

How To Motivate Students Online: What Works And What Doesn't

How can we get each of our students to take their transformation or education into their own hands? Here is how to motivate students online and get them fired up about the subject matter.

What Works And What Doesn't While Trying To Motivate Students Online

The key to student motivation has to do with internal drive and individual interests. Whether educators, entrepreneurs, or motivational speakers, we must ask ourselves: How can I help each of my students to feel more connected to themselves as learners, as well as more personally invested in the world they live in, as a result of deep engagement with the subject matter at hand? Many of the factors that hold true in effective traditional education formats also apply to online learning formats. For example, a low student-to-teacher ratio is necessary for probable student success, regardless of the format – in-person or online. However, there are a few specific techniques online instructors can adopt that will maximize the motivation, learning, and subsequent retention of adult students. To motivate students online, provide opportunities for students to personally connect to the subject matter; have students set their own goals; set up a system for self-monitoring and progress-tracking; encourage students to collaborate with you on the syllabus or course reading material; and act as the facilitator, rather than transmitter, of information.

Motivating Adult Students

Adult students become more motivated to learn –whether online or in person– when they are treated like unique individuals with goals, interests, and lives of their own. Once they realize that you're on their side –in the role of coach, say, rather than tyrant or micromanager– they'll feel more comfortable contributing to class discussions and relating the subject matter to their own lives. The ultimate goal is to strengthen adult students' intrinsic levels of motivation while minimizing focus on extrinsic sources of motivation, so as to help ensure that they are not dependent upon you for their learning.

Because online learners are often non-traditional, adult students who have been active in the workforce for at least several years, it could be helpful to apply a few commonly-known leadership and management strategies to your online teaching approach: Resist the urge to dominate, and opt for motivating instead; practice your listening skills; hold students accountable; be human; view dips in student performance as teaching or learning opportunities; and communicate to students that they matter.

One of the most effective ways to help motivate students online involves connecting the "real world", so to speak, to the subject matter at hand. This could mean something as simple as beginning each day with an online class discussion relating something relevant in the news to the current lesson at hand. Alternately, you might choose to engage in role playing by having students apply current reading concepts to future careers or hypothetical situations. Dialogic interaction has been shown to be a valuable part of the learning process, as the act of engaging in dialectic with others reinforces concepts by helping students to solidify and elaborate upon key concepts from the subject matter or reading material. Either of these applications could be carried out in online chat rooms via student discussion, thus ensuring engagement with both the subject material and each other.

Another way to help students feel more motivated is by having them track their own progress and learning processes. One technique is the portfolio method, in which students compile all their work into a single folder or binder so as to allow them to track their own progression from the first paper or assignment to the last. A physical compilation would be especially helpful for online learners, as it's too easy to feel as if all evidence of learning and subject matter comprehension is being relegated to the digital realm. In addition, ask students to reflect upon the learning process, after completing each assignment. That way, they're more likely to feel in control of their own education, and they'll become

more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, so as to feel better able to understand where they need more guidance.

[Vocabulary list \(A\)](#)

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Instruction And Learning Motivation

In 1996, Deborah J. Stipek's extensive study *Motivation and Instruction* was included in the *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. Stipek lays the groundwork for classroom practices that teachers can utilize to maximize student motivation levels. A few recommendations in her criteria for success, evaluation, and rewards included the following: "Define success in terms of mastery and personal improvement rather than in terms of performance relative to others"; and "Make rewards contingent on effort, improvement, and good performance". She also recommends providing diverse opportunities for exploration and experimentation, so as to increase the chance that students enjoy the learning process.

In other words, it's crucial that students not only take ownership of their own learning, but also that they actually enjoy the process of learning. As instructors, we can facilitate this enjoyment by trying to make our lessons fun, rather than laborious and painful. We can also put the emphasis on the learning process, rather than on grades or trivia contests in which students compete over which of them knows the most facts or figures. As Maurice J. Elias writes, "There is a need for personal autonomy, self-determination, and to feel that one is choosing one's behavior, versus being controlled externally".

This student-centered autonomy is vital to intrinsic motivation, since adult students are likely to feel the most motivated when they participate in the learning process. Our job as instructors is to encourage active participation in online class discussions, offer choices in terms of research projects and essay assignments, and give lots of constructive feedback. This shared responsibility helps students stay involved and feel connected to the subject matter, the other students in the class, and themselves, as learners.

According to Paige Paquette, the biggest reasons why students drop out of online courses include feelings of isolation, frustration, and disconnection, as well as a general lack of faculty contact, instructor participation, and social interaction. Therefore, a sense of community, encouraging engagement, interaction with other participants, and collaboration are all factors that contribute to student success. Things like eLearning tools, personalized learning environments, and mobile applications also help the subject matter feel more relevant and applicable to students' everyday lives.

At Arizona State University, for example, the Global Freshman Academy is partnering with Cerego to offer first-year university courses online for credit - without even required prospective students to apply for admission. The way it works is there is a \$45 registration fee; then, once the course is over, students will be allowed to convert their coursework into university credits, if they so choose. There is also a quantified measurement that tells students exactly what they have learned and how much information they have retained, as well - so as they can opt to take courses more than once, for example, until they know the material well enough to want the class to be counted toward university credits on a transcript.

Moreover, according to ASU,

Cerego's personalized learning platform is built on proven memory science that drives knowledge retention and student engagement. As learners study...the technology measures a students' rate of information absorption and memory decay and simultaneously calculates the precise moment to review that material in order to achieve maximum memory strength. Within the learning environment, Cerego provides each student with a personalized Memory Bank that provides a visualization of

learning progress, and maps activation and memory strength across all items and individual items studied.

In other words, the future of online education is coming, and it will incorporate not only instructional sensitivity and responsiveness, but also adaptive technology and a fusion of virtual and old-fashioned reality that will allow us to gauge students' performance better than ever before.

[Vocabulary list \(B\)](#)
[Click here](#)

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