Staying Engaged with Academics

In this context we’re using the term "staying engaged" to mean being able to stay focused, motivated and persistent with your academic work. Staying engaged requires managing stress in a way that you are not avoiding your work to avoid feeling stressed and you are not so stressed by your work that you are too overwhelmed to be effective.

College can be stressful, and that can be a good thing. A certain amount of stress means that we are engaged. Some stress can be energizing and help us pay attention to what’s going on. You may know some friends who don’t seem to care about how they do in school – they’re not experiencing enough stress, and they’re not motivated as a result. Of course, you probably know other friends who seem to stress about school all the time. That’s the other end of the spectrum, and that just leads to feeling overwhelmed and burning out.

Imagine a graph. Along the bottom axis are different levels of arousal, or how stressed you might be. The side axis indicates how well you’re performing.

![Graph showing stress and performance relationship](image)

The graph shows that some stress results in the best performance. Too far in one direction, and you lose interest; too far in the other, and you start feeling overwhelmed. Somewhere in the middle, you find an enjoyable challenge that keeps you engaged. That’s where you find peak performance and satisfaction.

Examples of the kind of factors that lead students to “check out” and avoid engagement include: procrastination; difficulty balancing academic demands with other priorities; substance use; distraction caused by other life stresses; perfectionism, etc.
Examples of factors that contribute to students feeling overwhelmed include: test anxiety; high stress levels from multiple academic demands at one time; having too many stressors for one’s coping strategies; etc.

The good news is that there are strategies and techniques that you can learn that can help you to modify your the level of arousal and stress so you can perform at your peak.

Where are you on this curve? Are you feeling overwhelmed from too much stress? Or do you feel like you’ve checked out and don’t really care about school?

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, click here for strategies for reducing your stress [1].

If you’re feeling checked out, click here for ways to motivate yourself to be more engaged [2].

Source URL: https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/academic-success/staying-engaged-academics

Links
[1] https://campushealth.unc.edu/stress-management