# How to motivate students

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*Buchach lyceum*

**Alice** Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

**Cheshire Cat** That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

**Alice** I don’t much care where…

**Cheshire Cat** Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.

**Alice** … so long as I get somewhere.

**Cheshire Cat** Oh, you’re sure to do that, if you only walk long enough.

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,* Lewis Carroll

What is the biggest challenge for teachers? Motivating students is a challenge that almost all the teachers face. Motivation is essential to success. Without motivation students certain fail to make necessary effort. The more motivated students are, the more successful they will be and the longer the learning process will last.

Firstly, a teacher should know students’ needs. We can use formal and casual approaches to find out the background and needs of the learners in the class. Duncan Foord suggests writing a letter to your students as a less formal approach to needs analysis. In his book “The Developing Teacher” he gives a sample of such a letter.

*Dear Students,*

*I am your teacher. I want to help you improve your English. I have been teaching English for four years. I like playing tennis and listening to music. My favourite singer is Tracy Chapman. I like my job, although it is sometimes quite difficult. I am always interested in ways of improving.*

*I want to make these classes useful and interesting for you. Can you help me by telling me something about yourself, your life and your experience of learning English? Can you tell me why learning English is important for you and some things you would like to do in class? Thank you.*

*Yours,*

*Liria*

Ask students to write you a reply. Collect the replies. Read them and reply to each one individually. This type of analysis is more informative than traditional form-filling and questionnaires.

It is often suggested to have an agenda for each class, either on paper or on the board. It helps motivate students who like to know what to expect.

Moreover, if teachers want to encourage students to learn foreign languages they should try something new. John Fanselow advises teachers to incorporate changes and surprises into their teaching, to keep students engaged and alert. It is also a good strategy for student motivation. Possible changes can be grouped into five categories:

* Change who – teacher becomes student, student becomes teacher.
* Change where – change the room layout and your position, teach somewhere else.
* Change how – vary the techniques you use and your models of working.
* Change when – vary the sequence of your lesson plan.
* Change what – teach something completely different, varying your materials.

Furthermore, valuable and helpful feedback is also a good form of motivation. Duncan Foord suggests four fast feedback formats which are quick, easy and effective.

**Hot feedback:**How *are you feeling?*

Stop the class at some point in the lesson. It can be at any moment: while you are addressing them or while they are working in pairs or groups. Write on the board the following question: *How are you feeling at the moment?* Give out slips of paper and ask the students to write a few lines in response to the questions. Tell the students you want them to be honest and that the slips are anonymous. Collect the slips of paper and read them after class, you don’t need to discuss them with the students.

**Cool feedback:** *What can you remember?*

This activity helps you understand what is memorable for students. At the start of the lesson, write on the board the following question: *What can you remember about the last class we had?* The students can write any memories that come into their head (what they did, what they heard, something funny etc.). Tell the students to pin their pieces of paper on the wall for others to read, or pass them round. Join the students in reading and commenting on what they have written. Do not write anything, but make a mental note of everything.

**Feedback on learning**: *What did you learn today?*

This activity helps you see the lesson content through the students’ eyes. You may (or may not) be surprised to find that your perception and those of your learners do not always coincide. Allow ten minutes at the end of the class for this. Ask the students to write down on a piece of paper *three* things they have learned or practiced today. Do the same yourself. Then discuss any differences between you and the students and between different students.

**Feedback on fun*:*** *What did you like best?*

This simple procedure helps you understand where in the lesson the students are having fun, and if different students have different ideas of fun. Near the end of the class, write these two questions on the board: *What was the most fun part of the class today? Why?* The students discuss the two questions in pairs or groups. Hold a feedback discussion with the whole class. You can substitute the word *fun* for *boring.*

What is more, cross-cultural projects are a common form of integrative motivation. Anne Merritt is sure that, “Learners who study a language with the aim of better understanding a culture, language and society are integratively motivated”. The International education programme “Face to Faith” is a good example of such type of motivation.

Finally, the most important point is to be tolerant and supportive. If you want to motivate your students, then you have to prove that you are the person who is worth listening to. Be passionate about what you are teaching. Even if your students are not interested in your subject, your enthusiasm should amuse them.

Learning English is a challenging process. Students can have ups and downs. Fortunately, there are plenty of things that we can do to keep them on track when the going gets tough. We should always remember that motivated students are successful students, and successful students are happy students. Consequently, happy students mean happy teachers.