
Why is motivation important?

In recent times, there has been a lot of research into the importance of motivation in second language learning. It has been proved that, even with a great range of skills or aptitude, a learner is less likely to be successful if they are not motivated. It's very easy to draw comparisons with sports stars here: you probably all know of footballers who seemed remarkably skilled, but never quite fulfilled their potential. Often that is because they lost their motivation (as many of them freely admit).

Which aspects of motivation can a teacher influence?

Over to you: Considering its importance, what can a teacher/trainer do to make their classes more motivated? If we go back to the four features outlined in our earlier definition, which ones do you think a teacher can most easily influence?

Well, it's not a black and white situation, as we have already seen. You may be able to influence the reason for learning or the kind of person the learner is, particularly over a longer period. However, I'm going to focus on two:

The strength of the desire to learn

If you are feeling a bit tired, a bit removed from the workshop, what kind of teacher or trainer is more likely to motivate you? Perhaps one who is willing to be engaging and 'wake you up' rather than one who is quiet and undemanding? Almost certainly it will be one who can develop some sense of interest in what you are studying... Increasing this strength of desire can have a really big impact, and teachers and trainers should recognise that and aim to do it by making what they do interesting for their learners.

The task

The task (as much as the attitude of the teacher or trainer) is what can really influence the strength of desire. What kind of things did you hate doing at school? And what did you like doing? I'm sure you all have your favourites, and that the tasks you enjoyed doing you found more motivating. The teacher or trainer should see this and look for their tasks to be motivating. Again, there are so many factors – for example, as a starting point you may want to make sure the task is not too easy, but not too difficult either. And of course, what's motivating for one group of learners (or even one learner) may be different for another group.

Over to you: You will now going to work through several tasks yourselves to look at motivation in more detail, followed by some exercises to help you explore a part of the Premier Skills English website called Goal!