

Goal setting your way to academic success

Without goals, and plans to reach them, you are like a ship that has set sail with no destination. Fitzhugh Dodson

Goals are powerful, precise statements about your intentions. They are motivated by plans, dreams and desires, powered by discipline and maintained through commitment.

When it comes to university studies we know that successful students routinely set achievable academic goals. Goal setting focuses the mind, forces you to be specific, and requires that you learn to prioritise, manage your time and make a commitment to completing tasks.

During the course of your studies you may encounter procrastination, low motivation, ill health, personal problems, anxiety, depression and self-doubt. In fact, many issues can get in the way of your personal and academic progress. However, applying the basic strategies of establishing realistic goals, prioritising tasks, and setting achievable timeframes can be very useful in getting you back on track.

Successfully achieving your goals will contribute positively to your sense of effectiveness as a student, boost your confidence and encourage you to keep achieving.



Blueprint for weekly goal setting

- STEP 1** **Commit** a set time each week to relax in a quiet setting and consider the study goals you would like to achieve over the coming week.
- STEP 2** **Write goals down** as they come to you. Once completed, rewrite them in order of priority eg a) must do, b) important, and c) less important. Make sure that your goals are specific, achievable, measurable and time limited.
- STEP 3** **Break down** large goals into smaller, more manageable tasks that can be achieved in short time frames. Creating daily 'To Do' lists is a great way of doing this.
- STEP 4** **Time manage** your goals by setting achievable deadlines. This focuses your attention, concentration and creative energies. Make sure that you only work on one goal at a time and cross off each goal from your list as you complete it. Use a diary to help organize your time.
- STEP 5** **Evaluate** your progress towards your goals regularly and positively. Adopt a positive, optimistic attitude and consider your progress in terms of what you **have** achieved, rather than how much is left to do. Use positive self-talk and words of encouragement to keep achieving.
- STEP 6** **Commitment, persistence and self discipline** are the values upon which the achievement of your goals rest. Resolve to never, never, never give up—even when you hit setbacks. Remember, quitters never win and winners never quit.
- STEP 7** **Reward yourself** regularly to celebrate your successful achievements along the way. This will allow you to have breaks and enjoy periods of positivity while you work.



Quotable quotes

Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment. Jim Rohn

You can't hit a six if you don't step up to bat, you can't paint a canvas if you don't pick up a brush and you can't achieve your goals if you don't try. Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success. Stephen A. Brennan

The most important thing about motivation is goal setting. You should always have a goal. Francie Larrieu Smith

The SMART approach to goal achievement

Specific

Be very clear about what it is that you want to achieve. This reduces indecision and increases your ability to recognise the sub goals you need to complete to achieve your goal. For example, a goal of: "Study physics today" could be made more specific by stating "Read chapter 5 of my physics textbook, write questions in the margin of text".

Measurable

Your goal should be tangible enough so that when you are through you have clear evidence that you've completed the task. It feels good to see something there finished in front of you indicating a job well done. As equally important, you will be able to prove to yourself that you were successful and your time wasn't wasted. Without such evidence the end result of a goal such as "Read Chapter 3" cannot be reliably assessed. Did you fully comprehend what you read when you looked at the pages? A smarter goal would be: "Read Chapter 3, then jot down a summary of the major points from memory." The summary would indicate that you read the chapter and understood what you read. Producing tangible evidence like this requires **active** studying on your part. Research repeatedly finds that active study produces superior learning and retention.

Achievable/Acceptable

Your goal should be set so that you can achieve it within a specific period. If the goal is too big or too involved to achieve within a reasonable time frame, then break it down into more manageable tasks. You know best your strengths and weaknesses, and can use this information to maximize your chances of success.

Realistic

Set goals that are realistic and able to be achieved by you with the resources available to you. Avoid planning things if you are unlikely to follow through. It is better to plan only a few things and be successful rather than lots of things that fail.

Success breeds success! Start small, with the tasks you set, experience the joys of meeting your goal, and gradually increase the amount of work that you set yourself.

Setting goals that account for every minute of the day is unrealistic. Unplanned events will crop up and interrupt your schedule. Rather, factor in flexible time to deal with unexpected interruptions. If you don't use it for problem solving, finish early and use it to reward yourself for a job well done.

Time frame

Dedicate clear timeframes to work on your goal, eg, between 9am and 10am. Long periods without a break cause fatigue, distraction and loss of enthusiasm. Break large goals into smaller, more manageable chunks and have small breaks often.

When studying, the average attention span lasts around 40–45 minutes before concentration wanes. So, plan to work in short, sharp, energetic bursts to maintain effective goal achievement.



Further information

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