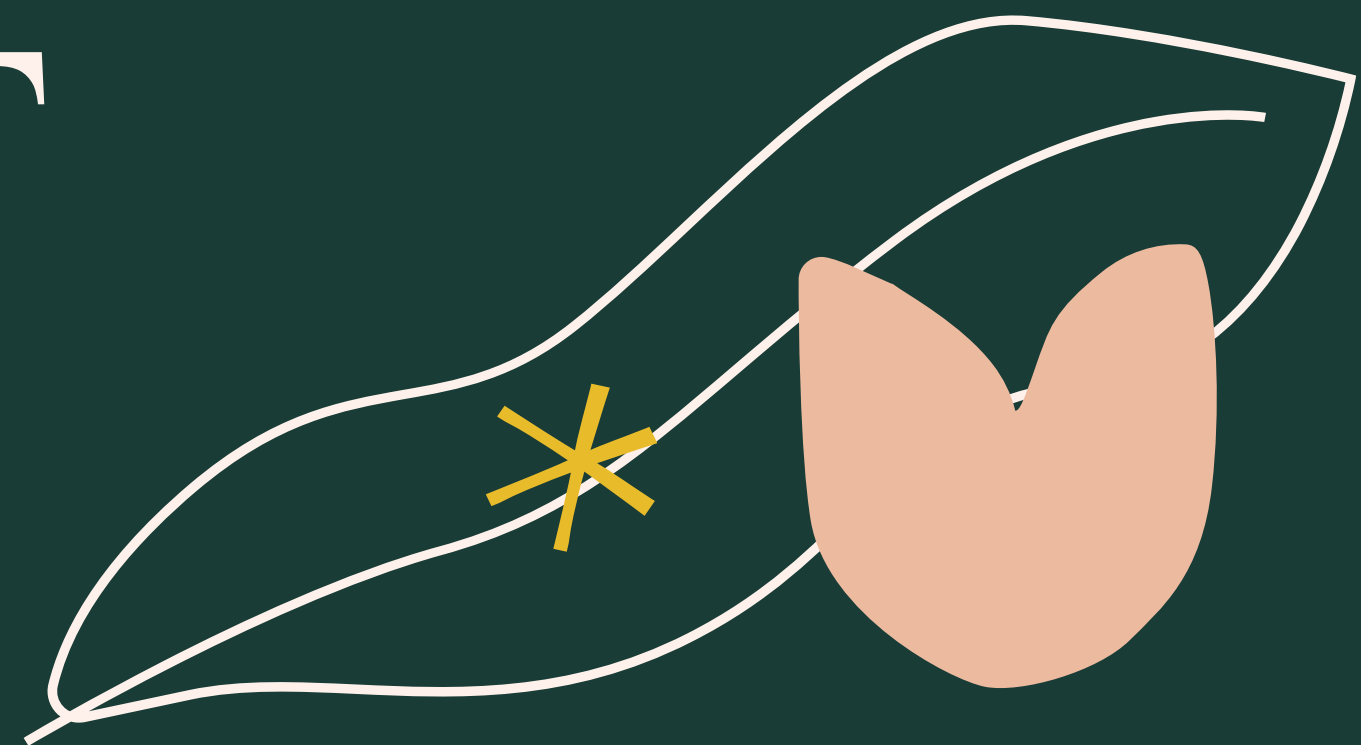


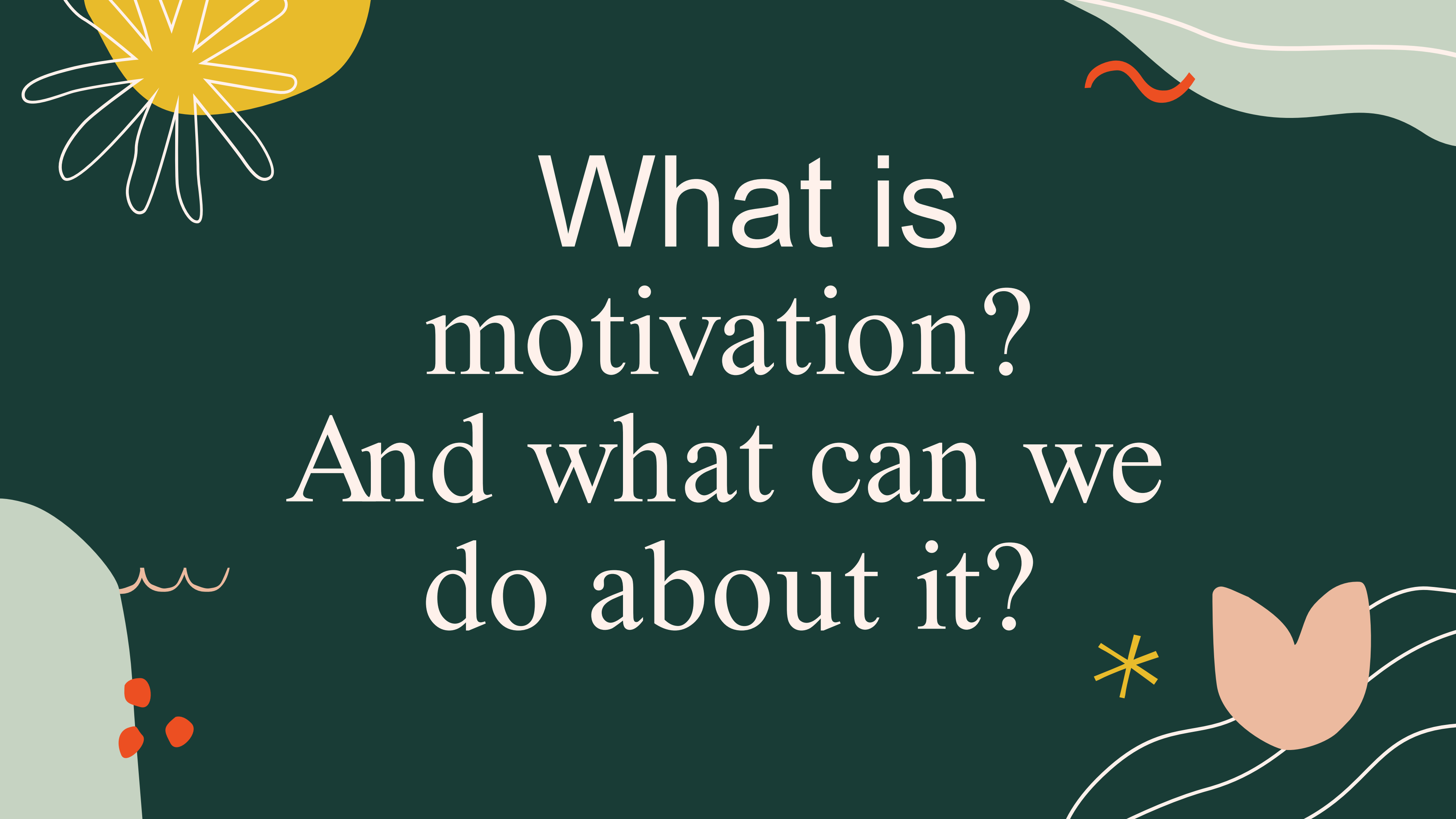


# MOTIVATION TO PERSIST

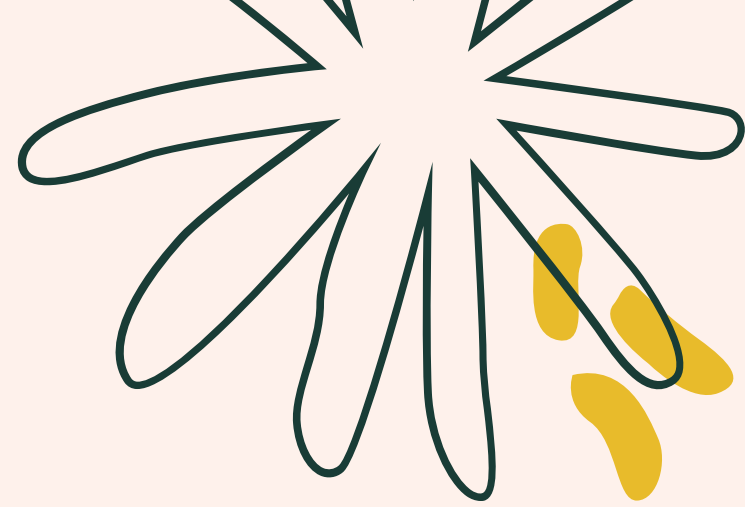


Foundations: A Student Success Series  
April 2026  
Learning & Accessibility Services (LAS)





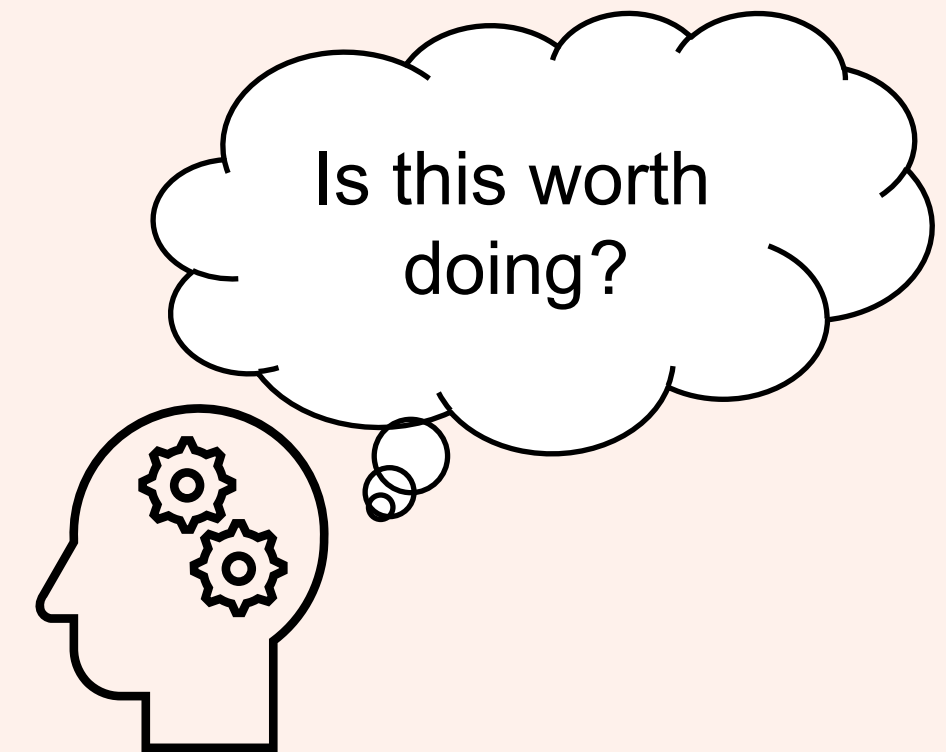
What is  
motivation?  
And what can we  
do about it?

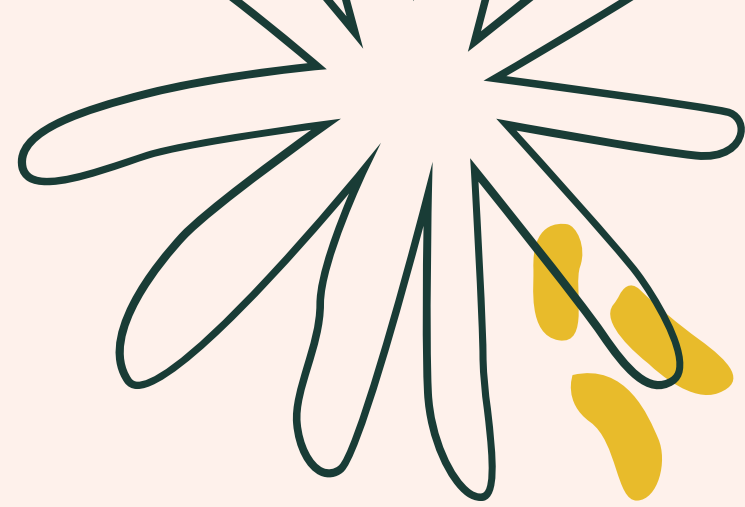


# What is motivation?

In psychology and neuroscience, motivation is the process that:

- **initiates** behavior (gets you started)
- **directs** behavior (what you choose to do)
- **sustains** behavior (keeps you going)

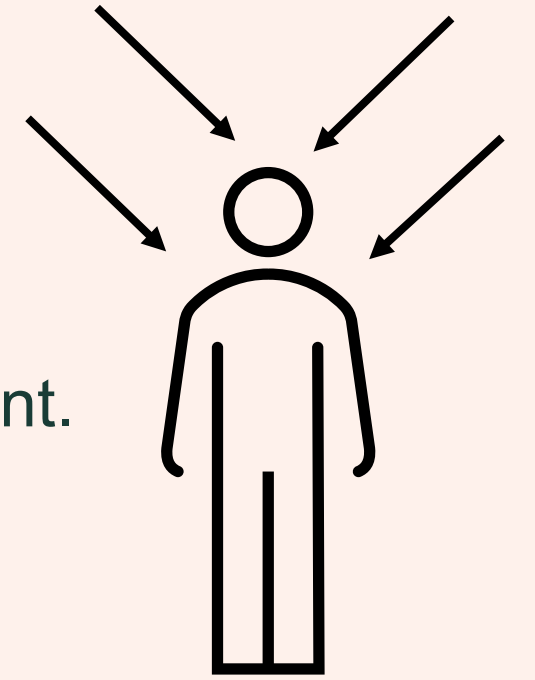




# Two types of motivation

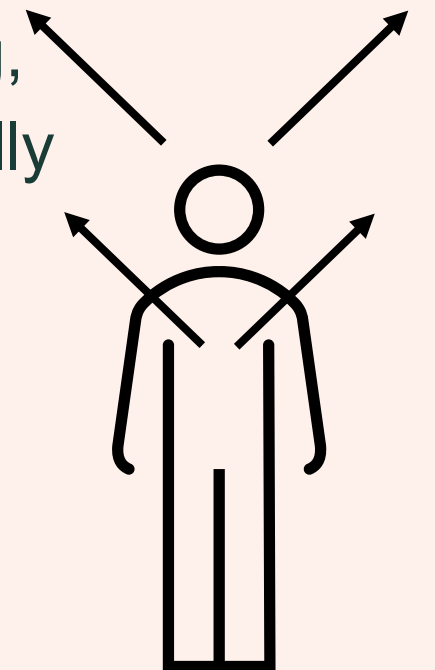
## EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Doing something for a reward or to avoid punishment.




## INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

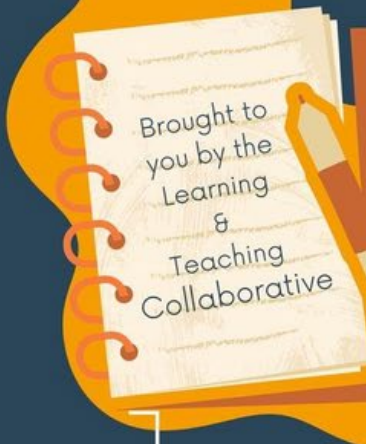
Doing something because it's interesting or satisfying, connected to an internal value or something personally meaningful.



While we can use extrinsic motivation as an aid, it is unreliable.



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**FOUNDATIONS:  
A Student Success Series**


**Motivation to  
PERSIST**

Learn tips and strategies to avoid avoidance!

Wednesday, February 1




Chick-fil-A



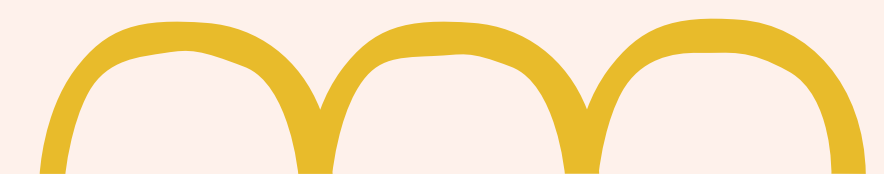
5:30 PM  
Phelps

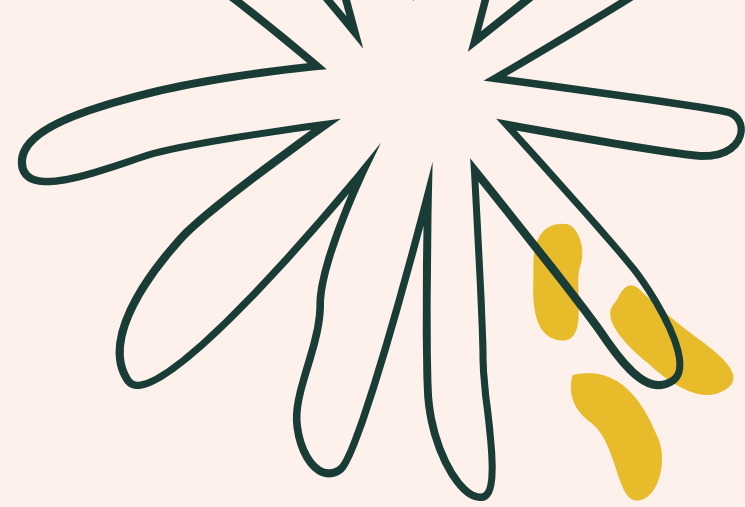
More info &  
register  
here



“...it is God who works  
in you, both to will and  
to work for His good  
pleasure.”

Phil 2:13





# Brain chemicals for motivation

## Dopamine

- Dopamine tracks effort vs reward trade-offs
- Low dopamine → tasks feel “not worth it”
- High dopamine → more willingness to work for reward

## Serotonin

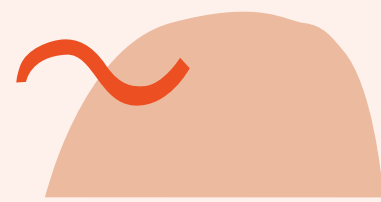
- mood, stability, sense of well-being

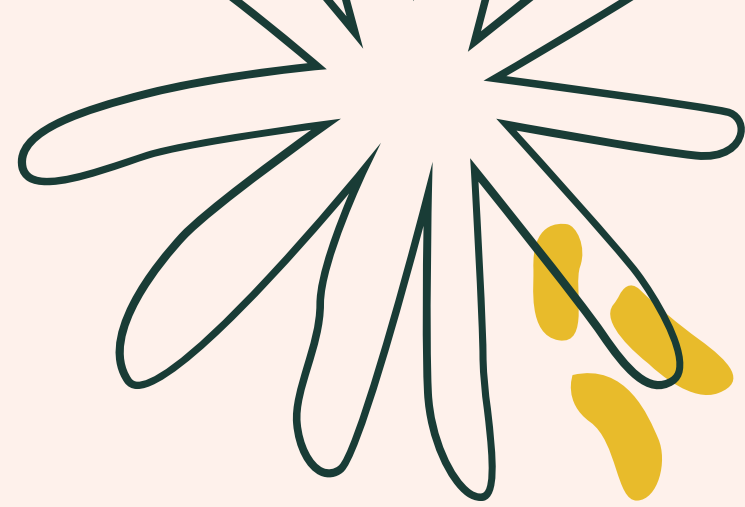
## Norepinephrine

- alertness and energy

## Endorphins

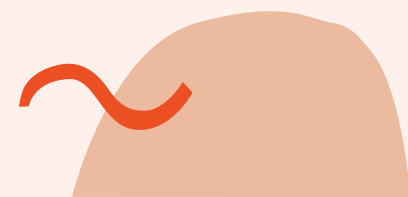
- pleasure, especially after effort

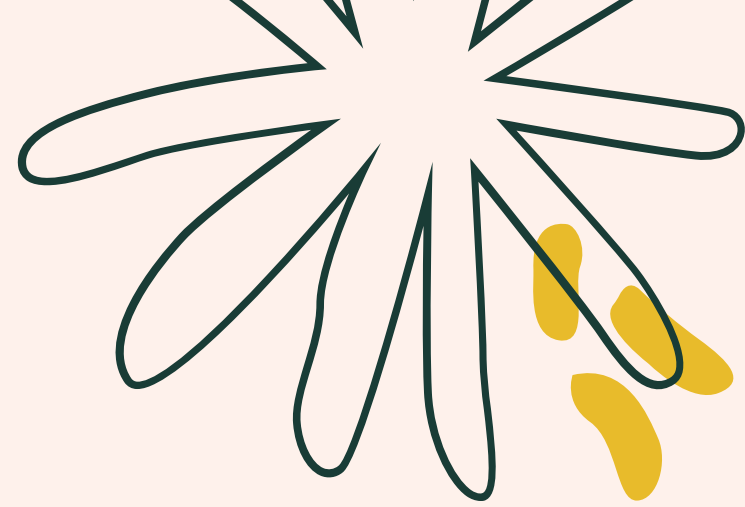




Neurological  
differences can  
cause feelings of  
‘low motivation’

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood disorders
- Trauma
- ADHD





# Unhelpful thinking patterns that demotivate

- All-or-nothing thinking

I bombed that one test... I'm just bad at this subject.

If I don't get an A on this paper, I'm basically a failure.

If I can't get caught up on all my work, I can't show my face in class.

- Over-generalizing

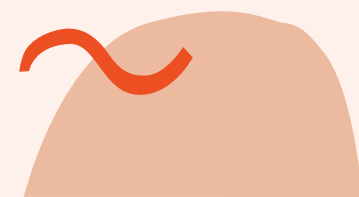
- Catastrophizing

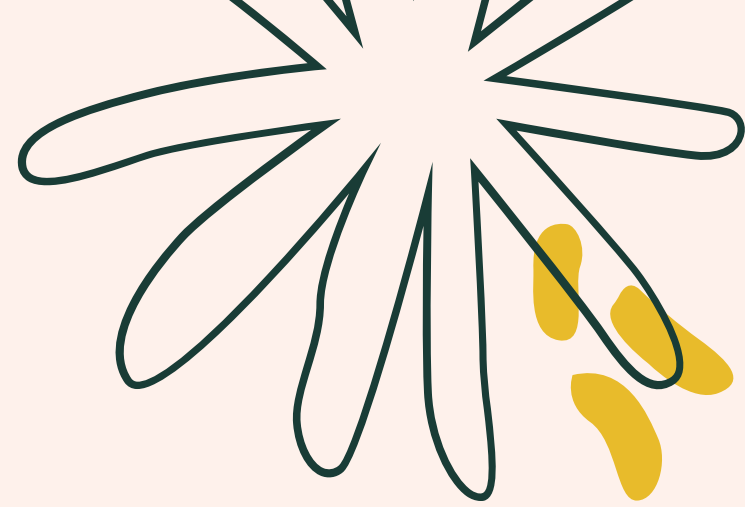
If I mess up this presentation, everyone will think I'm incompetent and it'll ruin my future.

- Shoulds and musts

I should always be productive. I shouldn't need breaks—I just need to push through.

I should have this figured out by now—everyone else does.





# The Motivation Equation

$$\text{Motivation} = \text{Value} \times \text{Expectation} \div \text{Cost}$$

Where:

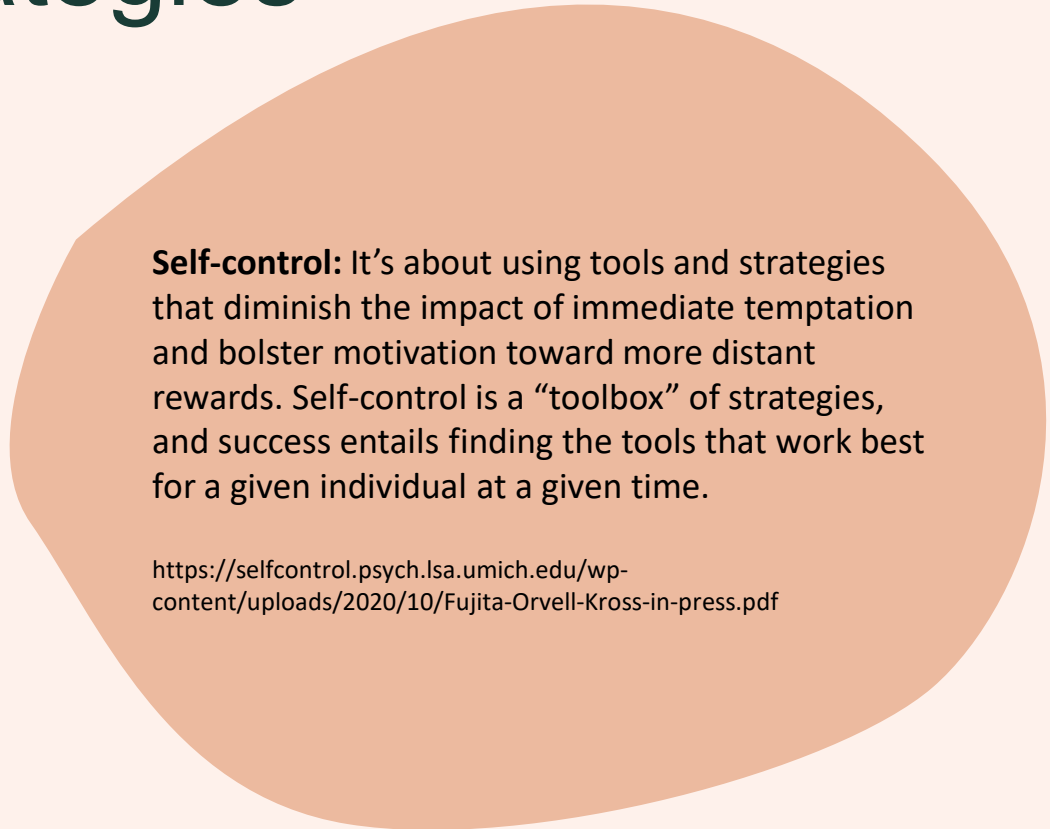
- Value = how much you care
- Expectation = belief you can succeed
- Cost = effort, time, stress, FOMO





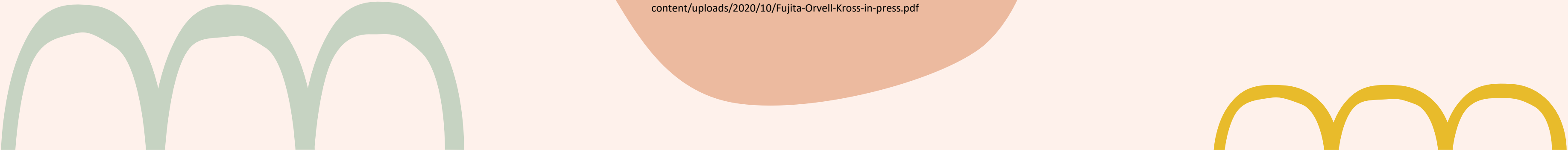
# Two Truths

1. You have to do work even when you don't feel motivated
2. Your self-control is only as strong as your strategies

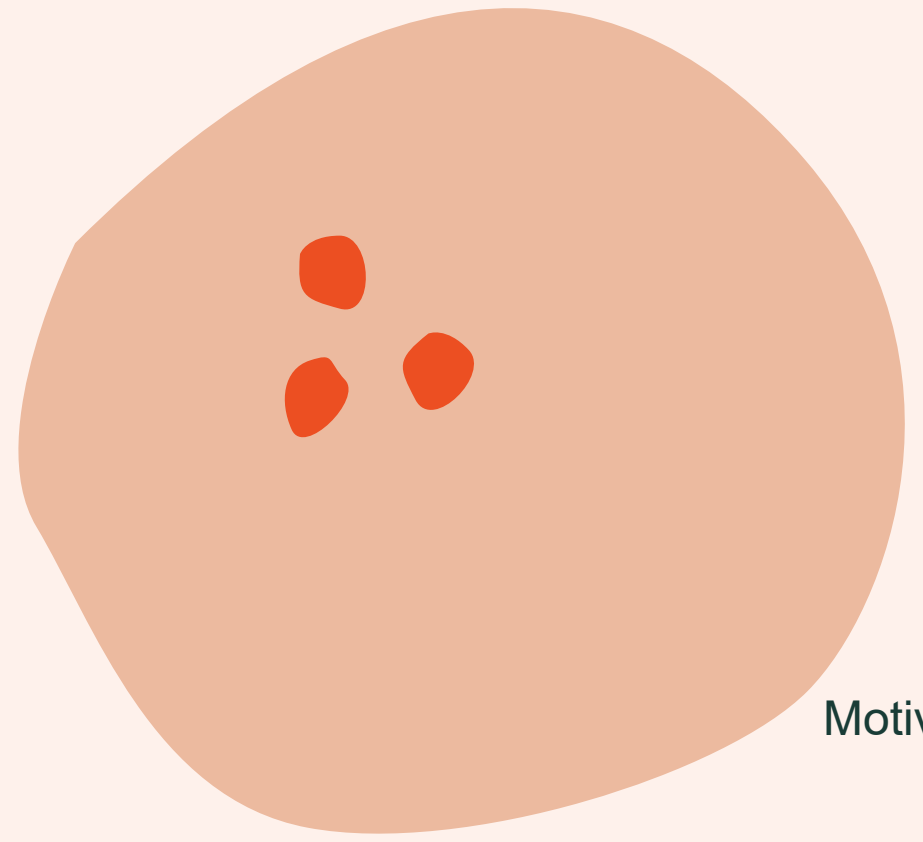


**Self-control:** It's about using tools and strategies that diminish the impact of immediate temptation and bolster motivation toward more distant rewards. Self-control is a “toolbox” of strategies, and success entails finding the tools that work best for a given individual at a given time.

<https://selfcontrol.psych.lsa.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fujita-Orvell-Kross-in-press.pdf>



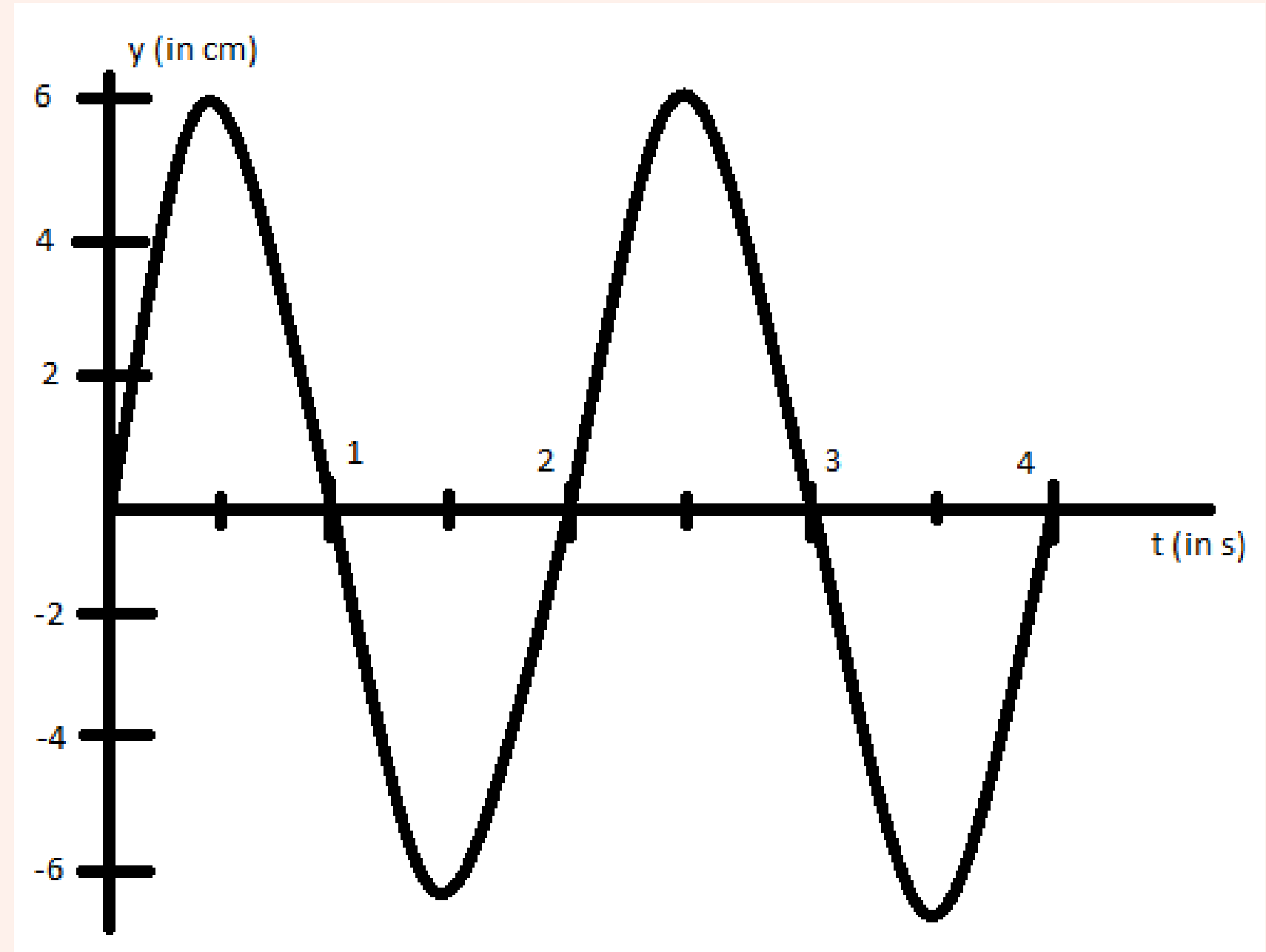
# Motivation Graph



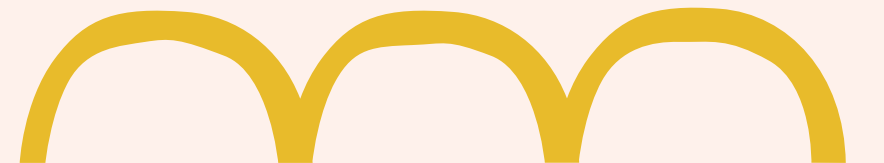
Motivation!

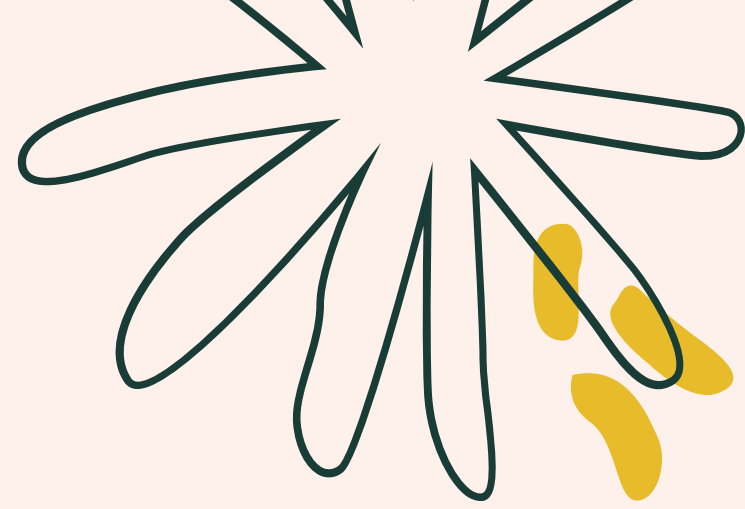
Meh

Low – No Motivation



Semester





# What's your flavor of demotivation?

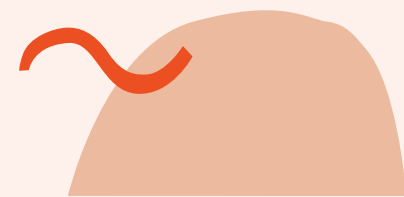
I feel overwhelmed

I feel lost

I feel insufficient

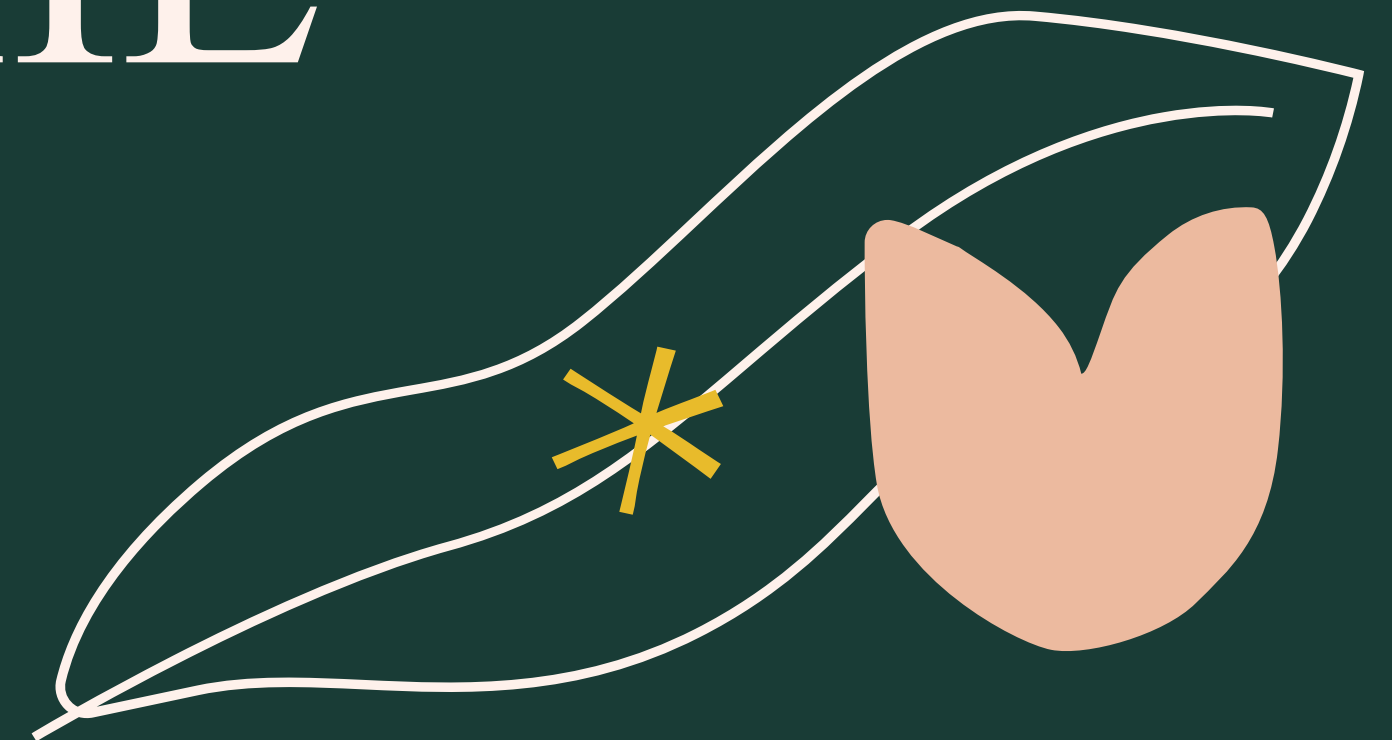
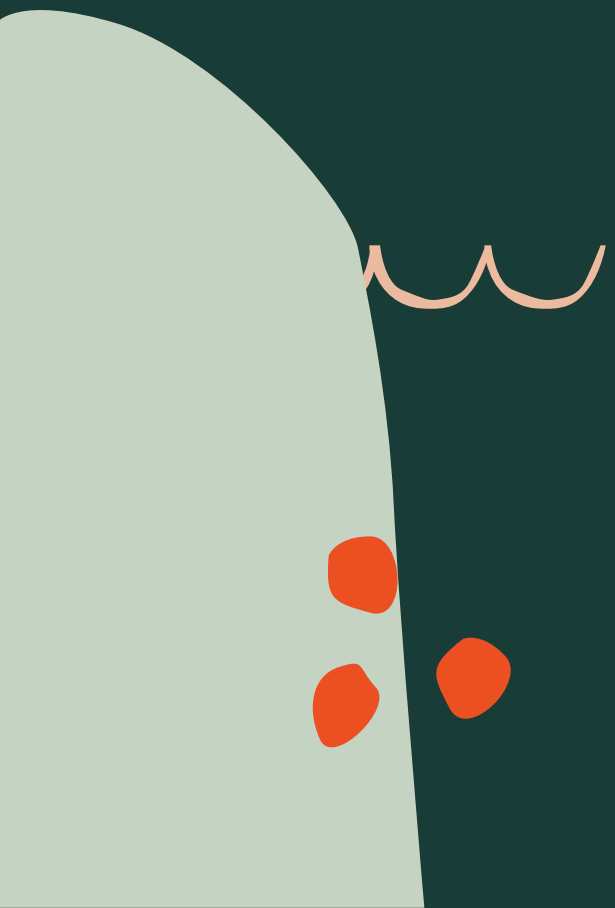
I feel tired

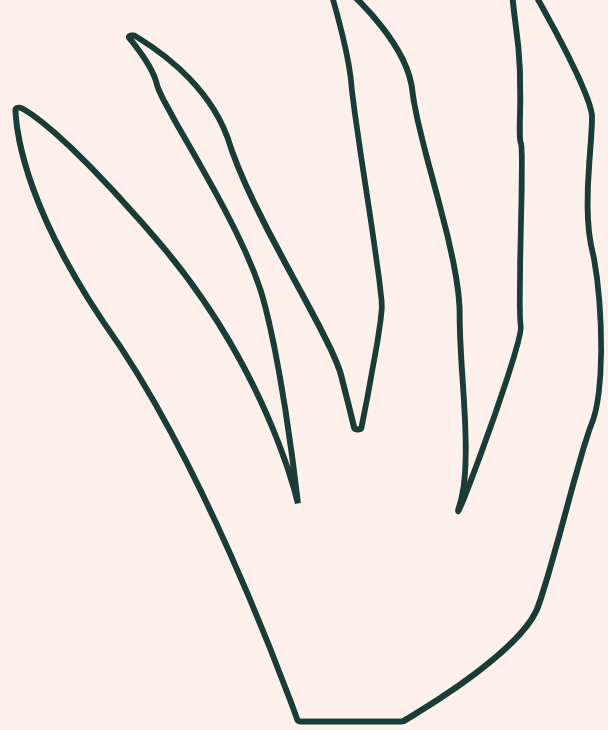
I feel...??



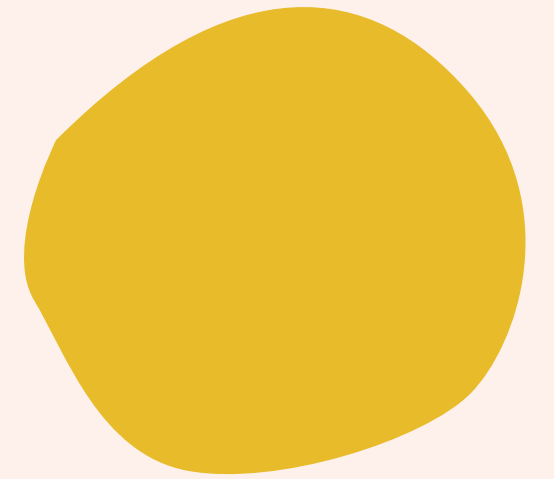


# STRATEGIES that MOTIVATE

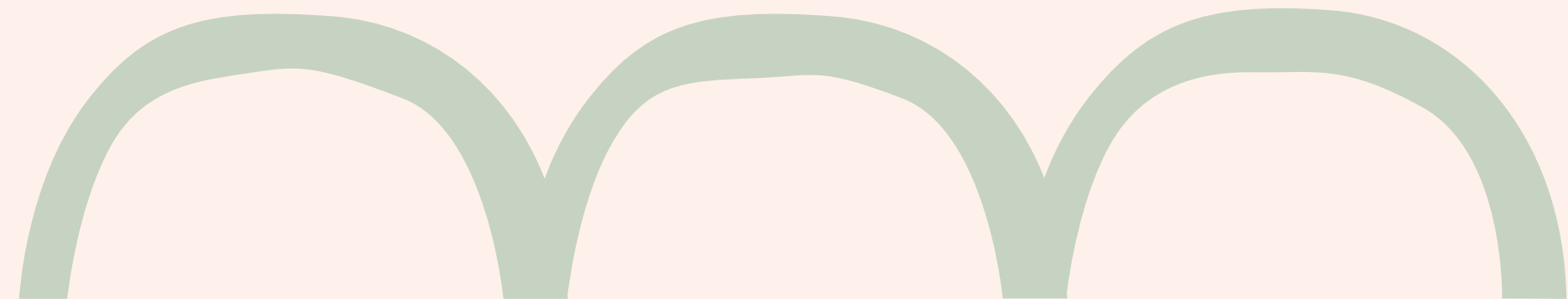




# Strategies that Motivate!



1. Up the value
2. Up your expectation of success
3. Reduce friction
4. Dopamine boosts!
5. Change up the modality
6. Academic accountability

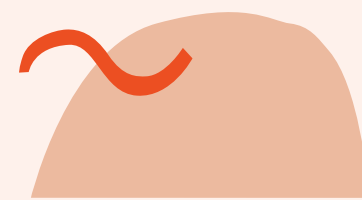


# Up the Value



- How does this connect to me personally? How is it connected to my personal interests or future goals?
- How can the Holy Spirit be a helper?
- Cultivate wonder and awe.
- Engage your feels.
- Mix childlike curiosity with tasks: “What’s one thing I don’t know yet?”
- Go on a treasure hunt to find it.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.  
John 14:26



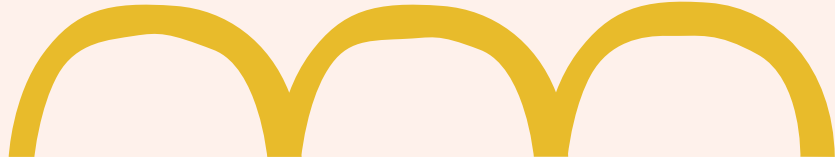


# Up your Expectation of Success

CREATE SMALL WINS

- Tiny start: Use the **2-minute rule**—start a task for just 2 minutes
- Often starting is the hardest part; once momentum begins, dopamine builds and you continue
- Create small wins early on to get the dopamine going
- Check off checkboxes or give yourself stickers

Small win examples:

- Making your bed
  - Opening a document
  - Replying to an email
  - Reading an assignment prompt
  - Book office hours to ask prof about the assignment
- 



# Up your Expectation of Success: Scaffolding

CHALLENGE: Can I break the next step down even more??  
Something you can complete in 10 minutes. Or 2 minutes.

## Example #1: Annotated Bibliography

- Research and form topic (2-4 days)
- Read and annotate sources (23 days for 7 sources)
- Write the summaries (1 day)
- Edit and format citations (1 day)

Brainstorm 2-3 topic ideas and star the one(s) you feel drawn to (5 min)

Spend 15 minutes and find 2-3 articles on the topic you chose

Meet with a subject librarian to discuss topic and next steps for research (15 min)

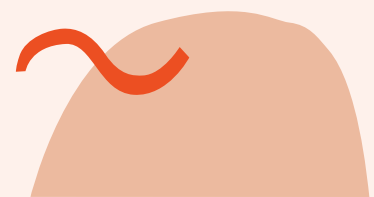


# Reduce Friction



How habits help so you don't have to rely on motivation

- Brain peaks: Most people have 2-3 peaks of alertness daily. When are yours? Schedule difficult tasks then.
- Use “prime focus periods” and protect them with low - distraction environments.
- Environmental support: Remove barriers and set up “launch pads” (materials ready to go, have what you need with you).
- Have visual reminders pointing you back to your goals (semester calendar!! weekly schedule!!)
- Fix the basics: Low dopamine often= sleep deprivation or stress overload/burnout.



# Dopamine Boosts!



- Move your body (even briefly):
  - 25 jumping jacks
  - 5–10 minute walk
  - Stretching
  - Mini dance party
- Get light exposure: step outside or sit near a window, take a wonder walk
- Invigorating scents: citrus, peppermint, cookies baking, coffee, chocolate..
- Pair tasks with something enjoyable: Music, tea, cozy space, candle, stickers → you attach dopamine to doing the thing
- Body doubling: your brain is highly responsive to social reinforcement
- Quick games! “Name 5 animals starting with B in 10 seconds” or hangman/ pictionary if studying with friends, magic eye



# Change up the Modality

What other mode could you use to motivate...?

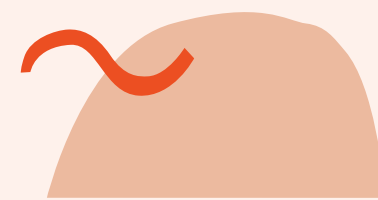
If your assignment is to write... try [SPEAKING](#)

If your assignment is to write...try [DRAWING](#)

If your assignment is to read...try [LISTENING](#)


If your assignment is to study...try [PRESENTING](#)

Can you think of any others??



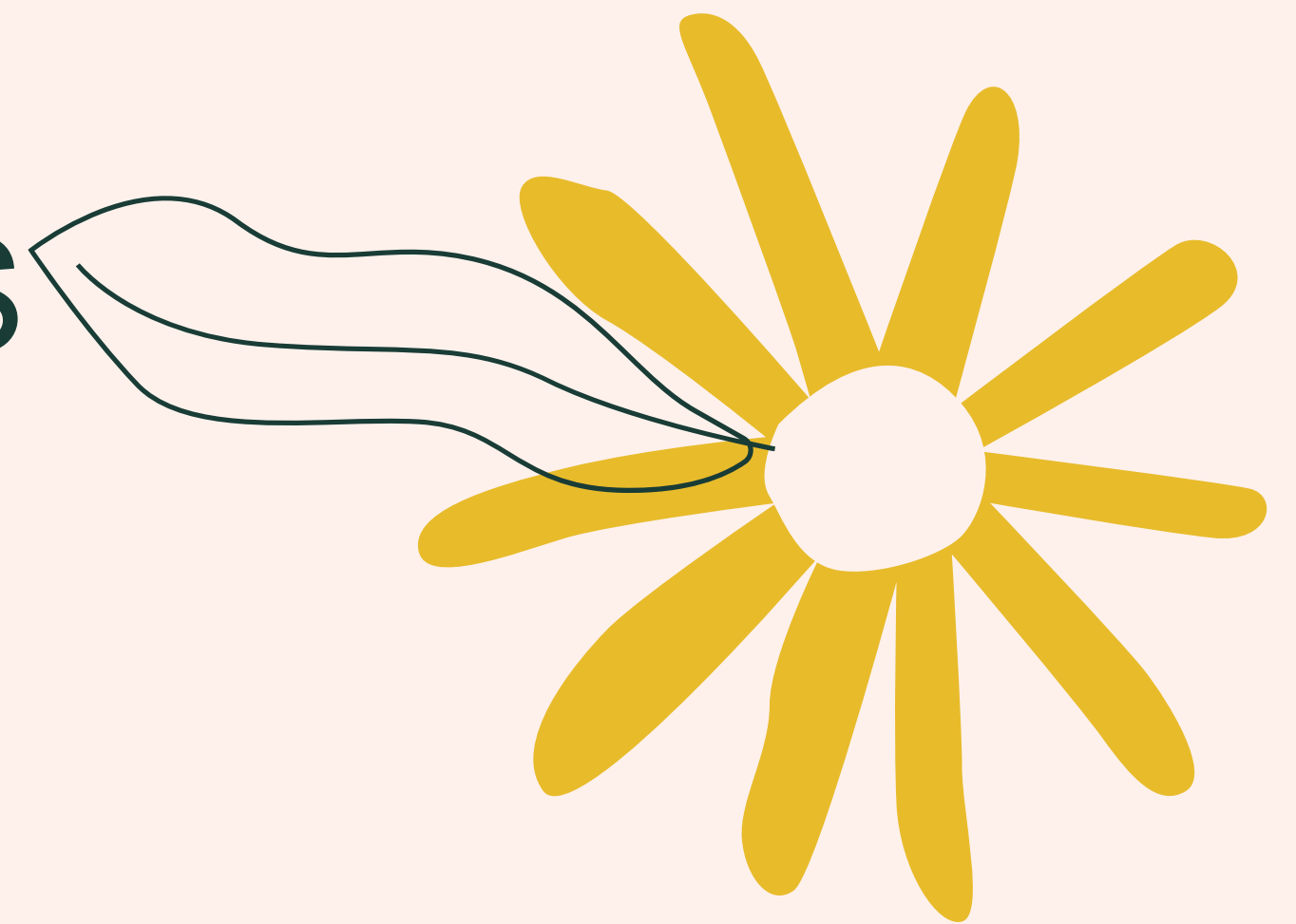
# Academic Accountability



- Meet with a professor/TA and tell them ahead of time what work you will have to show them or something specific that you will have finished by that meeting.
  - Schedule an appt with [LAS or a Peer Coach](#) to identify a realistic goal and accountability to keep moving ahead on it
  - Make an appointment with the [Writing Center](#) or a [Subject Librarian](#) to hold yourself accountable to progressing through stages in your research or writing process
  - Tell your friend, “I can hang out with you at 5pm if I finish \_\_\_ by then!”
  - Reward yourself immediately! Make it fun!
- 



# MOTIVATIONAL PHRASES



Choose one or two that resonate with you:

Progress, not perfection

Avoid avoidance

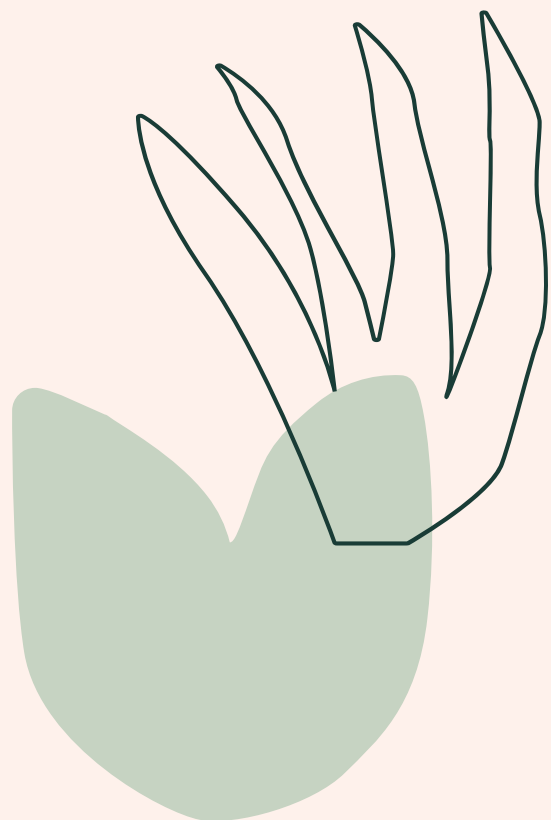
Do the thing!

Got out of bed!

Study like it matters, and it will

Remember your WHY

I can do anything for 10 minutes





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