

Attitude Activity 7 – The Myth of the Curve

You 'll have heard the phrase 'learning curve'. It describes the process of getting better at something. Sometimes, when a task is challenging, we use the phrase 'steep learning curve' to describe how hard it will be.

But we think there's a problem with the word 'curve'. It suggests the process will be smooth, and in our experience, learning is almost never smooth. There are setbacks, plateaus, sudden jumps forward – less like a neat curve and much more like a series of rising hills.

There really are particular periods of time when progress flattens out. We call these progress plateaus. These are the periods when you're making hard-won changes to the way you work, but they don't seem to be producing any difference in performance. Like these frustrating examples:

- You're working way harder than you were, but there's no change in your grades... yet.
- You've got to grips with getting up early, so your attendance and punctuality have improved, but no-one seems to have noticed.
- You're revising differently, pushing yourself to do more challenging work but your test results haven't changed that much.

There are tons of other examples of study changes taking a while to have an impact. And what's it tempting to do while we wait for that impact to be made? Jump to a hasty conclusion: *what's the point? I tried it for a little while but it made no difference. Waste of energy. I may as well go back to doing things the way I was.*

Before you do, try this activity. We've found it's a great one to help you persevere when momentum seems to vanish. It's about *changing the way you measure progress*. Progress isn't just test scores or grades; though these are nice, they often take longer to arrive. Progress starts as micro-changes in other measurements. Consider the following and note down some thoughts:

Progress in Peace of Mind	Progress in Confidence	Progress in Time Management
<i>You're feeling better about your study habits. You're worrying less or feeling less stressed; you feel optimistic for the first time in ages; you're conquering unhelpful habits; you're enjoying classes more.</i>	<i>You're feeling on top of your classes. You can follow complex discussions more easily; you find yourself answering difficult questions quite well; you understand something a classmate doesn't.</i>	<i>You're getting to grips with tasks as you rebalance. You have a clear sense of what you've got to do; you don't wake at night in a cold sweat; you feel in control of your time; you don't forget things and schedule work better.</i>

Capturing examples of these micro-changes in psychology, confidence or study management help remind yourself that you are actually moving forward. These improvements in the way you feel are worth the work. And soon enough, they'll be followed by upward movement in grades too – you just have to stick at it.