



Encouraging Student Motivation Series
PART 3: Motivating Students through Feedback and Clear Expectations

Motivation is perhaps the most critical non-academic factor to positively affect student performance on coursework (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Increased motivation has been linked to increased academic achievement (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999), success in handling stressful situations (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000), and better study skills (Robbins et al., 2004).

How can I communicate clear expectations for student performance?

Students tend to perform better when they know what is expected of them and are given guidance on how to meet those expectations (Davis, 2009). Below are suggestions on how to set expectations in the classroom:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Provide lesson objectives.	Try to provide learning objectives for each lesson that tell students what they will learn, and ensure that students are aware of these learning objectives and any assessments. You could do this by starting each class period with either a one-slide presentation of the day’s learning objectives or writing the learning objectives on the board. An example from Linguistics might be: “Today we will be discussing morphemes. By the end of the class, you should be able to define what a morpheme is, differentiate free versus bound morphemes, and be able to generate examples of each type.”
Make your expectations clear in the syllabus.	Use the syllabus to clearly define what students need to do to be successful in your class, and provide them with explanations, timelines, and additional resources for each assignment.
Post rubrics well in advance of due dates.	Whenever possible, post assignment grading rubrics for the students to peruse before starting the assignment. This allows students to evaluate their own work according to your expectations prior to grading and gives guidelines for improvement. Here are a few examples from Carnegie Mellon’s <i>Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation</i>
Provide examples from previous students.	If possible, provide examples of successful student work along with rubrics. This can give students a model to reference as they work on their own project.
Tell them you believe they can meet your expectations.	In addition to communicating what the important learning objectives are, let your students know that you expect that they will meet these goals--you believe they can do it. This is especially important for underrepresented or underprepared students.

How can effective feedback help motivate my class?

Studies show that students tend to value feedback that is “timely, individualized and focused” (Hyland, 2013). Below are some suggestions on providing effective feedback:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Practice effective feedbacking strategies.	Providing students with timely, task-specific positive feedback increases intrinsic motivation to learn and helps students stay on-task during classroom learning activities (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). For more suggestions on how to provide effective feedback to students, see our “Effective Feedback Series.”



Avoid singling out specific students for praise or comparing one group of students to another.	Instead, praise the class as a whole for performance on tasks. For example, you could say: “Overall, the class did very well on the exam/problem set/writing assignment. I’m very pleased with your performance. If you weren’t happy with your performance, please come see me and we’ll work on a plan to help you get your grade to where you’d like it to be.”
Provide individual written/verbal praise on specific assignments.	Individualized feedback helps the student to feel that they stand out and prevents feelings of anonymity. The Speedgrader tool in Canvas can help make the process of composing feedback easier as it provides a quick and direct way to give each student individual feedback and grades for work submitted online.
Ensure the feedback is returned in a timely fashion.	This encourages students to pay attention to your feedback, and to incorporate that feedback into future assignments.

Citation

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