

Develop Positive Habits

Change Your Habits by Changing Your Attitude

How can you keep a positive attitude when you are discouraged and frustrated? What if some days you have one problem after another? What if your study group or work environment is negative? Is it possible to see life differently?

We see with our eyes, we perceive with our brains. People have mind-sets that filter information. Each of us has attitudes or beliefs about people and events, and these attitudes decide for us what parts of our perception we will allow our brains to interpret and what parts we filter out. Our attitudes have a lot to do with how we relate to others and to the world and even how we see ourselves.

Most people resist change. Even when you are aware of a bad habit, sometimes it is difficult to change it. However, the ability to adapt to new situations is not only important in school but also crucial to success in the



workplace. Accountemps, a temporary staffing service for accounting professionals, asked 1,400 executives to rank the characteristics that were essential for an employee to succeed. From the lists, “Adapts easily to change” and “Motivated to learn new skills” ranked #1 and #2. In a corporate world of acquisitions, mergers, and buyouts, best-selling business books (such as *Who Moved My Cheese?*) have spurred companies to hold employee seminars on the importance of adapting to change and growing professionally along with the company.

Strategies for Creating Positive Change

Habits are learned—and can be unlearned. Adopting new habits requires a desire to change, consistent effort, time, and commitment. Try the following strategies for eliminating old habits and acquiring positive new ones.

1. **Be willing to change.** As with all learning, you must desire and see the value and meaning in developing positive attitudes and habits. It’s easy to find excuses. At some point in your life, you must be willing to find reasons to change. It helps to identify goals: “I really want to be more optimistic and positive and to get along with people,” “I am determined to see problems as challenges and see creative alternatives,” “I will no longer be a victim. I have control over my thoughts and behavior.” Lasting change requires desire, effort, and commitment.
2. **Focus on the positive.** Are you a glass-half-empty or glass-half-full type of person? Practice the ability to see the good qualities in yourself and others and the positive side of any situation. Dispute negative thoughts and beliefs with critical thinking and use creative problem solving to explore the best alternatives—for example, “I missed my group study meeting. I’ll email my test questions to the group, apologize, and offer to do extra summaries for the next meeting. This situation has reminded me how important it is to check my calendar each morning.”
3. **Develop specific goals.** Setting specific goals is a beginning for change. Statements such as, “I wish I could get better grades” and “I hope I can study more” are too general and only help you continue your bad habits. Goals such as, “I will study for 40 minutes, two times a day, in my study area” are specific and can be assessed and measured for achievement.
4. **Change only one habit at a time.** You will become discouraged if you try to change too many things about yourself at the same time. If you have decided to study for 40 minutes, two times a day, in your

study area, then do this for a month, then two months, then three, and so on and it will become a habit. After you have made one change, move on to the next.

5. **Start small.** Realize that consistently taking small steps each day will produce major results. Sometimes the smallest changes make the biggest difference. For example, don't put off starting an exercise program because you don't have time for a long workout. Just start small by walking to class instead of driving or taking a walk at lunch. Being just a little more positive or a little more organized, finding small ways to be kind and supportive, and doing just a little more than what is expected of you are simple steps that can lead to a positive change.
6. **Use visualization and affirmations to imagine success.** Imagine yourself progressing through all the steps toward your desired goal. For example, see yourself sitting at your desk in your quiet study area. Affirm, "I am calm and find it easy to concentrate. I enjoy studying and feel good about completing projects." Before you get out of bed in the morning, imagine your day unfolding effortlessly: "I am positive and focused and will accomplish everything on my to-do list."
7. **Observe and model others.** How do successful people think, act, and relate to others? Do students who get good grades have certain habits that contribute to their success? Research indicates that successful students study regularly in a quiet area. They regularly attend classes, are punctual, and sit in or near the front row. Observe successful students. Are they interested, involved, and well prepared in class? Do they seem confident and focused? Model this behavior until it feels comfortable and natural. Form study groups with the people who are good students, are motivated, and have effective study habits.
8. **Be aware of your thoughts and behaviors.** Pay attention to your behavior and reflect on ways you can be more successful. For example, you may notice that the schoolwork you complete late at night is not as thorough as the work you complete earlier in the day. Becoming aware of this characteristic may prompt you to change your time frame for studying and completing schoolwork. You may notice that you feel less stressed in the morning when you take 10 minutes at night to pack your bag with books, keys, and snacks; lay out clothes; and check the next day's events.
9. **Reward yourself.** One of the best ways to change a habit is to reward yourself when you've made a positive change. Increase your motivation with specific payoffs. Suppose you want to reward yourself for studying for a certain length of time in your study area or for completing a project. For example, you might say to yourself, "After I outline this chapter, I'll watch television for 20 minutes," or "When I finish reading these two chapters, I'll call a friend and talk for 10 minutes." The reward should always come after the results are achieved and be limited in duration. Focus on the pleasurable feelings you get when you make a positive change and avoid the pain, guilt, and other bad feelings associated with negative habits.
10. **Be patient and persistent.** Lasting change requires a pattern of consistent behavior. With time and patience, the change will eventually begin to feel comfortable and normal. Don't become discouraged and give up if you haven't seen a complete change in your behavior in a few weeks. Give yourself at least a month of progression toward your goal. If you fall short one day, get back on track the next. Don't expect to get all A's the first few weeks of studying longer hours. Don't become discouraged if you don't feel comfortable instantly studying at your desk instead of lying on the couch. Lasting change requires time.



Make a Commitment and Learn to Apply Positive Habits

Committing yourself **Page | 3** to good habits is the foundation for reinforcing the cycle of success. Read the following statements concerning habits for success that we have discussed in this text. Check either Yes or No as each statement applies to you.

Success Habit	Yes	No
1. Have you created a study are that helps you concentrate?	_____	_____
2. Do you make learning physical?	_____	_____
3. Do you preview each chapter before you read it?	_____	_____
4. Do you preview other chapters?	_____	_____
5. Do you rewrite your notes before class?	_____	_____
6. Do you outline your papers?	_____	_____
7. Do you proofread your papers several times?	_____	_____
8. Do you rehearse your speeches until you are confident and well prepared?	_____	_____
9. Do you attend every class?	_____	_____
10. Do you sit in the front of the class?	_____	_____
11. Do you attentively listen and take good notes?	_____	_____
12. Do you review your notes within 24 hours?	_____	_____
13. Do you monitor your work?	_____	_____
14. Do you get help early, if necessary?	_____	_____
15. Do you participate in class and ask questions?	_____	_____
16. Have you developed rapport with each of your instructors?	_____	_____
17. Have you joined a study team?	_____	_____
18. Do you study and review regularly each day?	_____	_____
19. Do you complete tasks and assignments first and then socialize?	_____	_____
20. Do you recite and restate to enhance your memory skills?	_____	_____
21. Do you take advantage of campus and community activities?	_____	_____
22. Can you create a motivated, resourceful state of mind?	_____	_____
23. Do you know how to solve problems creatively?	_____	_____
24. Do you use critical thinking in making decisions?	_____	_____

- 25. Do you exercise daily? _____
- 26. Do you maintain your ideal weight? _____
- 27. Do you keep your body free of harmful substances and addictions? _____
- 28. Do you support your body by eating healthy foods? _____
- 29. Do you practice techniques for managing your stress? _____
- 30. Have you developed an effective budget? _____
- 31. Do you take time for career planning? _____

If you find you've answered "No" to many of these questions, don't be alarmed. When old habits are ingrained, it's difficult to change them. Select at least one of the habits you answered No to. Determine what you can do today to turn it into a positive habit.

