Nine Ways to Jumpstart Your Lifelong Learning Habits

Adult learners need positive learning habits to be successful and stay motivated in their degree programs. There are many approaches based on a variety of sound learning and psychology concepts that can be used to help learners develop the behaviors that lead to better engagement in the learning process. Below are nine practical ways to jumpstart these habits. Though technically each of these activities can be done individually, there is a lot of overlap and interplay between them. Therefore, the real impact can happen when some—or all—are done in concert. Let’s start.

#1 Understand Yourself Better

Self-awareness helps you become a more authentic you! The more you know about yourself, the more impactful your choices and goals are and the closer you get to your “Ideal Me.”

If you haven’t already, try taking a personality test or two, such as the Myers-Briggs (MBTI) or the Enneagram. Additionally, there are many other types of assessments and interest inventories (both free and paid) that can deepen your understanding of yourself.

There are also many newsletters, Twitter accounts, Pinterest boards, and other forums that post information customized for different personality types. Subscribing to these can help you maximize the benefits of your results and continue to learn more over time. Or simply Google search your personality type to do some research of your own. There is a lot of information about how you (again, based on your results) can more effectively interact with others and approach things in your life such as learning. Taking this one step further, by sharing your results with your peers can develop deeper and more genuine relationships.

Here are a couple free resources:
- **16 Personalities** (MBTI) - [https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test](https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test)
- **Eclectic Enneagram** (Enneagram) - [https://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test](https://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test)

#2 Define Your “Ideal Me”

It’s crucial to define where you want to go—your point B—to guide your learning journey. As your first step, create a page in a document or slide in a presentation that describes your “Current Me”—your point A. You should include elements such as strengths, gaps or weaknesses, your interests, and any past experiences that have shaped who you are. You could use a presentation tool like Powerpoint or Google Slides, a word processing tool such as Word or Google Docs, or traditional tools such as pen, paper, scissors, or glue sticks.
Next, create another page or slide that captures your “Ideal Me”—the you that you aspire to be in the future. Include any weaknesses that you plan to improve, any specific goals you want to achieve or future experiences that you want to have, motivational quotes or words you find powerful, and any images that inspire you. Though we recommend incorporating visuals, as they can help to deepen your emotional investment in your “Ideal Me,” this page can easily start as a simple bulleted list.

You will regularly revisit your “Ideal Me” as a way to guide you on your learning journey, as well as to revise and refocus along the way (#6).

#3 Capture Your Journey
It’s hard to know where you’ve been (and use anything you’ve learned) if you don’t keep track of it. Recording valuable achievements or realizations, before they are forgotten as we move through our busy lives, will help you focus your mind and prepare you for your next steps.

Find an easy way to capture elements from your day, week, or month—things like achievements, failures, confidence levels, mood, etc—on an ongoing basis. Some example tools include Google docs, notes on your phone, a mobile app, voice or video recordings, a journal, or regular pen and paper.

You may find this easier to achieve by picking a tool like an app with notifications and writing prompts, or even a guided journal. You ultimately want to find a rhythm that’s realistic and fits with your life. To do this, you may choose to build this practice into an existing routine, for example, with your morning coffee or before bed. Just remember: doing this activity at all is beneficial! Don’t feel bad if you get behind; pick it up again as soon as possible and make an entry, long or short.

#4 Create Steps Towards Success
Success doesn’t come with just one giant leap, but rather through many intentional steps. You need to make sure to break large goals into smaller, more achievable steps. For example, your “Ideal Me” probably isn’t something that can be done in a day, week, or even a month. Take some time to identify tangible steps that move you closer to your ideal place.

Find an easy way to record your goals and track your progress such as an app on your phone or a planner. The tool that you use could be based on the expected duration of your goal. Short-term or mid-terms goals that can be accomplished in a week or a month could be tracked in a task list. Long-term goals that stretch out over many months or across a year may require a different method such as a journal or the tool that you used for the “Ideal Me” activity above (#2).
#5 Identify Boosts and Blocks

Identify some quick activities that energize you. These could range from a simple challenge or game to a physical activity like a walk. Research shows that even a small win builds confidence that carries into your next actions. Working in intervals can also be helpful, so take a break every 30 minutes when tackling a difficult project. The Pomodoro Technique, where you work for 25 minutes and take a break for 5 minutes, is one example of this. There are many mobile apps and timers that can help you.

Reward yourself along the way to increase your motivation. Taking some type of action—any type of action—when you are procrastinating helps capitalize on the momentum you build. For example, if you are writing a paper and staring at the blank page, simply capturing a stream of thoughts in your document can be enough to break through a writing block.

Mindfulness and meditation activities, such as Headspace, can help you pause and re-energize. Take 3-5 minutes to clear your mind and refocus your priorities on the most important task at hand; this can stop your mind from spinning. Additionally, there are many great books filled with activities for boosting your energy and creativity that you can find at your favorite neighborhood (or online) bookstore. These activities can bring delight to your day and help you push through difficult tasks.

Identify and proactively prepare for possible interruptions or roadblocks—what we’ve simply called blocks. Looking back at your journey, you’ve captured (#3), can help you anticipate and identify future blocks. What tends to hang you up? Have you found successful ways to overcome these? Could you use one of your favorite boost activities to help you through any of these struggles? Having a strategy can definitely help.

#6 Maintain Your Progress

Keep moving down the path! Check in on your progress regularly. These check-ins can be quick, but it’s important to do this regularly to keep you on track. The more recent the information you have to review and react, the more impactful and relevant it will be to inform your next steps.

Take a look at your “Ideal Me” page and reflect on if anything needs to change, and make those changes. Realign with your goals and review what you’ve captured along your journey (#3) to inform your changes. This is about regular maintenance, taking some time for yourself, and reminding yourself of where you want to go. This check-in can be as quick or as lengthy as you want, but finding a regular milestone to attach this to, like the changing of the seasons, can really help you stick to it. Maintaining your progress may lead to a resetting activity (#9) or a celebration of your accomplishments with your support network (#7).
#7 Share Your Steps and Progress
Saying things out loud can motivate you to start taking action. Telling others about your goals builds your support network and also accountability. Being vulnerable by asking for help or support as your work towards your goals allows others to contribute to helping you take steps and be successful.

A great way to make sure you are heading where you want to go, and to identify challenges or considerations that you may not have had on your own, is to gather feedback from others. Sharing with your support network when you feel stuck can help you understand what may be causing this block and how to break out of any ruts you might find yourself in. Also, finding a person that can act as a coach or mentor that you meet with regularly can help you make sure you are taking steps towards your goals, and if not, identify why you might be off course. You could even set up an event to celebrate reaching a goal. Or, if you didn't reach your goal, celebrate what you've learned and make sure to discuss what you will try next.

#8 Seek Diverse Perspectives
Out of ideas? Ask someone else. Your support network is a great resource to leverage for exploring new ideas to increase your productivity and effectiveness in learning—or to get closer to your “Ideal Me.”

But, if most or all of those in your support network think similarly as you (we tend to gravitate and befriend those that think like us), the ideas that they come up with might already be very similar to yours. You may want to engage a few new people you don’t regularly interact with to bolster new ideas. There is power in diversity of thinking and finding people with diverse perspectives can help give you a new perspective on what you can do. Additionally, you may be a new perspective for someone else, whether inside your support network or beyond—so, when appropriate, offer to support others by sharing your new ideas to overcome their challenges.

#9 Know When to Move Up or Move On
Is it time for a reset? Maybe you’ve you’ve reached your “Ideal Me” or maybe it is no longer relevant and you need to start over. Either way, it’s time to reimagine your next “Ideal Me.”

Revise your “Ideal Me” until it fits where you want to go now. This will include the setting of new goals, and in some cases, letting go or releasing things that are weighing you down. You may want to keep copies of your old “Ideal Me” pages to capture how far you’ve come. Or, it can be empowering to purge your old “Ideal Me” if you desire.

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