Making Learning Relevant[1]

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Have you ever sat in class wondering, "When will I ever use this?" You're not alone. Research shows that students who see genuine meaning in their studies are more motivated, learn more deeply, and retain knowledge longer. The good news is that relevance isn't something you get from others—you can actively create connections between your coursework and what matters to you.

When you find relevance in your learning, it helps you:

- Invest more effort and persist through challenging material
- Connect new concepts to your existing knowledge and experiences
- Develop intrinsic motivation that lasts beyond grades
- Transform from a passive learner to an active contributor

The key point: **Relevance is personal**—what motivates one learner may not resonate with another. Your task is to discover the connections that matter to you.

Finding Relevance in Your Courses

Relevance can come from different sources: your career, your interests, who you are, or your community. Here are four ways to connect your learning to what matters.

1. Connecting to Your Career

Even when course content seems abstract, it often connects to skills and knowledge you'll use professionally. Rather than waiting to be told why something matters, actively explore how your learning applies to your future work.

Strategies:
- Ask professionals in your field how they use concepts you're learning
- Research job descriptions to identify which course skills employers value
- When you have choices about assessments, create projects that simulate real workplace challenges

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[1] Content developed with AI, based on the CAST UDL Guidelines™, scholarly sources, and web resources. Icons courtesy of *Flaticon.com* contributors and others.

2. Following Your Curiosity

Personal interest is a powerful motivator. When you connect course material to topics that genuinely fascinate you, learning becomes engaging rather than just meeting a requirement.

Strategies:

- When given choices in assignments, select topics that genuinely interest you
- Explore how course concepts connect to your hobbies, passions, or current events you follow
- Ask "what if" questions that extend ideas in directions that intrigue you

3. Drawing on Your Identity

Learning becomes more meaningful when it relates to your values, culture, and sense of who you are and who you want to become. Your background and experiences are valuable resources for making connections.

Strategies:

- Reflect on how the course content relates to your personal values and beliefs
- Draw on your life and work experiences to deepen your understanding of new concepts
- Consider how what you're learning shapes the person you're becoming

4. Contributing to Your Community

Learning takes on new meaning when you can use it to help others. Moving from passive learner to active contributor creates a sense of purpose that deepens engagement.

Strategies:

- Look for opportunities to apply your learning to real problems in your community
- Share your knowledge with peers, family, or community members who might benefit
- Consider how your education prepares you to make a positive difference

Key Takeaway

Finding relevance in your learning is an active process you control. When you discover your own connections—to your career, interests, identity, or community—motivation becomes self-sustaining. Not all four sources need to resonate; even one can increase your engagement. The most powerful learning happens when you take ownership of making your education meaningful.

Resources

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