

The text below is excerpted from valamis.com and shortened for our purposes.

Lifelong Learning

What is Lifelong Learning?

Lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university or corporate training.

Lifelong learning does not necessarily have to restrict itself to informal learning, however. It is best described as being voluntary with the purpose of achieving personal fulfillment. The means to achieve this could result in informal or formal education.



We're all lifelong learners

But what does personal fulfillment mean?

The reality is that most of us have goals or interests outside of our formal schooling and jobs. This is part of what it means to be human: we have a natural curiosity and we are natural learners. We develop and grow thanks to our ability to learn.

Lifelong learning recognizes that not all of our learning comes from a classroom.

- For example, in childhood, we learn to talk or ride a bike.
- As an adult, we learn how to use a smartphone or learn how to cook a new dish.

These are examples of the everyday lifelong learning we engage in on a daily basis, either through socialization, trial and error, or self-initiated study.

Personal fulfillment and development refer to natural interests, curiosity, and motivations that lead us to learn new things. We learn for ourselves, not for someone else.

Key checklist for lifelong learning:

- Voluntary
- Self-motivated or self-initiated
- Doesn't always require a cost
- Often informal
- Self-taught or instruction that is sought
- Motivation is out of personal interest or personal development

Do I need to be proactive about lifelong learning?

Most people will learn something new at some point in their daily routine just by talking with other people, browsing the internet based on personal interest, reading the newspaper, or engaging in personal interest.

However, if making more effort to learn something new is important for either personal, family, or career reasons, or there is a need for a more organized structure, then here are some steps to get started.

How to adopt lifelong learning in your life?

1. Recognize your own personal interests and goals

Lifelong learning is about you, not other people and what they want. Reflect on what you're passionate about and what you envision for your own future.

If progressing your career is your personal interest, then there are ways to participate in self-directed learning to accomplish this goal. If learning history is your passion, there are likewise ways to explore this interest further.

2. Make a list of what you would like to learn or be able to do

Once you've identified what motivates you, explore what it is about that particular interest or goal that you want to achieve.

Returning to our example of someone having a passion for history, perhaps it is desired to simply expand knowledge on the history of Europe. Or perhaps the interest is so strong that going for a Ph.D. is a dream goal.

Both of these are different levels of interest that entail different ways of learning.

3. Identify how you would like to get involved and the resources available

Achieving our personal goals begins with figuring out how to get started.

Researching and reading about the interest and goal can help to formulate how to go about learning it.

With our history example: the person who wants to simply learn more about a particular historical time period could discover books in the library catalog, blogs, magazines and podcasts dedicated to the subject, or even museums and talks.

The individual who wanted to achieve A Ph.D. in history as a personal goal could research university programs that could be done part-time or online, as well as the steps one would need to take to reach the doctorate level.

4. Structure the learning goal into your life

Fitting a new learning goal into your busy life takes consideration and effort. If you don't make time and space for it, it won't happen.

It can easily lead to discouragement or quitting the learning initiative altogether.

Plan out how the requirements of the new learning initiative can fit into your life or what you need to do to make it fit. For example, if learning a new language is the learning goal, can you make time for one hour a day? Or does 15 minutes a day sound more realistic?

Understanding the time and space you can devote to the learning goal can help you to stick with the goal in the long-run.

5. Make a commitment

Committing to your decision to engage in a new learning initiative is the final and most important step. If you've set realistic expectations and have the self-motivation to see it through, commit to it and avoid making excuses.

Examples of lifelong learning

Here are some of the types of lifelong learning initiatives that you can engage in:

- **Developing a new skill** (eg. sewing, cooking, programming, public speaking, etc)
- **Self-taught study** (eg. learning a new language, researching a topic of interest, subscribing to a podcast, etc)
- **Learning a new sport or activity** (eg. Joining martial arts, learning to ski, learning to exercise, etc)
- **Learning to use a new technology** (smart devices, new software applications, etc)
- **Acquiring new knowledge** (taking a self-interest course via online education or classroom-based course)

Benefits of lifelong learning

Incorporating lifelong learning in your life can offer many long-term benefits, including:

1. Renewed self-motivation
2. Recognition of personal interests and goals
3. Improvement in other personal and professional skill
4. Improved self-confidence