

February Activities

Whatever news has come in January, February is the month to respond to it. This is the month to establish some new habits. Forget about trying to break old habits, simply focus on starting some new ones. Beginning something is a much more positive experience than trying to stop something, so make February your month for starting a habit. This month's activities give you some ideas for starting positive study habits that could well stay with you until the summer. We've also given you advice on how to begin rescuing subjects that are falling behind, and being courageous enough to spend time working on weaknesses.

24. Effort Activity: The Effort Thermometer

If you want to be successful at anything you're going to have to put the work in – it's that simple.

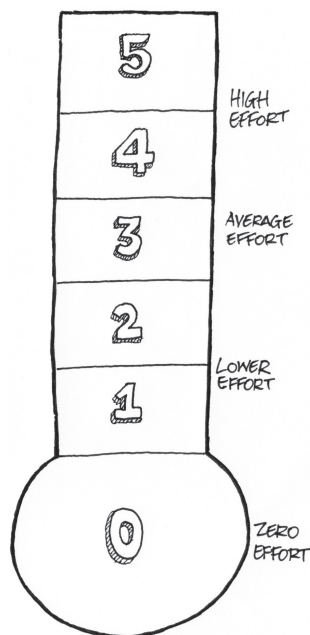
There are a number of people who think that their talent is average, but their work ethic separates them from the rest. The actor Will Smith is a great example of someone who claims he doesn't have much talent and it's his work ethic that separates him from the rest. Here's what he says about hard work:

The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is I'm not afraid to die on a treadmill. I will not be out-worked, period. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, you might be sexier than me, you might be all of those things – you got it on me in nine categories. But if we get on the treadmill together, there's two things: you're getting off first or I'm going to die. It's really that simple, right?

The effort thermometer is a way of getting you to keep track of how hard you're working. The first thing you have to decide is what are high levels of effort.

It might be best if you do this activity with your tutor group or ask a few friends for their thoughts. Next to 'high effort' write down what the high effort pupils are doing. (We've done this activity a number of times before. Here are the kinds of things we often get back: does ten hours of revision each week, always stays focused in class, works hard in every lesson, does additional work on top of homework, asks teachers questions to fix misunderstandings, attends lunchtime sessions or after-school catch-ups).

Next, you then need to do the same for average effort and low effort pupils. How are the behaviours here different?



Now it's time to rate yourself. Be honest – no one else is ever going to see this. Where would you put yourself on the scale – low, average or high?

Once you've made your decision, answer the following questions:

1. Are you working hard enough yet?
2. Are you *reactive* (responding to teacher instruction only) or *proactive* (sorting things out yourself, setting yourself extra work, taking responsibility for your own progress)? Place a cross on the line below to represent where you think you might be:

Reactive

Proactive



Why have you made this decision? Make a note of the evidence:

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3. What things could you change? How could you push the cross further to the right? Try thinking of four steps forward:

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4. Make a note of three or four pupils who are working harder than you. What are they doing?

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5. Have you got the balance right between work and rest? What adjustments could you make?

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Repeat this activity every term: as you progress through the year, the amount of effort you need to put in changes.

Final Thoughts

Try setting short term goals to help you boost your effort. Instead of thinking "This is how hard I'm going to have to work for the rest of the year!", which can be a daunting prospect, you might instead set yourself a date where you take a mini-break. Try working harder for three or four days before rewarding yourself. Then work for five days at a new level of effort. Then eight or nine. Try for longer and longer periods, building in breaks.

These mini-breaks help break-up the time ahead of you and keep you motivated.