



How Do I Stay Motivated? The Motivation Equation

$$\text{MOTIVATION} = \frac{(\text{EXPECTANCY} * \text{VALUE})}{(\text{IMPULSIVITY} * \text{DELAY})}$$

MOTIVATION = HOW ENERGIZED YOU FEEL TO DO SOMETHING

EXPECTANCY = HOW LIKELY YOU THINK IT IS THAT YOU WILL
RECEIVE THE PAYOFF FROM TAKING ACTION

VALUE = HOW HIGHLY YOU VALUE THE PAYOFF OF TAKING ACTION

IMPULSIVITY = HOW DISTRACTIBLE YOU ARE WHILE TAKING ACTION

DELAY = HOW FAR AWAY THE DEADLINE IS

The Motivation Equation

This is a useful mental model to understand how energized you feel to perform a task. **Increasing the numerator** (top part) of the equation and **decreasing the denominator** (bottom part) will both increase motivation!

- **Expectancy** has to do with expecting that you can reach your goal. How confident are you that you can get things done? For example, it would be really neat to sail solo around the world, but do you expect that's something you would achieve? Probably not, so you're not motivated to work towards that goal.
- If you don't feel that something is **valuable**, then you'll be less motivated to work towards it. If you're offered a year's supply of live crickets for doing five jumping jacks, you probably won't go for it, because you likely do not value having so many crickets (or any crickets at all for that matter).
- How often do you get distracted by seeing small pleasures and gratification throughout the day? This has to do with your **impulsivity**. If you get distracted often by little impulses, you'll find it harder to take action towards your goals.
- Have you ever had two weeks to work on a paper or project, but left it until the night before? This is the influence of **delay** on your motivation.

Delay is a little harder to control, so we'll talk about ways to increase expectation and value and decrease impulsivity on the next page.

Image from "The Motivation Equation: How to Generate Motivation On-Demand" by Patrick Buggy,

<https://mindfulambition.net/motivation-equation/>



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Increasing Expectancy

- **Pick one thing to focus on.** Take one bigger task you have to do and break it up into smaller ones. It is easier to be motivated to work when the end of a task is near and clear.
- **Make use of success spirals.** The idea of a success spiral is that accomplishment creates confidence, which creates more effort, which results in more accomplishment. If we set a **series of ongoing, challenging, but achievable goals**, we maximize our motivation.
- Rather than expecting to be cured of motivation struggles all at once, believe that **you can build up your motivation**. Have you ever had a small failure and then quit something altogether, thinking there was no point in continuing? Don't be that way about motivation! Instead of aiming to be filled with motivation, aim to have just a little bit more will to work on each future task than the last one.
- Don't be afraid to **ask for help!** Sometimes you need someone else's input to assist you in your learning. You can talk to classmates, maybe ask your TAs questions, make use of your professor's office hours or email them... there are lots of options!

Increasing Value

- **Make sure you have energy!** Just like when your muscles are exhausted, having an exhausted mind will make you feel tired and burned out. Make sure your base needs like sleeping and eating are taken care of.
- **Work at the times that are best for you.** It's easiest to tackle your work when you have the most energy, which depends on when you work best. Reserve your peak performance hours for your hardest work.
- **Pair an unpleasant task with one you find more enjoyable.** If you have one assignment you want to work on and one you're totally lacking motivation for, let yourself work – at least for a little while – on the one you like first. Once you've got the ball rolling and you're in work mode, switch to the other task. Even if it's just a small amount, you're still making progress!
- Be sure to **reward yourself** for your hard work. The rewards might be small, but they can still be motivating! *Don't allow yourself rewards if you haven't earned them!! Be honest with yourself.*

Decreasing Impulsiveness

- **Create a study routine.** Habits are powerful! By creating a study routine (finding a time and place to study every day), you can get your mind into work mode even when you're feeling unmotivated.
- **Put away your tempting distractions.** Turn your phone on *airplane mode* or *do not disturb*, block distracting websites, turn off your computer if you don't need it for your work.
- Find an **accountability buddy**. Talking to another person about the things you need to get done can be a great motivator.

