

40. Attitude Activity: Stand Tall

Sprinter Usain Bolt's celebratory position – arms outstretched above his head as soon as he crosses the 100m finish line – is typical of the confident and victorious poses adopted by sportspeople and winners.

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard University, has looked at why people adopt this pose and the effects it can have on your physiology. She has found that by changing your physiology (or your posture) you can have a profound effect on how you feel. In her 2012 TED talk, 'Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are', she argues that by standing in certain 'power poses' you can increase your confidence and self-esteem, enhance your memory and reduce feelings of fear.

Cuddy goes on to argue that weaker postures (such as curling up, making yourself small or moving into defensive positions) trigger other psychological responses – feelings of imminent danger, stress or threat. And yet we often see nervous students hunched over their notes or hiding in a corner in those last few moments before an exam!

Instead, we think it's worth trying more confident and powerful postures before taking your final exams or important assessments.

Here's how you do it:

Power Pose 1

Stand tall with your hands on your hips and elbows pointing out. Your feet should be approximately one foot apart. Look straight ahead and think of a time you felt confident, strong and in control. Hold the pose for as long as you can. Aim for up to five minutes. You may need to begin with two or three minutes and build up.

Power Pose 2

You will need a little more space for this one. Stand as above, but this time put your arms above your head, stretched out like the arms of a clock at the 10 to 2 position. Again, hold your head high, stick your chest out and think about a time you felt really confident. And again, if you can, hold the pose for a few minutes – aim for five if you can.

These poses are positive and confidence building – but not ones you might feel comfortable doing in public. Therefore, don't think of this as an activity you can only do outside an exam hall. We've found standing tall can also benefit students when they hit a block in their revision.

So, next time you're working away in your room and you hit a block, don't hunch yourself over your notes. Take a break and stand in the power pose!

Final Thoughts

Many professionals talk about the importance of energy, movement, exercise and positivity to break up a challenging working day. Take some time to schedule in a walk, a run, a session at the gym or a power pose. Is there a particular time of the week you could do this?

An Attitude Journal

The eight activities in this section have all been about establishing a link between your thoughts, your attitude and your response to setbacks. The toughest, most positive students will be the ones who succeed. That can be you! Use this space to record your learning.