

## Article ARCS Strategy for Fostering Student Motivation

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/powerful-strategy-fostering-student-motivation>

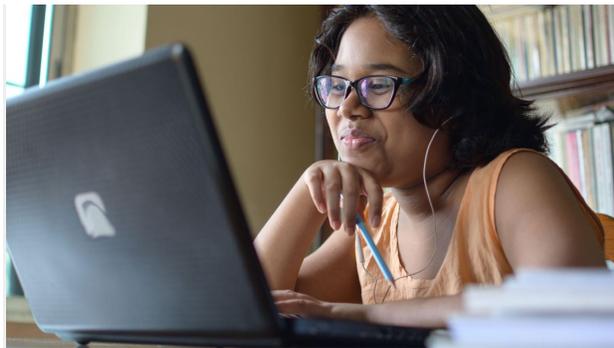
# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

## A Powerful Strategy for Fostering Student Motivation

A look at how to adapt a well-established technique for boosting student motivation in distance learning or hybrid classrooms.

By [Jenny Gieras](#)

December 18, 2020



Tapas Biswas / Alamy Stock Photo

Whether in person, virtually, or in some blended or hybrid model, many teachers are finding it more difficult than ever to keep their students motivated to learn. If you're a new teacher this year, student motivation can be an even tougher nut to crack. I've found it helpful to revisit ideas I explored during my teacher training, and one that has been helping me through today's unprecedented circumstances is the [ARCS Model](#). Developed by educational psychologist John Keller, ARCS highlights the importance of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction in stimulating learners and maintaining their focus during learning activities.

For educators looking to improve student motivation, evaluating whether these elements are present in learning is a good place to start. From there, small steps can be taken to apply each element with the help of both tech-based and traditional tools, which can make a notable difference in motivating students and improve outcomes.

## ATTENTION

Like all of us, students are more willing to invest their time and focus when they are interested in a topic. Likewise, sitting through the same routine lesson structure day after day can quickly lead to disinterest.

Perceptual arousal: Capture interest with the element of surprise or uncertainty. Storytelling, humor, and active learning experiences are proven ways of grabbing students' attention, but what about entering text upside down or in code on a slide, posing the opposite point of view from what is expected, or changing the environment, like switching up your Bitmoji classroom background? Give students a jolt of educational caffeine when their attention wanes.

*Try this:* Begin your lesson—or insert by surprise somewhere in the middle—a photo from the [New York Times Learning Network “What’s Going On in This Picture”](#) column or the [National Geographic Photo of the Day](#). Allow conversations to spark interest and thought provocation, and then ride the momentum.

Interest arousal: Stimulate an attitude of inquiry by posing challenges or novel ideas. [Project-based learning](#) fits in here, as students are often driven by the desire to solve problems, explore, and create. Explore using shorter-term thinking challenges and brainstorming events that push kids to consider ideas beyond the ones you present.

*Try this:* Rather than a worksheet or quiz, have students create something during class to demonstrate their application of learning, like a game, a screen cast of their work, or a flipbook, then post their learning to a shared whiteboard space like [Explain Everything](#) or Jamboard. Students can then do a digital “gallery walk” through classmates' projects, leaving feedback and sharing new learning from one another.

Variability: Following the same structure day in and day out can quickly lead to boredom, so mix it up. With kids on devices for much of the day, opportunity for variation is at their fingertips. Have them experiment with a new tech tool you've

been hearing about, or ditch tech altogether and give kids a screen break from time to time with interesting paper-based instruction or projects.

*Try this:* Check out [Genially](#), an all-in-one digital tool that enables users to create interactive presentations, animated infographics, games, and more.

## **RELEVANCE**

In order for students to want to learn, they must feel that what they're learning matters to them. Understanding how a new skill or information is applicable to or will help them now or later on in life can make a big difference in motivation.

**Relate to goals:** Be explicit in connecting what students are learning with when, why, or how they can use this in the world beyond the classroom. Help students consider and define their own goals, and support them in making connections between their goals and what they're learning.

*Try this:* Invite professionals to join your real or virtual classroom (or share sites like this one from [The World Science Festival](#)) to demonstrate how what you're teaching matters in the real world.

**Match interests/familiarity:** When possible, allow learning methods to align with students' interests. Author and professor Christopher Emdin, creator of the #HipHopEd social media movement, has [integrated science and hip-hop](#) to motivate high school students with great success. Understanding students is key to ensuring relevant instruction for them.

*Try this:* Engage your students with some fun get-to-know-you-better activities. Many interactive polling tools, like [Mentimeter](#), enable you to poll your class about their interests and instantly display results.

## CONFIDENCE

When students believe they can succeed and feel positive about their achievements and potential, their confidence increases and motivation improves. Clear directions, useful guidance, and consistent formative feedback help students know what is expected and how to make progress.

**Success expectations:** Build a positive expectation for success. Enable students to take knowledgeable ownership of their progress by providing them with the steps they need to take to succeed.

*Try this:* Deploy an interactive rubric, like [SmartRubric](#), to help provide clear success criteria and meaningful feedback in an accessible digital tool.

**Success opportunities:** Facilitate successful learning by supporting or enhancing students' belief in their competence. Help students strike a balance between effort and results by giving the opportunity to achieve success through varied and challenging experiences that build upon one another.

*Try this:* Challenge students to find success while thinking outside the box with a digital escape room. Explore the many great ones (including some that are free) from [Breakout EDU](#) or [create your own](#).

**Personal responsibility:** Provide students with personal control over their success. When people feel their success is based on their own efforts and abilities, rather than on external factors like luck or the decisions of others, their confidence improves. Present choices when possible so that students can select the path for which they feel most prepared.

*Try this:* Create a [digital choice board](#) to engage students with different interests, strengths, and ability levels.

## SATISFACTION

To sustain optimal motivation, learners need to have positive feelings about their learning experiences and accomplishments. Satisfaction can come from a sense of achievement, value, or inherent joy in the act of learning; from external reward systems or praise; or from the belief in a sense of fairness.

**Intrinsic satisfaction:** Provide opportunities to apply new learning in personally meaningful ways and foster personal recognition. Allow students to showcase their efforts to increase a sense of accomplishment and share the positive benefits of their learning.

*Try this:* Teach students how to set up a paper or [digital portfolio](#), and encourage them to add their work to it over time. Portfolios are fun to share with others and work as archives for projects and personal reflection.

**Rewarding outcomes:** Positive reinforcement and motivational feedback can lead to extrinsic motivation that many students desire. Grades, privileges, certificates, and other tokens of achievement can provide motivating recognition for efforts. Likewise, feedback from peers, teachers, parents, and members of the community at large can be highly satisfying for students who have put forth effort and want others to know.

*Try this:* [Publishing to an online site](#) (with permissions, of course) allows students to see themselves as content creators with ideas worth sharing.

**Fair treatment:** To feel satisfied, students must feel that there was equity in the objectives, activities, and grades in a learning activity. If they suspect favoritism, bias, or unfairness, students are more likely to be turned off and lose the motivation to learn.

*Try this:* Elicit student feedback often. Create a quick feedback survey with Google Forms to share with students regularly or to include with major projects. Surveys—

anonymous or not—can often give quieter voices a forum in which to be heard and can tune teachers and other students in to perspectives other than their own.