

Part 2. Keeping motivated

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Keeping yourself motivated is going to be an important issue over the next few years. This is a four year programme: at first, everything is new which means it is variously exciting and/or confusing but its newness means it is unlikely to be boring. Typically, students lose motivation in year 2 and 3: things are no longer new and finding oneself no more than half way through a four year programme with another two or three years of 'more of the same' stretching out ahead can mean that some students 'switch off' from their studies.

Understanding what motivates you is, therefore, going to be increasingly important as you progress through the programme. You are much more likely to be able to keep yourself motivated if you have a clear understanding of why you are doing this programme, why you want to be a performer or composer, what your goals are, and what music means to you personally. These things may change over time, and so your motivations may also change, but maintaining a clear sense of why you are doing what you are doing is a good habit to develop.

Hallam and Gaunt identify four key elements of motivation in relation to musicians:

- Music acting to satisfy personal needs
- Developing and maintaining a positive musical identity
- Acquiring appropriate approaches to learning [...]
- Having a supportive environment (2012, p32)

There are various questions at the end of each of the following sections/ although these are not directly part of the self-assessment task, we would recommend that you take the time to write down your answers to these as part of your reflection on what motivates you.

Music acting to satisfy personal needs

This probably seems the most self-evident motivation for wanting to be a musician. Music means something to each of us personally, and as a composer or performer, music fulfils particular needs in relation to self-expression and satisfaction; and also the positive experience of approval we get from performing or having a composition performed.

How would you say that music satisfies your personal needs?

Developing and maintaining a positive musical identity

This is a slightly more complex issue and perhaps one that you have not thought about before. As we go through life, we develop a sense of who we are, the type of person we are. A key issue in staying motivated is thinking about oneself in a positive way. If you think you will fail something, then it's more likely you will; but if you can think positively, you are more likely to stay motivated, and that gives you a much better chance of success. Hallam and Gaunt (2012, p33) identify different ways that one can develop and maintain a positive musical identity:

- setting high (but realistic) musical standards for oneself;
- believing in yourself as a musician;
- developing a resilience to negative criticism and understanding how to use bad experiences positively in order to succeed in the future;
- developing an ability to manage your feelings, to not let these spiral out of control in a negative way.

It can be very difficult to take criticism about one's music-making, and very easy to let a bad experience dent your confidence and your motivation to succeed in the future. Part of what we encourage you to think about in this exercise is how you can deal with criticism as part of staying positive, focused and motivated. Remember: the fact that you are at the Conservatoire means we think you're good enough to be here! There is some more about this in Part 3 as well.

Do you think you have a positive musical identity? What things can you identify that can help you build and maintain a sense of yourself as a successful student and musician? What changes might you make to help you think more positively about yourself as a musician?

Acquiring appropriate approaches to learning

This aspect of motivation is about planning and goal-setting with a positive mental attitude. At the most fundamental level, this is about developing good ways of practicing, composing and working in general: being able to plan and manage your work and understanding what ways of working are going to be most effective. This is certainly something you should talk to your principal study teachers about, but you also need to find out what is going to work best for you. Not everyone works in the same way.

The most successful students (and musicians) are the ones who want to learn new things, who want to improve their skills, who want to master new techniques, find new challenges and broaden their musical horizons by seeking out new repertoire rather than waiting for other people to tell them what to do. You have many tutors and teachers who will (frequently!) tell you what to do over the next few years, but you can help your own development and stay engaged and motivated if you actively

set goals for yourself as well.

Another aspect of this comes back to dealing with bad experiences and negative criticism - even when that criticism is well-intentioned and designed to help you improve, it can often be upsetting. Part of developing as a musician means being able to focus on what you need to do to improve (making changes to what you have done in the past), although for many of us the more immediate response is to feel hurt and unhappy. Being aware of how experiences impact on you and on how you learn and develop is going to be very important over the next few years, as will be managing your responses.

Are you good at planning and managing your own work? In what ways do you need to improve or develop your organization skills? Do you feel you are self-motivated to seek out your own challenges? What can you think of doing that might encourage you to be more pro-active and adventurous in your musical development? How do you usually respond to negative criticism? What strategies might you use to help turn negative experiences in positive ones?

Having a supportive environment

In many ways, this one is pretty obvious. Teachers, friends, family – people who are supportive of what you are trying to achieve and who encourage and help you in different ways – these are going to be an essential part of helping you keep motivated. The other side of this, of course, is choosing friends carefully: ideally, your circle of friends will be made up of people with aims and ambitions similar to your own. It can be tempting, as a new student perhaps living away from home for the first time, to get too distracted by the social side of student life and sometimes this can happen if a group of friends allow themselves to be a ‘bad influence’ on each other. Try to actively help to create a supportive and motivated environment in your social group: it just as possible for a group of friends to be a *good* influence on each other, encouraging and motivating each other to work effectively and successfully.

How might you encourage your friendship group to be a good influence on each other?