interested in the subject?
- * Do I have a distinct goal I want to achieve (passing an exam, for instance)?
- * Do I consider studying as meaningful and leading to success?
- * Which internal doctrines do I have? (cf. next paragraph)
- * I decide to study myself and on my own responsibility!

Being interested in a subject and working with a focus are advantageous conditions for successful studying. Rewards also reinforce motivation as everything that touches us emotionally and activates us, leads to success in the long run. With the following visualization exercise, you can support your goal-finding mission and strengthen your solution competence:

Exercise for reinforcing your motivation

- * Sit down at a quiet place, close your eyes and breathe deeply for a few moments.
- * Imagine your goal as realistic as possible (passing the exam, accomplishes seminar paper, etc.).

- * Try to activate all senses and to make the imagination as vivid as possible.
- * Now visualize present obstacles that prevent you from reaching your goals (low interest, little time for studying, inefficient studying techniques, etc.).
- * Consider intensely which solutions and alternative options you have. Who or what could be helpful? What do I have to change (set up a new schedule, create better working conditions, alter studying techniques, join a peer group, etc.)?
- * Finish the visualization and set up a concrete plan of how you approach your new solution step-by-step.
- * If you do not find a solution, try to figure out if there might be more extensive motivational problems (choice of study, overload, personal problems, etc.).

ATTITUDE TOWARDS STUDYING – INTERNAL DOCTRINES

Positive or negative attitudes towards studying result from earlier experiences with studying, experiences pressure and the subsequent resistance to further studying, relevant people's assessment of studying skills, etc.

Hence, so-called internal doctrines evolve in which attitudes and expectations are expressed. They have a tendency towards coming true in the sense of "self-fulfilling prophecies". Thoughts like "I'll fail" or "I'm not clever enough" are obstacles to successful studying. For that reason, it is important to notice, to analyze and to substitute negative, obstructive statements by positive, realistic verbalizations. Who believes in him-/herself and his/her chances for success studies more easily and achieves better performances.

Some examples:

NEGATIVE self-verbalizations

"I have to force myself to study."

"If I don't perform, I am not of value"

"I have to learn."

POSITIVE self-verbalizations

"I have a clear goal I want to achieve, and studying takes me there."

"I am of value, not depending on what I do."

"I want to learn."

The aims are realistic self-assessment and solid self-confidence. Self-responsibility, which shows as target-oriented, independent and responsible attitude, is also important: "I know what I want. My studies are my affair. I see obstacles as a challenge. I won't get distracted from reaching my goals." Missing self-responsibility can result in self-pity, escape from reality and resignation: "I have to, but I don't want to have to." "I am so pitiable, I have to study. I don't feel like it, why do all that?"

Summary:

NEGATIVE attitude towards studying

pessimistic:
"I don't really think I am capable of doing this."

aimless, chaotic:
"I don't know how to do it."

unrealistic:
"I have to master the learning matter, once I have learned it."

insecure:
"I don't know if I'll manage the learning matter."

nervous, inattentive:
"I always get distracted, there is no progress."

easy to distract:
"Today I simply don't want to study."

POSITIVE attitude towards studying

confident:
"I am capable of doing this."

target-oriented:
"I know what I want."

realistic:
"I repeat it until I master it."

self-confident:
"I will master the learning matter."

calm and focused:
"I won't get distracted."

consistent:
"I study despite my reluctance."

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HOW TO STUDY

For successful studying, it is necessary to have realistic goals, good organizing abilities and efficient studying techniques. Quiet surroundings, a fixed learning schedule and a balance between work and rest are also necessary for success.

CONDUCTIVE CONDITIONS

Workplace

- * Arrange for quiet and undisturbed surroundings.
- * Only keep on your desk what you really need for studying.
- * Get up and walk around during breaks.

Working hours

- * Find out your most effective time of the day for studying and make use of them for intense work and studying phases.
- * Ensure your studying by regular working hours and sticking to the scheduled time.

Breaks

- * Breaks are necessary for recovery, moreover the learning matter is further consolidated by the brain during breaks.
- * The duration of a break always ought to be determined before the study time:
 - * after 30 minutes: 5 minutes break
 - * after 90–120 minutes: 15 minutes break
 - * after 3–4 hours: 1–2 hours break
- * The activities during the break should differ from studying.
- * Exciting activities or those which cannot easily be interrupted, such as watching TV, should be avoided during short breaks.

Physical well-being

- * Both physical exercise as well as physical fitness have positive effects on studying.
- * Do physical exercises as a compensation for learning. It contributes to feeling good and to the activity, thus intake capacity of the brain.
- * Enough sleep is important for recovery.
- * Healthy and light nutrition is also beneficial for studying.
- * Relaxation exercises can contribute to maintaining a level head during times of stress and pressure. (Please find advice on relaxation techniques on our homepage.)

Rewards

- * Reward yourself for reaching (sub-ordinated) targets with positive experiences such as going to the cinema, meeting friends, good music, etc.

LEARNING STRATEGY

Masterplan for the whole term

- * Planning of the necessary classes and exams
- * Balanced scheduling of seminar papers and speech assignments over the term

Schedule and division of learning matter for a concrete exam

- * Preparation of the required learning material
- * Learning trial for 3–5 days:
 - * How many hours a day am I capable of studying?
 - * How many pages do I manage on average in this span of time?
- * Concrete planning:
 - * How long does it take me to work through the whole learning matter one time?

- * How long does the repetition take me?
- * How much time will be required to be well-prepared for the exam in the final repetition?
- * Detailed planning:
 - * Setup of a schedule for the week comprising the hours for classes, studying, leisure time, other appointments and time slots for unpredictable events
 - * Planning of the program for the week. As various subjects may differ in difficulty, deviations are possible. Nevertheless, the daily learning assignments should be achievable.

Planning errors

- * If the assignment is not achieved, you should try to analyze what the reasons might be and if you can compensate for it by a temporary reduction of leisure time. If it is still not possible, a new plan has to be set up under consideration of the planning errors.

STUDYING TECHNIQUE

A focused and determined approach and effective learning strategies are important factors for successful studying.

The **PQ4R-Method** (Preview – Questions – Read – Reflect – Recite – Review) is a good example for active and structured studying of a chapter from a textbook.

1. Preview

Getting an overview over a given chapter, general orientation (structure and subtitles)

2. Questions

Which questions ought to be answered by reading the text?

3. Read

This means active, understanding reading.

4. Reflect

How can the new learning matter be included in the existing knowledge?

5. Recite:

The learning matter should be reproduced freely. If knowledge gaps occur, the text should be re-read, completed and reproduced without any notes again.

6. Review:

Think the chapter or subchapter through again, emphasize important aspects, ask yourself questions about the matter and answer them.

Rules against forgetting

There are some general rules, but also individual traits.

- * Similar learning matters mutually interfere with memorizing.
- * Shortly after studying is when most is forgotten. That's why repetitions should be done more often at that time.
- * The earlier a repetition is done, the fewer are necessary in total.
- * The more detailed a learning matter, the more repetitions are required.
- * Even well-memorized matter will be forgotten, but re-activation is easier.

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