

Internal vs. External Motivation

At times there are tasks that you do because you want to do them; this is internal motivation. At other times there are tasks that you do because someone else wants you to do them or rewards you for doing them; this is external motivation. Recognizing the difference between those two types of tasks will help you to understand your motivations.

YOUR REASONS FOR GOING TO COLLEGE

It may be that you are going to college because you want to do it. It is also possible that you are going to college because someone else expects or requires you to do it. Write at least three tasks that you do because you want to do them. Then write at least three tasks that you do because someone else wants you to do them or rewards you for doing them.

Three tasks you want to do:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Three tasks you do because someone else wants you to do them:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Internal vs. External Motivation

WHAT IS INTERNAL MOTIVATION?

“Internal motivation” means that your motivation to accomplish your goal comes from within you. It is determined by your own values and goals.

Sample goal that is internally motivated:

I will go to class every day this semester so that I can learn as much as possible.

With internal motivation, it is much easier to stay academically motivated. Trying to find some internal value in everything you have to do academically can improve your overall motivation (e.g., learning astronomy so that you can explain to your little brother what stars really are).

WHAT IS EXTERNAL MOTIVATION?

“External motivation” means that your motivation to attain your goal comes from a source outside yourself.

Sample goal that is externally motivated:

I will make a 3.5 GPA in college so that my parents will buy me a car.

It’s okay to be externally motivated by such things as getting higher grades, praise from your family, or earning more money, however, it will be harder for you to stay highly motivated in the areas where you only have ulterior reasons for being in those situations.

Performing tasks to look good for others or to please your family can be difficult to maintain. Constantly using external motivation when you are confronted with difficult tasks requires a great deal of effort.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Here are some helpful methods and suggestions for you to generate and maintain internal motivation. These can improve your general motivation to succeed in college:

- **Reframe your mindset:** view classes/assignments as an opportunity, not a requirement
- **Imagine your success:** rather than assuming the worst, think of the best possible scenario outcome – how does that look to you? Is the reward worth the work?
- **One step at a time:** Rome wasn’t built in a day – break down your goal into smaller goals so that it is not as overwhelming. Small victories are just as important!
- **Remember your why:** Who or what is motivating you? When you feel discouraged, think of those individuals and why you are pushing through!