

# Student Motivation and Engagement in Online Environments

Engagement plays a vital role in learning and greatly influences investment in the learning content. Students that may be considered 'unmotivated' or 'misbehaving' are likely disengaged, whether due to a lack of desire, knowledge, or skills. Identifying how to keep students engaged in a traditional classroom remains a common concern; however, these concerns may seem even more monumental in online environments where teachers are not physically present. Now more than ever, it is important to consider how to engage students in online environments.

1. What are the similarities and differences between motivating students in face-to-face environments versus online environments?
2. How can I identify when my students are motivated and engaged in online environments?
3. What strategies can I employ to promote student engagement in online learning environments?



to Consider

Student motivation and engagement are foundational elements to successful online learning. For some teachers, supporting and maintaining student motivation and engagement may be the most challenging aspect of teaching in online environments. While often used interchangeably, motivation and engagement are distinct terms. Motivation is commonly related to interests, needs, or values and can be identified as the influence that leads someone to do something; whereas, engagement is the action or doing element influenced by motivation. In essence, motivation is the cause, and engagement is the effect, so it is crucial to promote student motivation.

Establishing positive social-emotional relationships promotes student motivation in online environments. To build relationships, get to know the interests, needs, and values of your students. Students are likely to be more motivated in online environments if they feel the online community is personal and supportive. To promote a safe, personal, and supportive online community, use a positive tone in verbal and written communication, be willing to open up and share with students, and encourage them to do the same with their teachers and peers.

It can be difficult to identify when student engagement is occurring in online environments. Student engagement can be exemplified behaviorally through the students' observable actions, cognitively through their academic focus, and emotionally through their contribution to relationships. In traditional face-to-face environments, engagement is often identified through a variety of verbal and non-verbal behaviors including eye contact, posture, and whole group or individual responsiveness. However, in online environments, where students and teachers are not in the same physical space, engagement appears differently.

Identify instructional strategies that will likely increase student engagement. Be creative with lessons and activities, and use familiar technologies that promote student engagement. Some students are more likely to engage if they feel affirmed in their actions and accomplishments. To help students with self-affirmation, include activities that help them develop competence by providing multiple opportunities for revision and feedback. Exercising autonomy and self-direction can also influence engagement in online environments. For example, students might be more likely to engage if they have options for assignments and if they are provided multiple formats to engage in learning content. Student motivation and engagement will likely increase when students are encouraged to use their voices to share their ideas, attitudes, and opinions, as well as when they have choices in what, where, and how they learn.

## KEY Elements