

Amherst College Strategic Learning Center

How to Identify and Tackle Burnout

What is burnout?

Burnout is a term used to describe “extreme fatigue and the loss of idealism and passion for one’s job” (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Because being a student is your primary job, academic burnout can occur when you feel overwhelmed with your workload, you have trouble managing your different responsibilities, and you struggle to find the motivation necessary to continue doing your academic work.

Why is combating burnout important?

Tackling burnout head-on is crucial for continued success in school because a lack of motivation and exhaustion can lead to unhealthy habits, lower quality performance, a loss in work productivity, and undesired spill-over into other areas of your life.

How do you know if you are experiencing burnout?

Extreme
Exhaustion



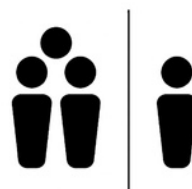
Lack of
Motivation



Frustration
and Irritability



Isolating
from Others



Dreading work/
Loss of Passion



What Can You Do to Address Burnout?

1. Prioritize what is most urgent and important right now

- Identify your non-negotiables, or tasks that need to get done regardless of the circumstances (e.g., sleeping, eating meals, registering for classes, etc.)
- List your other tasks and rank them in terms of what is most urgent and important (e.g., upcoming assignments, internship/job applications, club meetings, etc.)
- If you can, remove some of the tasks further down your list and plan to do them at a later time

2. Change up your routine

- Make time to do things you are passionate about that aren't work-related
- Try a new study area or, if possible, study outside if you think it will help you feel more energized
- Break up larger projects into smaller tasks
- Freshen up your schedule and move some tasks around for a change of pace

3. Ask for help as needed

- Let others know if you are feeling burnt out and, if appropriate, see if they are willing to help with any tasks
- Communicate with your professors as soon as you feel like you may need an extension for an assignment
- If you are feeling guilty about asking for help, remind yourself that everyone needs support sometimes and that by advocating for yourself, you are practicing a valuable life skill
- Need extra support? Meet with an Academic Coach!

4. Take breaks

- Burnout can occur when we are not allowing ourselves to take any time off; make sure you are scheduling regular breaks, even if you are not feeling tired
- If you are working on assignments or readings, try out the Pomodoro Technique: for every 25 minutes of continuous work you do, reward yourself with a 5-minute break

5. Develop some new motivation strategies

- List and review your values; this is a good way of capturing what matters to you and can help clarify your next steps
- Write down 3–5 things you like about doing a particular homework assignment
 - For example, “I enjoy solving problems because it’s like doing a puzzle,” or “It feels good to go back and look at what I’ve written”
- Write down 3 benefits you get from doing your homework
 - For example, you might be learning about ideas that will help with current or future courses, developing reasoning skills that can help you in your career, or expanding your perspective on current events for good conversational fodder in social situations