# Why Are You in University or Have Chosen to Continue Your Learning?

We know that university is not mandatory—like kindergarten through 12th grade is—and it is not free. You have chosen to commit several years of hard work to earn a degree or to further your learning. In some cases, you may have had to work really hard to get here by getting good grades and test scores in high school and earning money to pay your fees and other expenses. Now you have more at stake and a clearer path to achieving your goals, but you still need to be able to answer the question.

To help answer this question, consider the following questioning technique called “The Five Whys” which was originally created by Sakichi Toyoda, a Japanese inventor whose strategy was used by the Toyota Motor Company to find the underlying cause of a problem. While your decision to go to university or continue your studies is not a problem, the exercise is helpful to uncover your underlying purpose for studying.

The process starts with a “Why” question to which you want to know the answer. Then, the next four “Why” questions use a portion of the previous answer to help you dig further into the answer to the original question. Here is an example of “The Five Whys,” with the first question, “Why are you in university, or have chosen to continue your studies?”

While the example is one from a student who knows what she wants to study, this process does not require that you have a specific degree or career in mind. In fact, if you are undecided, you can explore the “why” of your indecision. Is it because you have many choices, or are you unsure what you really want out of university/your studies?

# The Five Whys in Action

1. Why are you in university?

I am in university to earn a degree in business administration.

1. Why do you want to earn a degree in business administration?

I want to be able to build a business.

1. Why do you want to build a business?

I believe that building a business will enrich my life and those of others.

1. Why do you feel it is important to have a business that will enrich your life and those of others?

I feel that we must provide for ourselves as well as others and having a business will facilitate this.

1. Why do you feel that we must provide for ourselves as well as others and that having a business will facilitate this?

I feel that it is my purpose and responsibility to help others as well as provide for my family and myself.

Do you see how this student went beyond a standard answer about what they wanted to study and connected it to her study plans and an overall purpose to help others in a specific way?

Had she not been instructed to delve a little deeper with each answer, it is likely that she would not have so quickly articulated that deeper purpose. And that understanding of “why” you are studying—beyond the degree you want, the job you desire or personal enrichment—is key to staying motivated through what will most likely be some challenging times.

How else does knowing your “why,” or your deeper reason for being in university, help you? According to Angela Duckworth (2016), a researcher on grit—what it takes for us to dig in deep when faced with adversity and continue to work toward our goal—knowing your purpose can be the booster to grit that can help you succeed. Other research has found that people with a strong sense of purpose are less likely to experience stress and anxiety (Burrow, 2013) and more likely to be satisfied in their jobs (Weir, 2013). Therefore, being able to answer the question “Why are you in university?” not only satisfies the person asking, but it also has direct benefits to your overall well-being.

# ACTIVITY

Try “The Five Whys” yourself below to help you get a better sense of your purpose and to give you a worthy answer for anyone who asks you, “Why are you in university?”

## The Five Whys: Your Turn

Complete the following statements as best as you can, then save this document, and submit it to the Practice Written Assignment.

Why are you in university?

I am in university to gain knowledge and skills that help me build a successful career

Why do you want to gain knowledge and skills to build a successful career ?

I want to build a successful career so I can achieve financial independence and make a positive impact in my field

Why do you want to achieve financial independence ?

I want to achieve financial independence so I can support myself and my family

Why do you believe it’s important to support your family and use your abilities to improve the lives of others ?

I believe that supporting my family is a way of giving back to those who raised me, and using my talents to help others gives my work a deeper sense of purpose

Why do you believe giving back and having a deeper sense of purpose in your work is important ?

Because I believe that living with purpose and contributing to others well-being creates a fulfilling life, not just for me, but for the people around me

References:

* Duckworth, A. (2016). Grit: The power and passion of perseverance.  Simon & Schuster.
* Burrow, A.L. & Hill, P.L. (2013). Derailed by diversity? Purpose buffers the relationship between ethnic composition on trains and passenger negative mood. Personality and Psychology Bulletin, 39 (12), 1610-1619. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499377.
* Weir, K. (2013). More than job satisfaction: Psychologists are discovering what makes work meaningful--and how to create value in any job. American Psychological Association, 44 (11), 39.