

# Motivational Teaching: engaging young people in learning behaviours

By Nick Thornor (for IATEFL, Glasgow 2017)

*Learners who aren't motivated can seem lazy, but in fact demotivation is the result of a huge mental struggle that takes place while students contemplate learning tasks and behaviours. Motivational teaching is about understanding and intervening in this struggle. We can do this in three ways.*

## 1 Increasing task commitment

- Ensure that the time, place & equipment for tasks are 'in place' when setting homework
- Set an easy minimum requirement + a challenging maximum
- Explain the relevance (see Simon Sinek's Golden Circle)
- Outline procedures (with flow diagrams / lesson maps)
- Use homework records and 'streaks'

---

## 2 Removing psychological barriers

- Reflect on feelings in the future (i.e. 'future orientation', visualisation techniques)
- Think of fun activities you can link to the task (see 'temptation bundling', K Milkman)
- Help students develop an available identity aligned to learning (e.g. the 'future self')
- Avoid negative 'trigger' words (e.g. *notebooks* → *learning records*)
- Link task to already-valued activities
- Laugh at yourself! (e.g. using memes to share anxieties)

---

## 3 Creating memories of rewarding learning experiences

- Sensory stimulation (e.g. haptic sense, movement, etc.)
- Mystery and revelation (e.g. narrative, back-chaining)
- Freedom to move (consider furniture arrangement)
- Novelty (see research into the novelty-seeking trait)
- Playfulness (emotional experience)
- Progress

More ideas from:

[www.oup.com/elt/teacher/itc](http://www.oup.com/elt/teacher/itc)

