

9: Motivating students to use learning technology

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The time, energy, enthusiasm and planning that you have invested in the design of your implementation, and the provision and arrangement of resources could all be wasted if you fail to sell the idea effectively to your students. After all, it is the students who are actually going to be working with the technology. An open access resource centre, however nicely decorated, regardless of the technical wizardry included, will not be exploited by the students unless they are given strong motivation for doing so. Simply telling students that there is an exciting package available covering subject X is not enough to actually get them sitting down in front of it, never mind absorbing any worthwhile information from it.

This chapter gives suggestions of different ways that students **might** be motivated to use the technology that you are providing. If you are able to identify several reasons for the students using the material - all the better. Above all your own enthusiasm and belief in the materials you are using is crucial in convincing the students that technology is a useful, important and relevant component of their course.

Make it Relevant (Content)

- Integrate it with the lectures and other parts of the course. Refer to it in lectures and course documentation.
- Use it to reinforce and expand on concepts developed in other parts of the course.
- Only use parts of the package that are directly relevant to the course content
- Give students references to packages, and “pages” in packages, like other references.
- Use a shell (e.g. Resource Builder) to tie together several resources which all support one topic.
- Tell students why it is relevant to them, don’t assume it is obvious.
- Get the students to record their work, so that they have something to take away. (If there is nothing to file, it can’t be important, but beware of letting students print courseware content just “to be read later”.)
- Use it as a basis for revision.

Make Sure it is Appropriate (Right Level)

- In the use of language, jargon, methodology and general style.
- To students’ level of computer literacy.
- Lay on training/introductory sessions.
- To student access to hardware - in class time and for self study.
- To the ability to provide help when difficulties arise.

Make it an Experience

- Select a package that presents information in a unique or novel way, not just an electronic book, where the student turns the pages.
- Plan the integration of the materials.
- Vary your methods of presentation and interaction with the students.
- Include clips/interactivity/simulations.

Make it Supportive

- Make sure that help is available if & when it is needed.
- Tell students how and where help is available.
- Be there yourself to help for areas that you know are difficult.
- Run surgeries.
- Pair/Group students into self help groups.
- Offer post test support sessions.
- Don’t assume that all students are computer literate.
- Don’t assume that all students enjoy using computers.

- Make sure the students know what the aims are for each session.
- Make sure there is access to printed and other support materials.

Make it assessed

- As part of the package, counting towards continuous assessment.
- As a separate file, monitored electronically.
- As part of summative assessment.
- Have a quiz in a tutorial.
- Assess a group presentation based on the content delivered in the package.
- Include a write up of the lab session as part of continuous assessment.
- Log the students who use/complete the package. Make this a pre-requisite for successful completion of the course.
- Assess students' own critical reviews of the LT materials.

Give the students ownership

- Allow students control of the speed of progress through the materials.
- Allow students control of the sequence of progress through the materials.
- Encourage students to use and enter their own data, where possible.
- Allow students some choice of the topics studied.
- Enable students to copy sections of the content to a clipboard/notepad to build their own notes.
- Follow up with an explanation (or presentation) by one student to another.

Make it shared

- Set a group task, e.g. assign students a problem to work through.
- Group students around 1 computer (but make sure there is enough room for everyone to see).
- Involve group members in the assessment of the rest of their group's work.
- Get groups to feed back to the rest of the class in a tutorial setting.
- Use LT materials within a tutorial and stop at regular intervals to recap.
- Ask the students to submit a group project - possibly electronically.

Make it properly integrated

- Don't expect students to use LT just because it is there - Build the LT into courses.
- Follow up the use of the package by running a tutorial, perhaps using case studies based on the material.
- Use the LT in your lectures and make subsequent references to the material.
- Set specific self study group tasks using LT.
- Use in combination or in parallel with other modes of learning i.e. run a laboratory then ask students to go through a software simulation.
- Use the material to demonstrate situations which might not otherwise be possible, for example which might be dangerous, expensive, slow etc.
- Enable students to rehearse situations or to repeat experiments or situations in their own time.
- Select only the relevant pieces of a package rather than using inappropriate material.
- Use the LT to develop a point or to reinforce an idea covered in class.
- Set tasks that cannot be completed (efficiently) without it.

Follow it up

- Ask students for feedback on the LT
- Use the LT as a basis for a follow-up tutorial.
- Ask other colleagues to give feedback - so recommendations can then be passed to the class.
- Look at exam results and do a comparison between results obtained using different packages and pass on this information to students.
- Use class - course committees to give feedback and/or recommendations on LT.
- Look at computer confidence.
- Make sure to act on the feedback obtained - and tell students about it.

Make it interactive

- Have at least one LT material based activity in every class.
- Make sure students are able to record the outcomes of their activity, perhaps by creating notes or getting a printed copy (but beware the tendency to print material rather than to read it).
- Set students a task, asking for a report back after 10 minutes say.
- Give students questions or a problem to solve as they work through the package.
- Give students a workbook or worksheet to go through.
- Get students to report back on what they have learned.
- Get students to fill in the blanks in a handout with what they have learned and use this as a basis for a class record.
- Encourage students to ask questions about the package.

Make it competitive

- Involve groups in a task to be marked by other groups.
- Ask groups to prepare a poster of their findings which will be assessed.
- Ask students to solve a problem and have a poll in the class to vote on which is the best solution.
- Award prizes for the best project/solution etc., for example offer: freetime; less to hand in; beer vouchers; fun activity etc..
- Ask students from other years to mark students' work.

Set targets

- Clarify the aims and objectives for the exercise, particularly if they are not included in package. Possibly provide a paper based copy.
- Get the class to set the goals for the session e.g. have brain storming session and write up goals on a flip chart.
- Write out a timetable or a schedule for students to follow.
- Get students to keep a record of their work or a diary of when they achieved the targets set.

Make it understandable

- Encourage students to ask questions.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Find out the answers to any questions which you can't answer.
- Differentiate between opinion and factual evidence.
- Set up a list of the students' most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).
- Refer students to other FAQ lists or relevant web sites.
- Ask students to compile a list of questions. This could be a group exercise.
- Ask groups of students to ask other groups of students questions.
- Set up a discussion or e-mail group for your students.
- Get students to submit questions to you by e-mail.
- Provide written or electronic support about how to use the packages.
- Send questions to students via e-mail.
- Give questions to students prior to using LT.
- Get students from other years to become involved in demonstrating.

Be an enthusiast

- You must know what you are doing and convey this to the students.
- Make sure you know exactly what is in a package before telling your students to work through it.
- Pick out material which you enjoy working with and feel comfortable with.
- Enjoy working with the students and share their enthusiasm.
- Promote interaction in the class. Stimulate discussion and follow ups.

Enhance students' self confidence

- Make it easy to use.
- Provide positive feedback.
- Provide corrective feedback in a positive way.
- Provide helpful formative/self assessment.
- Don't undermine students' self confidence in the subject or the use of LT.
- Avoid unnecessary barriers between the students and the LT.

Make it fun

- For you
and
- For the students.