Resource 1: What's the point of staring at a wall?

Goal: Explain how isolating oneself from external stimuli allows us to unlock the thoughts, which we repress in our mind.

When I mentioned "staring at a wall" as a solution to figuring out why you want to pull through with the IB in the video, you all must have been confused 😊 But behind this seemingly useless technique lies a deeper effect, which allows us to internalise our attention!

Step 1: Depriving your senses of external stimuli to detect

When we ask the question "Why am I doing the IB", we will not find the answer in our surroundings, but rather within our mind. We often don't detect our thoughts, because there are so much sensory stimuli (through sight, smell, taste, sound, touch) that this occupies our mind's bandwidth – there is no space for our thoughts to be perceived. To give our thoughts this space, we need to remove the external stimuli and free up our mind's bandwidth.

When we are staring at a blank wall, with nothing interesting to see, what is there to be distracted by? NOTHING! That's the point – your mind is not going to be pre-occupied with processing the information from our senses. You also don't have to be staring at a wall to get the same effect. All that you need is an environment, where nothing changes. If there is no change, there is nothing to perceive. For example, you could also close your eyes, since you cannot see anything distinct in the first place! However, note that there should be no/minimal changes in any of your senses. With our example with the wall, you should make sure that there are no significant sounds, smells, tastes or feelings (touch-related) in your environment.

Step 2: Embrace the boredom, instead of pushing it away

Of course, I won't have to tell you that staring at a wall is EXTREMELY boring! But this is exactly what we want! When nothing is coming from our external stimuli, our thoughts and inner stimuli have the space to express themselves in your mind! The difficult bit is that staying bored is uncomfortable. It is in those moments, where we are willing to do anything to remove the boredom. However, the important thing is that we keep our attention on our mind, so

that we can proceed with extracting what we want to know about ourselves! For these few minutes, you will have to resist doing anything. I'm sorry!

Step 3: Use the boredom to find your "why"

For us, just staying bored defeats the point of this exercise. When we are in the state of boredom, we are in the best place to ask, "Why am I doing the IB"! When we start thinking about this question, we will perceive all the thoughts that we have about the question. Whatever you choose to do with the information from your thoughts, is up to you! However, you now have the foundation to tap into your thoughts with ease, without being distracted by your surroundings! You're welcome! 😊

WARNING: DON'T DO THIS FOR TOO LONG!

Although I said that I do this for 30-45 minutes, you must be careful. This technique can be classed as a meditation technique (since this makes you aware of your thoughts), and meditation has been shown to have adverse side effects when done for too long and incorrectly. To start off, I would cap the time that you do this at 30 minutes. You may not even need that long to find your answers within your thoughts, but don't try to prolong your time in the state of boredom. It is not a problem to not find answers in your first session!

I hope that this gives you more clarity on why staring at a wall allows you to tap into your thoughts and your internal motivation to do anything!

Resource 2: How can we use our perception to maximize our motivation to do things?

Goal:

Why is our perception so important in determining our motivation? It's simple – our perception alters how we interpret and feel about anything that happens within our life/in the world! Why else can two people have completely different reactions to the same thing? Since this plays such a defining role in what we are motivated to do, I wanted to write up this resource. Hopefully, I can help you understand perception and how you can use it to your advantage!

Scenario 1: Our perception of ourselves affects how we respond to challenges

We call our perception of ourselves "ego". Our ego is important because our brain factors this in, when it makes its probabilistic calculations about pursuing certain challenges in life. These calculations are done by our forebrain, including our frontal lobes and cortices, and these play a role in determining how we are inclined to act a certain way.

A negative ego means that we fundamentally do NOT believe in ourselves, when it comes to overcoming some sort of challenge. This skews our probabilistic calculations towards a lesser likelihood of success. Therefore, the likelihood of procrastination goes way up.

Scenario 2: Our perception of progress affects how motivated we are to make more progress

Let's imagine that you are starting your Extended Essay (EE). This is a year-long project, which takes up a lot of time. However, comparing every little bit of progress with the project, makes every bit of progress feel meaningless. At this point, we receive so little dopamine (our hormone of motivation) that our brain sees this situation as "not fulfilling".

Scenario 3: Our perception of situations affects how we are inclined to act

Here's a simple example - Nowadays, we struggle to not use our technological devices (our phones, tablets, computers). Why is that? For one, our devices have flashy, colourful icons, which catch our attention. Additionally, our behaviour, clicking the icon, is reinforced because we get a spike in dopamine without any effort (from Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) – this is called “instant gratification”.

However, what happens when we change our electronic devices to greyscale? We completely shift our perception. Since the icons are not flashy and colourful anymore, they are boring to look at. Our motivation to use our electronic devices, goes way down.

What is the problem with our perception and how can we fix it to motivate ourselves in the right way?

Scenario 3 illustrates our actual issue the best. Our real issue is not the actual situation, but the “colour”. Why? The colour does not come from the situation, but from how we view and interpret it. The colour represents our distorted way of viewing the world, informed by our personal experiences. This distorts our perception, to the point where it can elicit a strong emotional reaction. This explains situations, where we make menial things mean something dramatic.

How do we deal with that? We need to REMOVE the COLOURING! If we can the reality of the situation, we remove our own emotional attachment to the situation and we lose the motivation to act **based on our emotions!** So how could you achieve this? Here’s one way!

Step 1: Internalise your attention. This was addressed briefly in Resource 1 but achieving this means that you should isolate yourself from external stimuli. This also means that you should remove yourself from being around other people, because they could cloud your judgement. In short, remove yourself from the presence of people and distractions.

Step 2: Identify your assumptions from your emotions. While focusing on your mind, identify the parts of your experience that make you emotional. These emotions are grounded in what you perceived in the experience, which is where we can find the assumptions that we made. **How do we know that what we find is an assumption?** A lot of the time, these

assumptions are not based on anything that happened in the situation. These assumptions are usually the source of premature interpretations of the situation, which are not based on anything concrete. When you start investing time into tracing the source of your assumptions, you will start realising some of these things!

Step 3: Remove the assumptions. Now, we want to take out our assumptions carefully. The goal is to end up with the most emotionless reconstruction of the experience. You could imagine it like this: You are assuming that your assumption is not correct. At the end of this, you end up with the "most objective" reality of the situation. You get to see your experience for what it is. Now that we have removed our emotional attachment, we have the freedom to make whatever decision we want! In the end, you may conclude that this experience is nothing to act on. However, the important thing is that you have the best conditions to make the most rational decision!

If you found this easy or difficult to apply, please do let us know through our feedback form on our website! Of course, I understand that this takes time to really understand, but I do hope that you can take on the tools to unlock your motivation!

Resource 3: Goal Setting 101

Goal: Explain how to set goals, so that you do not sabotage your mindset

One big issue, when it comes to pursuing goals, is that we always compare our (day-to-day) progress to the goals at large. When is this a problem? If you got a large goal, like completing an Extended Essay from start to finish, your problems will only pile up. Let's look at this issue in more detail!

What is the actual issue?

Think about the work that you need to complete an EE. The IB prescribes 40 hours to complete the EE, but I assure you that you need more than this. Now, think about how much work you can realistically do every week. With everything else in the IB, as well as your personal life, you could be looking at 2-4 hours per week (**NOTE: THIS VARIES FROM PERSON TO PERSON!**). In comparison to the min. 40 hours that you may spend to complete the EE in total, the 2-4 hours a week seems like **nothing**.

Our brain has a hormone called dopamine. The dopaminergic system in our brain is responsible for regulating how we act towards external stimuli, since dopamine dictates our motivation to act. We feel a lot of pleasure when a lot of dopamine is secreted at once, causing a spike in our dopamine levels. Hence, we start craving that activity, and we are taught that such activities are "good" (in the sense that they provide us pleasure). However, when we compare our daily progress on our EE, with the EE at large, it seems so miniscule that there is little pleasure to be had when the daily progress is done.

For one, this means that our dopamine levels drop (this makes us feel less good about what we did). Our brain reinforces the idea that making progress on the EE is not worth it, so we are much more likely to procrastinate on that. However, we also must consider the probabilistic calculations that our brain makes about the challenge (mentioned in Resource 2). Since our brain will valuate our progress poorly, the brain will actively oppose us working on our EE.

In these situations, what can we do?

The solution? Smaller goals and a different mindset!

To reinforce the behaviour of working on our EE (in this example), we have to feel like there is progress being made. Having smaller, potentially daily or weekly goals allows us to achieve that. These are goals that we can complete 100% of, while not stretching on for a time that feels unbearable! The key here is about having that sense of achievement, one that triggers a spike in dopamine.

However, this is not the full story. We also need to make sure that we are getting the right motivation, which allows us to act on the EE (or any activity), on a long-term basis. Here is where we must differentiate between external and internal motivation. External motivation has to do with having validation for what you do, including money, appreciation from others, etc. Internal motivation has more to do with self-fulfilment and having full control over what you do. Internal motivation is better than external motivation, because it is not reliant on an external circumstance, which is out of your control.

To activate our internal motivation, I have found one way to create a lasting drive to do work. If we can see the reward of doing work, **as not having to worry about that tomorrow or later**, that serves as a type of self-fulfilment. For example, if you struggle with doing the dishes in the kitchen, imagine yourself walking by a part of your house, and noticing that all the dishes are clean and stored away properly! I believe that this would be much more relieving that seeing the same dirty dishes in the sink the following day. In that same way, let's try to complete more tasks, so that we don't have to worry about doing them later! Give future you a break!