

Making your Learning “Flow”

Flow in Learning is the complete immersion of your attention on an activity – reading, writing, hands-on, or very physical. When it occurs, you are “In the Zone”. In this state time slips away, you feel completely absorbed by your activity, and you are in a state of deep concentration and learning. The following conditions encourage flow and deep learning in your studies.

1. Commit to clear goals for every step of the way.

These goals may be provided initially by the course structure but it is fundamental that you take them on as your own goals, so they provide you with structure and direction.

2. Seek immediate feedback for your actions.

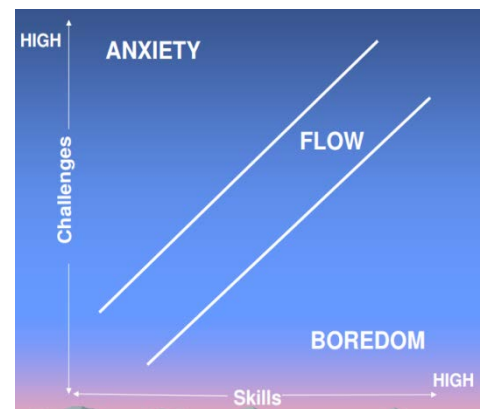
Research indicates that as you progress toward your goals you need to get ongoing feedback along the way. This includes timely feedback from your instructor, checking answers against keys in your text, interaction with team mates, or any other ways that can help you find out how you are progressing, so you can adjust your efforts so you can stay in flow.

3. Find a balance between challenges and skills.

Each activity needs to be challenging at a level that is just above your current abilities.

- If a challenge is too hard, you can get anxious and may want to give up;
- If it's too easy, you become bored and tend to wander away.

Your instructor will give an average type of challenge to the whole class. You need to find the right balance for you to promote flow. Breaking tasks or new material into smaller pieces helps to see challenges as they emerge. If you find individual ones too easy, you can group two or more challenges to make them more interesting.



4. Identify the relevance of assignments.

Research also shows that when you can see where what you are learning fits into the bigger picture of course and your personal goals, it becomes easier to engage with it and learn. If the instructor's examples don't make this connection for you, you will need to go out and discover the relevance for yourself. One way is to find examples of how an item to be learned fits into the context of your own life.

NB. Research says that students who do this get higher grades than students who do not.

5. Identify your choices.

When you are given an opportunity to choose your own activities and work with autonomy, it is easier to engage more with the task. When you can see the support from your instructor to explore on your own, you will tend to feel more competent and less anxious, identify more interest and enjoyment in the work, and produce higher-quality work than students who don't feel they have much autonomy.

5. Build positive relationships.

Positive peer and instructor/student relationships increase learning flow and are particularly vital in team projects. Good communication with others takes time but pays big dividends in learning gains.

6. Practise deep concentration.

When you study in your chosen environment, schedule the time to focus. Put aside your distractions (phone turned off, close 'other' browser tabs, door closed). Set a timer, if it helps, and practise concentrating in short bursts to begin with. Then extend the time bit by bit.

7. Use all Your Senses.

Read, write, draw, move, sing, and do anything that fits with your subject matter. The more you use your various abilities, the better you will flow with your materials and the better you will remember.

Reference: Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY, USA: Harper & Row.

