How to Motivate Students
Teaching students is not exactly easy. Motivating students is even more difficult. In a school or college environment you have to constantly deal with kids that resent the idea of being influenced. Here's the thing though, this resentment is only due misinterpretation on the part of the teacher and the student. There are ways to bridge the generation gap so that you can get to the kids, and so that they can get you...

Steps

1. Understand why motivating students is such a challenge. The thing about students is that they are exposed to so many different people acting as 'teachers' in their lives. Everyone and everything is at this point, trying extremely hard to stimulate these kids, make them think, make them work and make them into people the world can be proud of. Because of this overwhelming input of stimulus and influence, kids struggle to find their own identity. Once they have recognized this, they tend to deal with the constant environmental pressure by adopting one important policy: "I will only allow you to influence me if you prove to me that you're worth it". This policy is their mechanism of making sure that the right person gets to them at the right time, and it's a good way of doing it. The only time it becomes an issue is when they get impressed by a person who is a bad influence, or when a good person makes no effort to impress them.
2 Stand Out. Having read the above step, you should have realized that you need to prove your worth to the students so they can allow you to influence them. You can't do this if you blend into the murky background of life. You need to stand out, catch their attention and hold it.

- Be Vocal. Have an opinion and make sure you submit it at an appropriate time. Avoid talking too much and/or being too opinionated. You need to come across as being informative, intelligent and as a person who is not afraid to speak their mind, not someone who is arrogant and self-centered.
- Be passionate about what you're teaching. Wide eyes, a grin and barely suppressed enthusiasm does wonders for a student. Even if they're not interested in your subject, your manner would amuse them. Most of all, because you are adamantly expressing your love for a subject, they will tend to mark you as a genuine person.
- Be energetic. Enthusiasm is contagious. It is also a lot harder for kids to fall asleep in class if the teacher is bouncing off the walls (not that I am recommending bouncing off the walls). Make sure you have the energy to market your subject and yourself well.
- Bend a few rules. This requires a bit of care, but tends to really establish trust. If a student has been consistently not turning in work and they show up and tell you they haven't completed the assignment again. You need to recognize that something is wrong (even if it is just the student's attitude) and help. Discretely give them a bit more time to do it and make the topic a little bit easier. Yes it's bending the rules, but what you're doing is eliminating reasons for this to repeat itself. Make sure it is clear that you will not grant extensions like this again.
- Go the extra mile...even if it is just once. Do more than the average teacher is expected to do. In the case of the student above for example, if they fail to do the work on time, again. Call them after class and go through the entire assignment with them. Help them write it, show them how to do research, show them some papers other students have written. This is great because it eliminates all problems: if it's the student's attitude you are eliminating their excuses and if they genuinely were struggling with the work, they know exactly how to deal with it now. Be attentive, answer all questions and make sure they've completely understood your actions. Make sure you tell them that you will not work with them like this again. Ask them if they have understood and wait for their affirmative response before dismissing them.
- Put an effort into your appearance. You need to make a good impression, make sure you walk into class looking good. Try to dress a little better or differently than the average person.
3 **Volunteer Information.** This doesn't seem as important, but most teachers don't do it or don't do it right. Keep the students updated with recent developments regarding their subject. If you are a science teacher for example, you could 1) Bring an article from Scientific American for the students to read in class or 2) Give the students a summary of the article, show them pictures of the article, ask them questions about the concepts in the article and what certain sentences mean and tell them that you have copies of the article if anyone wants to pick them up after class. The second option is the better one. You need to understand that it is your job to get the students interested not the job of the material you present to them.

4 **Dare to Jump Out of the Box.** Do an extensive class project that is unconventional and fun. For example, your class could put on a science-related (or whichever subject related) play that you could perform at a local museum for younger children. The whole class could write a book that you could publish using a self-publishing service (these are rather cheap) and donate it to a local library. The thing about this is that the idea has to be different, you have to do it during class time or during some time in school (to avoid transportation and excess time issues) and you have to work with everyone every step of the way.
5 **Watch the sarcasm.** Sarcasm is actually a pretty good way to get along with students. It gives them the impression that you aren’t vying for their approval, know the rules and have a good sense of humor. Your sarcasm though has to be well versed, well placed and make sure you smile while you’re being sarcastic or right after. This is rather important. Students love sarcasm but your body language has to accompany it and make you come across as pleasant not mean.

6 **Brag a little but not too much.** You are trying to convince students that you are worth listening to, especially if you are trying to motivate them towards your field of study. You need to exhibit your talents. You are not just a teacher, you are really and truly good at what you do. It is almost like how you would present yourself during a job interview. Be humble about it but don’t hide it. Make sure your pride comes through when you are talking to the students about your experiences or contributions. If you have impressive contacts invite them over. Try not to ask them to make a speech though, an interview type of interaction would be best.
7 Pay attention. If a student looks depressed or unwell. Call them out after class and just ask them if they are alright. Try to keep yourself semi-occupied when you do this. Look at them when you ask but don't keep staring at them until they answer you. If they say they are fine, don't press them. Just say "Alright, just thought you looked a bit down back there" and drop it and continue working. Just the fact that you're concerned is enough for them.

8 Bring out student opinions. Ask them what their opinions are on certain issues. Avoid questions like: "What do you think about the Presidential Election?", this tends to be a bit annoying. Just throw a one-liner that they can't avoid answering like "Democrat or Republican?". If their opinion differ from yours or are the same as yours, argue with them lightly, like you would informally with friends. Admit defeat once in a while. Even if you think you're right, you could end with: "You're good. I'll get back to you on that one"
9 **Make a difference.** If you see a problem or issue worth tackling, bring it up. Tell the students you want to do something about it and ask them what they think. Deal with the problem together and you'll make a difference together.

10 **Make your expectations clear.** Tell your entire class what you expect of them. What you want them to become. What kind of contributions you want them to make in their field, and in the world. Be passionate and be genuine. The most critical mistake that teachers make with this speech is this: they deliver it at the beginning of their class with the students. This usually brings about an opposite motivation. If you have a new class and you stand up before them and tell them how you know they are all wonderful people and in this class they will learn how to change the world, they students won't believe you and they will lose respect for you. What they're thinking is how can you know what kind of people they are without making an effort to find out? How do you expect them to change the world when you aren't telling them what the world is? How can you have the exact same expectation of everybody? And they're right. To most teachers all students are the same and so they feel comfortable expressing themselves in that sort of speech, but to a good teacher, each student is different. Even avoid the "Some of You" speech ("Some of you will become lawyers, some of you
Explain expectations. Say something like: "Ryan will find a cure for cancer, Kevin will give Bill Gates a run for his money, Wendy will decorate the world, Carol will probably give Kevin a run for his money...". Add a bit of humor and make sure it's obvious to the students that you have gotten to know something about every one of them. These are your expectations for these kids, just as you have proven yourself to them, they have proven themselves to you.

11 Expose them to the stimulus that they were blocking off before. Issues concerning people, the community, the country, the world. Anything that is important to you. Anything you want to motivate them with. Now that you've gained their trust and they've decided you're worth listening to...they will. They will try and understand where you're coming from and why you feel a certain way. Even if they don't agree, they will be willing to make the effort.