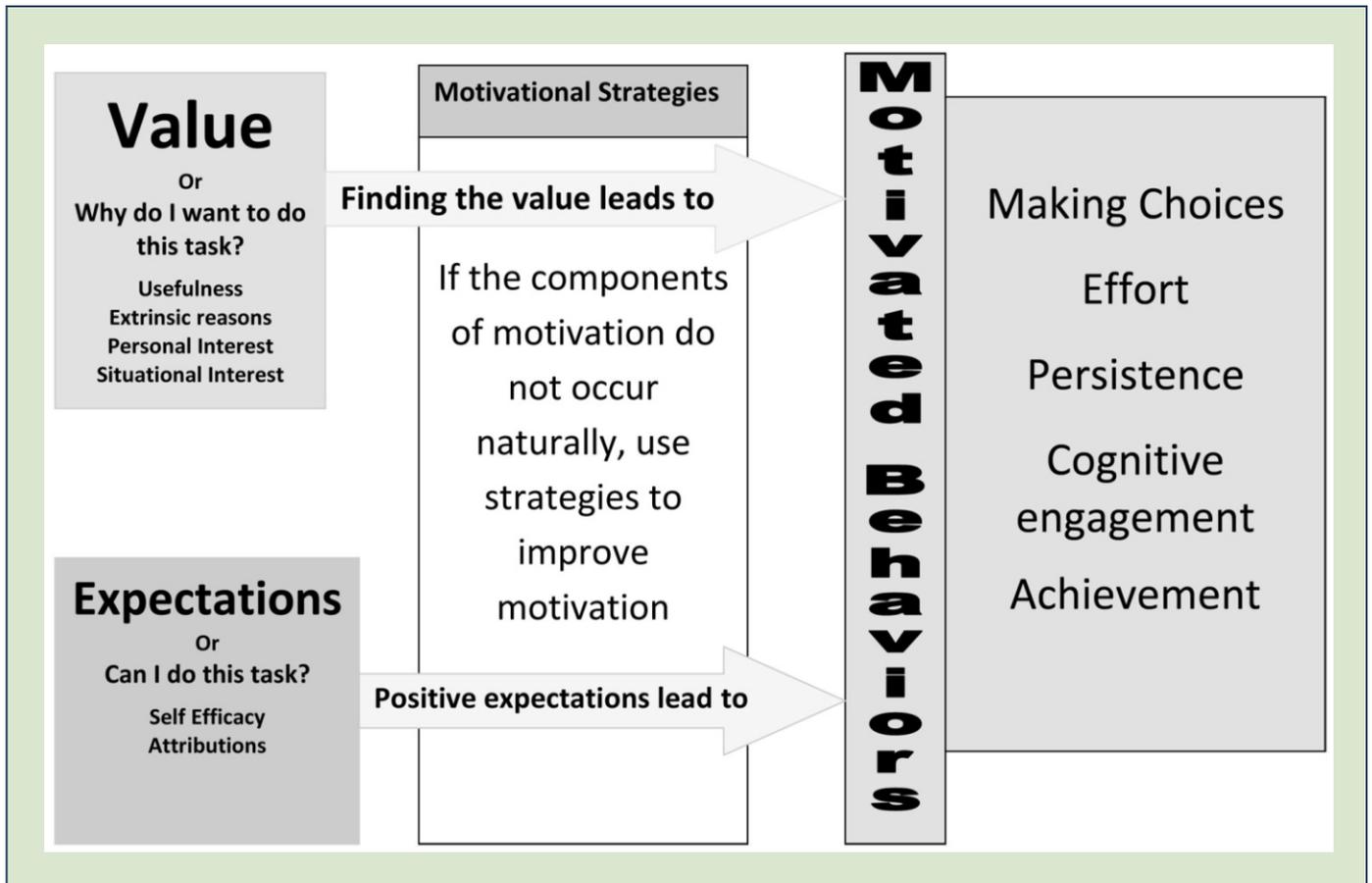


# Strategies for Success

## STAYING MOTIVATED

*Students often make the mistake of believing that a person is either motivated or not. In reality, people who appear to be motivated in everything they do have just been successful in understanding how to motivate themselves in a variety of settings and tasks. Two things contribute to your motivation for any task: what you expect from yourself and what value you place on achieving a goal. The key to motivation is understanding that you have the power to change both your expectations of yourself and the value placed on a task.*

### What is Motivation?



- 🕒 **Motivated students persist at tasks and are more cognitively engaged in the material**, which makes it easier to learn. People generally believe that a person is either motivated or they are not. In reality, motivation can change and those people who appear to be motivated in everything they do have just been successful in understanding how to motivate themselves in a variety of settings and tasks.
- 🕒 **Students who effectively motivate themselves exhibit a variety of behaviors that lead to success.** Motivated students will make choices that help them achieve their desired outcome. They will work hard to put forth the necessary effort and maintain that effort long enough to complete the task. Motivated students will think for more deeply about course material and engage in more elaborate processing in order to truly learn. Finally, motivated students can be recognized by their success in achieving their goals.
- 🕒 **Everyone can become a student who displays these characteristics**; it just takes more effort for some than others. When you learn the skills of motivation and recognize the obstacles to motivation you might be amazed at how quickly you can achieve your goals.
- 🕒 **Two things contribute to your motivation for any task: what you expect from yourself and what value you place on achieving a goal.** The key to motivation is understanding that you have the power to change both your expectations of yourself and the value placed on a task.

## How Can I Get Motivated?

*As mentioned above, getting motivated is a process to be undertaken purposefully. It does not always come naturally, especially when confronted with a task with which you are not excited. With a little work, however, you will be able to motivate yourself for any task that you face at UM. Follow the following strategies for help in getting motivated.*

### USING YOUR EXPECTATIONS TO BECOME MOTIVATED

Students often fall prey to disparaging their own abilities when faced with a difficult task, which can lead to a lack of motivation. The key to maintaining motivation in the face of difficult tasks is to learn how to form positive expectations for your capabilities. There are a number of strategies for achieving this.

- 🕒 **Be realistic and accurate in assessing your capabilities.** It is unrealistic to think that you will be great at everything and that all you need is a positive attitude. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing your weaknesses can lead you to addressing them. Addressing weaknesses might take the form of actively attacking them to improve your capabilities, but could also involve restructuring activities to avoid demands that prey on your weaknesses. This kind of adaptability might make a task more palatable and therefore help you stay motivated.

- 🕒 **If you encounter failure, make a plan to change behaviors and circumstances that you can control. Do not attribute outcomes to those things you cannot change.**

Lack of knowledge, lack of effort, or flawed study strategies are all things you can change; your intelligence is not. Do not think that you are not smart enough, think about what you can do differently. Be honest in your assessment of the problem. Did you really work as hard as you could, including keeping up with the course from the beginning of the semester? If you feel that you put in the maximum effort, then maybe you need to change your study strategies. There is a point for everyone where you really cannot work harder.

- 🕒 **Take responsibility for your academic behavior.**

Avoid blaming the instructor for being a bad teacher. Do not make excuses that you do not have the time, energy, or do not feel well or are not in the mood to study. You have made the choice to be here so need to develop the skills for dealing with these problems. You can create the time with a sound time management plan. If you truly feel that you do not have enough energy to succeed, look at changing your diet, sleep habits, and exercise habits. Avoid falling into the “I do not like my classes” trap. Realize from the start that you will take some classes that might not naturally excite you. They might be required for your concentration or simply did not turn out to be what you had hoped. Life is like that. You need to be able to adjust.

## USING THE VALUE OF A TASK TO MOTIVATE YOURSELF

Your motivation for everything depends on the value you place on the task. The more highly you value completing a task, the more motivated you will be. Difficulties arise when confronted with a task that you do not place a natural value on. Motivating yourself for these tasks can take a little work, but you can find ways to increase your motivation for almost any task.

*Before looking at strategies for increasing your motivation, it will be helpful to understand the different ways that people place a value on completing a task.*

- 🕒 **Beliefs about usefulness.**

The more you feel that a class or assignment will be useful, the higher value you will place on completing the work for that class. If you do not recognize a use for the class, then you will find it difficult to motivate yourself. Each class you take should be useful to you in some way. Maybe it is simply because you have to take it for your concentration or it is a prerequisite for a class that you want to take. Maybe you feel like you need to improve your writing skills. A writing intensive class will then have a higher value for you. If you identify the usefulness you will be more likely to motivate yourself.

- 🕒 **Extrinsic reasons.**

Getting good grades is the most obvious extrinsic reason for placing a high value on completing a task. Any reason that lies outside the task itself can help motivate you. You might be trying to gain the approval of peers or mentors, earn awards and honors, or as mentioned earn high grades. It is a fact of life that G.P.A. provides motivation for many college students. It can be a fine line, however, between using your GPA as motivation and obsessing about it to the point where anxiety begins to creep in or you are not focused on learning the material. You are best

off if you use your GPA as general motivation for doing well, but not build your motivation for each class on it.

 **Personal intrinsic interest.**

This occurs when you place a high value on completing a task because you have a natural interest in it. Completing the next level on your favorite video game, for example, holds a high intrinsic value for you. You will spend hours to complete it. You might also find some classes that you take to be so interesting that you do not mind completing the reading and work for the class. With these tasks you do not have to work motivate yourself. As a child you might have been fascinated with the way things fit together or with trying to understand why people acted the way they did. This knowledge of you natural interests can help you choose the classes for which you will not struggle to motivate yourself.

 **Situational interests.**

Sometimes new interests will arise out of your experiences. A particular book, class, or professor might lead you to look at things differently from before. While it is possible that you will develop a new intrinsic interest out of an experience, these situational interests are often temporary. If you are fascinated with a particular book, your willingness to work hard might not last beyond finishing the book. If you enjoy a particular professor, your interest in the subject might not last beyond the class. Use each of these experiences to choose classes in the future. Did you find the methods for analyzing images in your History of Art class made it easy to motivate yourself to go to class and do the homework? Then look for classes in other departments that focus on analyzing images.

## HOW TO INCREASE YOUR MOTIVATION FOR TASKS

There will be times when you will have trouble motivating yourself to complete an assignment because it is too uninteresting or difficult. If you do not work to increase your motivation you will have trouble successfully completing the assignment and you could suffer consequences in the form of low grades or failure to learn important material. In these situations there are a number of strategies you can use to increase your motivation so that you can complete the task.

 **Make Connections.**

Try to make connections between the material and your life and interests. Each academic discipline involves not only the study of different material, but relies on its own way of analyzing information and communicating arguments. If you are taking a psychology, sociology, or anthropology class, tie the material to your own personal experiences with people. You might not need to apply all the material from the class, but understanding how people develop the world views from their culture and personality might make it easier for you to work in an organization or with clients from a variety of backgrounds different from your own. For science classes, you might focus on the value of learning the scientific method as a model for inquiry in all problem solving. In a math class, think about how you can apply the problem solving methods to any problems you face. English classes and other classes that require extensive writing can help you develop the writing skills that will be essential for you in any career that you choose. Because you are introduced to different skill sets in different classes, you can

connect the development of new skills to your desire to do well and prepare for future classes and life after graduation.

 **Go for the grade.**

A good grade is a sign that you have effectively learned the material for a course. It can also motivate you to put the effort into learning the material. There is no getting around that fact that grades can be a highly motivating factor for students. Sometimes you will struggle to find personal intrinsic value or situational interests in a class. In the end, you might fall back on achieving a high grade as the sole motivational factor for putting in the effort. It is best that you plan ahead to avoid these situations, but when they do occur, studies have shown that students can increase their motivation through consistent reminders that their efforts will earn them the grade they desire.

 **Reward yourself for completing a specific task.**

The reward then becomes the motivation for completing the task. It will work best if you use this strategy for short term goals such as completing a specific chapter or writing a certain number of pages. Make sure that you balance the reward with the completion of the task. Telling yourself that for every 30 minutes of studying you will reward yourself by playing pool at the Union for an hour is obviously not going to get you far. Conversely, rewarding yourself with a 10 minute break for completing the entire book for a history class is not going to provide much motivation. It might take some experimenting to find the correct balance of reward and time on task, but you should be able to create a balance. Try to avoid using extrinsic rewards for larger goals like good grades. Doing well in your classes demonstrates that you are developing the knowledge and skills that will help you achieve your goals. This should be the reason you have chosen to come to U of M and spend the money on your education. If developing the knowledge and skills that lead you to your goals is not enough of an award, then you might want to rethink your reasons for putting yourself through all of this.

 **Try to make the material more interesting.**

Sometimes you might be able to create a game out of studying material. Challenge yourself or a friend to complete a certain number of math problems within a time limit. This might not lead to a permanent interest in the material but can help you maintain focus on completing the tasks at hand.