

## Habit Building (Slide 1)

Hi there. My name is Roxanne Ross from the Student Success Centre. Today I'm going to be talking about developing positive habits as part of a larger workshop series called Establishing and Maintaining Motivation while learning online. Specifically, in relation to habit building, I'm going to share some strategies with you for developing an overall study habit.

## Overview of session (Slide 2)

There are many strategies that can support the work of motivating ourselves and maintaining our motivation on a day-to-day basis to achieve our goals. While this session focuses specifically on habit building, I invite you to review the other components of this workshop as well. Goal-setting by my colleague Jessica Cohen, and Managing Procrastination and Engaging with Self-Compassion by my colleague Jennifer Parsons. In this video, we will be reviewing the importance of habit building as well as the key elements involved in habit building. As you review this session, I encourage you to think about your own experience with habits and how you might incorporate habit building into your day-to-day practices for maintaining your motivation.

## Motivation Interference (Slide 3)

Let's begin with one concept that is used to describe something we likely all experience, something called motivation interference. Motivation interference refers to those moments when we sit down to complete one activity that we know moves us towards our goals, such as completing a task for one of our courses, and then we immediately begin to think of other activities we might like to do instead. You may have experienced this, for example, when you sit down to read a chapter from one of your courses, your mind starts providing you with ideas of other activities such as engaging with friends on social media that you might prefer to be doing. The thought of these other activities then, can interfere with your motivation to complete the original task, which was to read the chapter. One reason why building strong study habits can be so important is that, according to researchers who study habits, habits can help us manage motivation interference. Establishing habits, then, things that we do regularly and routinely, help us reduce the influence of motivation interference and as a result, increase the likelihood of completing the original task.

## Habit building (Slide 4)

Let's move on to reviewing the key components of building a habit. We want to begin our process of designing habits with our goals in mind. That is, to develop supportive habits that carry us towards one or more of our goals on a regular basis. Overall, there are three components to creating a habit. Setting a habit includes a reminder or cue to begin the habit, the habit, which is the set routine or behavior and a reward for yourself when the task is complete. Let's unpack each of these a little.

Cues. Cues can be anything from a time of day to something we do repeatedly in a day. An alarm clock is one example. It is a cue we often use to support the habit of getting up at a particular time. The reward is coffee or breakfast or being on time. When thinking about a cue for beginning a new habit, the cue should be something you do already, not something that

requires you to form a new additional habit. So for instance, if I shower and then get a coffee every morning, that might be a good cue to use for the new habit, which might be sitting down at my desk and planning my study for the day. As you think about deciding on a cue for your new study habit, I encourage you to reflect on something you already do routinely.

Let's move on to the habit itself. The habit will be the new behavior you want to establish. In everyday life, this could be starting a new flossing regimen or replacing screen time for a screen free period in the day. In our example today, we're going to focus on habits that enhance our motivation in the context of online learning. And in a moment, I will demonstrate an example of how we might approach creating a study habit.

The third component, rewards, can be external, such as watching a movie, for example, when your study time is over for the day. or they can be internal, a sense of accomplishment, the feeling you get when you check all the tasks off your list.

## Building a Study Habit—An Example (Slide 5)

Now let's turn more specifically to habit building in the context of creating a study habit. Building a study habit is little more complex than creating a flossing your teeth habit, for instance, because both the content you are studying and the learning tasks are frequently changing based on the demands of your course. This larger task also involves a number of smaller cues as you move through the process. On the screen is an example adapted from researchers to Stojanovic, Grund and Fries of what a study habit might look like using the example of reading a chapter from your coursework. The overall study habit has a recurring cue, such as finishing breakfast, or pouring a coffee, or putting a child or sibling down for a nap. The habit also includes a distinct end, which is preceded by recurring end tasks, in this case, planning the next task and tidying the desk. The reward or celebration would follow at the end of this habit.

Within this broader study habit is a smaller set of habits which are modified depending on the task you are completing, such as in the reading example, in which getting out my reading, cues me to sit down at my workspace, which then cues me to begin reading using my reading strategies.

## Building a Study Habit—An Example (Slide 6)

Within your overall study habit, you may need to include breaks to maintain your focus. Frequent short breaks can be very helpful for our well-being. They give us a chance to stretch or rest our eyes or give our mind a break cognitively. I encourage you to think of breaks as something separate from rewards, in the sense that breaks are short momentary pauses to refresh yourself rather than longer rewards. It is sometimes difficult to motivate yourself to return to study after a break. Breaks can derail our habit and provide space for motivation interference to creep in. On the next slide, we look at some strategies for managing breaks. Planning both the break and the return to study can help you build a regular routine of refreshing breaks and intentional returns.

## Getting Back to Work (Slide 7)

When planning your overall study habit then, it's a good idea to intentionally think through when your breaks will be and how long they will be, and what you will do to refresh yourself. It can also be helpful before you leave for each break to prepare yourself to come back. This can

include tidying your workspace, putting away anything you will not need when you come back and organizing materials for the continuation of your study session or the next study session.

If you engage your mind with the upcoming material by deciding on your next task, thinking of a question you will answer, or deciding a new approach, for example, quizzing yourself, reviewing slides, or joining a study session with others, you will find the next study time more appealing. If it is helpful, you may want to set an alarm or time your break in some other way. As mentioned earlier, try to take breaks that build health, either mental or physical. For example, going outside for ten minutes or chatting with a friend. Avoid the rabbit hole of the internet or social media. You will be fresher for study if you give your eyes and mind a break from screens for five or ten minutes. Think if your break, like rest between exercises at the gym, you might get some water, walk around a little, take some deep breaths, but you wouldn't watch a movie before your next set. You might also consider adding something enjoyable to your return, perhaps by opening a window, bringing a cup of tea to your desk, or listening to music you enjoy as your study.

## Mini Celebrations and Rewards (Slide 8)

Lastly, let's talk about rewards. Rewarding ourselves is an important part of reinforcing your habit and maintaining motivation. As mentioned earlier in this presentation, it can be helpful to think about rewards as separate from study breaks, which are designed to maintain our well-being. When we reward ourselves for completing a habit, we help to create positive feelings with the act of completing the habit, which in turn can make us more likely to complete the habit again. Rewards can be external rewards, like rewarding yourself with a movie at the end of a full day of productive studying. However, rewards don't necessarily have to be external.

We can also cultivate positive feelings intentionally in relation to a completed habit by spending a moment to congratulate ourselves for completing a habit. B. J. Fogg, another well-known habit researcher from Stanford, in his book, *Tiny Habits*, emphasizes the importance of creating positive feelings with the habits we are trying to build. He suggests designing a personal celebration after you complete the habit to help reinforce the positive connection to the habit. This might be something as simple as cheering yourself on with 'a way to go', for instance. When to reward yourself or celebrate is also important to consider. Tali Sharot, a researcher on behavior change, in her talk, *How to Motivate Yourself to Change your Behavior*, emphasizes that we tend to respond best to immediate rewards. So with this in mind you might want to consider how you can provide yourself with a reward or celebratory action immediately after you complete your study habit.

## Planning Your Study Habit (Slide 9)

To review then, creating a habit involves thinking of a cue, the habit you want to establish, and a method to celebrate or reward yourself once you've completed the habit. A study habit also includes breaking down some additional steps in your habit depending on the activity you are working on. In addition, you will want to consider how you will include breaks to maintain your well-being and focus. This takes a little planning. So, I invite you to create a study habit plan for yourself using the template on the screen.

## What's Next (Slide 10)

For more information on establishing and maintaining motivation, you can review some of the other recorded sessions on the Student Success Centre's website in this series. If you would like more individualized support with any areas related to online learning, feel free to book an appointment with one of our Academic Development Specialists or Academic Strategists at the Student Success Centre or check out some of our additional resources on our website. Wellness Student Services also provides many programs, and one on one services to support students in their overall well-being.