

How to Motivate Your Students

This lack of structure in classrooms often interferes with the learning process. Ways you can motivate your students to learn are in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 20 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

It is very common to hear teachers say, “What can I do to motivate them to work?”

These teachers believe they must extrinsically motivate their students. So they spend their time trying to find fun things to do. Consequently, the class becomes a setting where the teacher is performing and school degenerates into fun time.

People should not *need* to be motivated, any more than the heart needs to be reminded to pump blood. Students are automatically motivated to do well until factors come along to demotivate them.

The problem, therefore, is not motivation. **The challenge is to stop demotivating students.**

When students are at a loss about how the classroom is organized, when they are confused about their responsibilities for learning, they start to act up in class. They doze off in apathy. They walk around and disrupt others. They refuse to work or participate. Then they announce that the class is boring and school is a waste of time. This is all being done for a reason.

Students fail when they do not know

- **what to do (procedures—Unit C), and**
- **what to learn (objectives—Unit D).**

Demotivation	Motivation
Students are demotivated when someone else has control over their lives. For instance, the teacher repeatedly scolds the student for doing something incorrectly, but no one structured the classroom with procedures so the student would know what to responsibly do. The teacher threatens the class by instituting a disorganized environment, which the students do not trust .	Students are motivated when they have a sense of control over their own lives. The classroom is organized and they know what to do. The students feel secure in an organized environment they can trust. Even with no adult in the room, the students know how to help others accomplish things.
Students are demotivated when they are given a test for which there are no objectives to study against and they are subjected to a grade given externally. The teacher places the students in a helpless position with meaningless assignments. The teacher can inflict punishment with the power—or threat—to give out grades.	Students are motivated because they have a sense of responsibility to get their assignments done. This is because the teacher has <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. provided objectives that give sense and purpose to the lesson, 2. given a test that is aligned to the objectives, so the student knows what to learn or accomplish to earn a grade, and 3. provided a scoring guide whereby the student is in complete control and strives for a good grade.
These teachers sometimes mistakenly believe that by holding a threat over a student’s head they can force or scare a student into doing better.	Students are motivated when they feel secure and safe in an environment that is organized, predictable, and structured. Students are motivated when they have the power to earn grades based on prior knowledge of lesson criteria.

Why Students Say the Class Is Boring

Before becoming upset because students are complaining that the class is boring, take a look at the likely causes.

- **Students fail when they do not know what to learn:** When lessons have no objective or purpose, students do not know what they are to learn.
- **Students fail when they do not know what to do:** When a classroom has no structure, students do not know what to do, and they cannot learn.

When lessons have no objectives or purpose, when a class has no structure, students do not know how the classroom should be run and what they are responsible to learn.

Apathy is a way for many students to avoid a sense of failure. Their philosophy is, “nothing ventured, nothing failed.”

In reality, they are highly motivated to protect their sense of self-worth. **If they tell their classmates that school is a useless, boring waste of time, then their self-worth is protected when they receive a failing grade.**

When that happens, they flash their failing grades and say, “See, I told you this class is boring.” No one shames the student because these students have discovered

it is less painful to reject school than to reject themselves.

To make matters worse, they often influence other students to adopt the same belief about school.

Effective teachers know that students are intrinsically motivated to work when the threat of negative external evaluation is removed. **The students feel more competent and intrinsically motivated because they know what to do and what to learn and can take responsibility for their successes.**