

## FOSTERING STUDENT MOTIVATION: GOAL-SETTING AND STUDENT INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRES

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This week's teaching tip illustrates how to use beginning-of-course questionnaires to encourage students to think about these motivation-related questions:

- Why are they learning English, and how does it relate to their goals and interests beyond the classroom?
- What do they hope to gain from this course?
- What topics and learning approaches appeal to them?
- What can the teacher do to support their learning and build their motivation?

This questionnaire activity can be conducted after the teacher has presented an overview of the course goals and objectives.

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### LEVEL

Intermediate and above. The example questionnaire provided with this teaching tip can be adapted to suit other students by adjusting the language level, the number of questions, and the ratio of multiple choice/"tick the box" options to free-text, open-ended responses.

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### GOALS

- Teachers will have a collection of student-generated data to inform motivation-oriented decisions related to instructional design, building learner autonomy, creating a positive classroom community, and their own classroom behavior.
- Students will increase their awareness of what motivates them to study English; this awareness can help them make choices about their learning and can be used as part of goal-oriented self-motivation strategies.

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### ASSOCIATED MOTIVATION FACTORS

**Instructional design:** incorporating student interests and learning preferences; personalizing learning

**Promoting learner autonomy:** encouraging goal setting and reflection; encouraging learner self-awareness; developing self-motivation strategies

**Creating a positive classroom environment:** understanding learner preferences about grouping styles and cooperative learning

**Teacher knowledge and behavior:** understanding student perceptions and preferences about teacher behavior

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## MATERIALS

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- Teacher:
  - Whiteboard or chalkboard
  - Markers or chalk
- Students:
  - Pencils or pens
  - Questionnaires (an example questionnaire is provided)

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## PREPARATION

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- Adapt and modify the example questionnaire to suit your students' needs, culture, and course content. The example questionnaire is designed for an upper intermediate, secondary integrated skills class.
- Print or photocopy the questionnaire, preparing enough copies for each student. If possible, prepare two-sided copies to save paper.

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## PROCEDURES

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1. Write "motivation" on the board. Ask student volunteers to define this word, giving prompts and asking clarifying questions if needed. (Example definitions: what makes us try to do something; something that makes us work to achieve a goal).
2. Tell students they are going to think about what motivates them to study English, their overall and course learning goals, topics they might want to see in course materials, and how they like to learn. Explain that they will use a questionnaire (survey) to complete this process.
3. Ask a student volunteer to pass out the questionnaires. Ask students to write their names at the top of the page. Tell students to wait to write their responses until after you explain the questionnaire's content.
4. Direct students' attention to the "Goals and Motivation" section at the top of the questionnaire. Tell students they will set some general goals today using the questionnaire. Explain that setting goals and thinking about them can help motivate students when they face difficulties or challenges while learning English. Explain that you will collect and keep the questionnaires so students can review and think about their goals halfway through the course and at the end of the course.
  - Explain that Item A (**Overall, I study English because...**) relates to long-term goals and reasons they study English. Ask students to share a few example answers to Item A, and write them on the board (for instance: *...I want to study at a university in an English-speaking country, ...I want to be a travel agent and I need to be able to speak to foreign customers at my job, etc.*).
  - Tell students that thinking about answers to Item B (**Learning English helps me/will help me...**) can help motivate them because it connects what they learn in the classroom to their everyday lives. Again, ask a few students to share example answers and write them on the board, reminding the class that answers can relate to both fun and more serious things you can do with English skills (for instance: *play online games with English-speaking friends and understand English popular music; communicate with people on the internet and get a good job after I graduate*).
  - Explain that Items C & D relate to setting shorter-term goals for the current course. Remind them to think about the course content and objectives when they answer Item D (**During this course I want to learn...**)

5. Direct students to the next section related to student interests. Explain that you plan to incorporate topics and themes that interest your students (as your curriculum permits) in some activities during the course. Tell students that this section of the questionnaire will help you determine which topics are most interesting to a majority of the class. Ask students to select the three topics they are most interested in, point out that they can add an original topic where the worksheet says “Other,” and ask them to give specific topic examples, if desired. (Reminder: asking students for input about their learning and connecting student interests to course content are great motivational strategies for teachers to use!)
6. Direct students to the questionnaire’s final section related to learning preferences. Explain that it is important for all learners to take time to think about how they like to learn and how they learn effectively. Tell them that you recognize that the way activities are set up and teacher qualities are important factors in how students learn. Explain that it is helpful to you to understand their individual and whole-class preferences in these areas.
7. Give students a few minutes to quietly reflect on the items in the questionnaire with their pencils and pens down. Then ask students to complete the questionnaire. Collect the questionnaires when students are done.
8. After class, review and tabulate the student responses. Make notes about the data you collect: Do you notice any patterns or trends? Are there some individuals with unique preferences and interests?
  - Revisit and consider this data as you make instructional and classroom management decisions during the course. Think about how to use the information to increase student motivation.
  - Mention the data you collected to students so they know you took their goals, ideas, and opinions into account; doing this can be inherently motivational! (Examples: *In our start-of-course questionnaire many of you mentioned....that you want to improve your confidence in speaking, so today we are going to do [activity X.]/ ...that you prefer to work alone; however, we also need to build teamwork and cooperation skills in language class because.../ ...that you like to learn through games, so today we are going to work in teams to play a game that will help us practice [grammar topic X].*).
  - Be sure to return the questionnaires to students at the course midpoint and toward the end of the course. Ask them to reflect on their goals and motivations: Has anything changed? What progress are they making toward meeting their goals? What challenges do they face? How can they overcome them? How do they use their goals to self-motivate in these challenging situations? If desired, turn this reflection process into a short writing assignment. (Again, encouraging reflection, self-assessing progress, and considering strategies to overcome roadblocks are all motivation-building activities.)

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY

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#### Talking about goals and motivation

After students complete the questionnaires, put them into pairs or small groups and ask them to share and compare their goals and motivations for studying English and the course. This brief discussion activity can help students get to know one another and create a sense of shared purpose, both of which contribute to creating a positive class environment -- another motivational strategy!