

## GOAL-SETTING

Setting goals for yourself is one of the most important things that you can do as a student. When you set goals, you'll find that you are able to be much more focused on your daily tasks. When you are able to link your day-to-day tasks to your goals, you can see the purpose behind them. This strategy can keep you motivated. It is important to think about your goals in terms of both the short AND the long term; this approach gives you perspective.

### LONG-TERM GOALS

Long-term goals are helpful because they give you perspective on how to work at accomplishing a larger (and often seemingly impossible) objective. When creating your goals, think "what do I want to accomplish?" and then ask "how will I do this?" The answer to your first question is your long-term goal, and the answers to your second question are your daily and weekly goals.

Without a long-term goal, it can be easy to lose motivation. After all, why would you work hard in your courses if you don't care about what you learn in them or what your final marks will be?

### DAILY AND WEEKLY GOALS

Daily and weekly goals are important because they become the foundation necessary for accomplishing larger things. They may be little, but they are what will determine your success.

For example, if your goal is to do really well in a course, you can't just make it happen with pure willpower. First you need to work hard and do well on the smaller midterms and assignments that make up the majority of your mark. At that point you will have developed the skills you need to write the final and achieve your long-term goal of academic success.

Without short-term goals, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by your long-term ambitions. How can you master your studies if you don't have a plan for learning the individual parts that make up your education as a whole? Chunking your work so that you think of it in smaller bits also makes it easier to approach than the whole project.

### SACRIFICES

Working towards and completing long term goals means that you will have to make sacrifices. There's no way around it; short-term sacrifices are necessary in order to achieve long-term results. Everybody knows this, but it is harder to carry out in practice (otherwise, it wouldn't be much of a sacrifice).

When you are figuring out your goals, ask yourself what you might need to sacrifice in order to achieve them. Knowing what you might have to give up later can save you an unpleasant surprise or a tough decision. Also, by thinking through the possible sacrifices you might need to make you will be able to decide how important your goal is to you.

## FAILURES

When setting goals for yourself, there are never “failures”. In every situation, whether you accomplished your original goal or not, there is something you can learn from the experience. Don’t be discouraged if you have not completed a goal that you set out for yourself. Step back and think about what went wrong. Ask yourself how you can avoid making the same mistake next time, readjust your goals, and try again. Don’t lose heart; now you know more than you did when you started!

## SMART GOAL-SETTING

When you are setting goals for yourself, you want to make sure that you are setting yourself up to succeed. Goal-setting isn’t very rewarding or effective if your objectives are always out of reach. By using a SMART goal framework, you can create personalized and, more importantly, achievable goals.

### SPECIFIC

*Not Specific:* I want to get in better shape.

*Specific:* I want to be able to run 5 km by the beginning of March.

Notice for **specific** goals you have clearly defined targets. If your goals are not specific, you will have no idea when you have achieved them. For this example, the idea of “being in shape” is not specific. Does this mean that you want to improve your cardio abilities/time? Muscle tone? Strength? Endurance? There are many ways to get in “better shape”. In order to focus your workout, you need to know what areas you want to improve in. It’s the same when you make an academic goal.

### MEASURABLE

*Not Measurable:* I want to do well in English 1A03.

*Measurable:* I want to get at least a B+ in English 1A03.

Note that **measurable** goals have concrete criteria that you can use to measure your progress. A measurable goal has a definite beginning and end.

For this example, “doing well” is a goal that you cannot measure. Having a grade as a goal is better because grades are usually a percentage. If your goal is a 75%, and you currently have a 60%, you know that you need to bring your mark up only another 15% to achieve your goal. This can help keep you motivated.

### ATTAINABLE

*Not Attainable:* I want to run the 100-metre sprint in 8 seconds.

*Attainable:* I want to be able to run the 100-metre sprint in 14 seconds.

In order to have an **attainable** goal, you need to consider what is possible for you to complete in the timeframe that you have available. You will need to do some research in order to determine what is attainable for you.

# ACADEMIC

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For example, the current world record for the 100-metre sprint is over 9 seconds, so it is not an attainable goal for you to try and surpass an Olympic level of sprinting. Trying to run 100 metres in 14 seconds is within the range of what amateur sprinters can achieve, a goal that could be within your reach.

## REALISTIC

*Not Realistic:* I want to get As in all my courses, join three new clubs, play on an intramural sports team, and join the McMaster Orchestra.

*Realistic:* I want to get As in all my courses and join one new club.

This section of your goal “checklist” is very personal to your abilities and commitments. In order to set a **realistic** goal, you need to consider how much free time you have, how long each activity takes, and your personal abilities.

For example, if you have never picked up a clarinet before, you will not be chosen to play in the McMaster orchestra. It is realistic to realize that your musical abilities are not at that level. If you want to learn to play the clarinet, joining a “beginner band” or taking lessons is a good way to get started.

You also need to think about how much time you have available for different tasks and which of these tasks you want to focus your time and energy on. Remember that there are only 24 hours in a day!

## TIMELY

*Not Timely:* I want to study for my Biology midterm.

*Timely:* I will study for my Biology midterm on February 28, March 1 and March 2 for three hours each day.

A **timely** goal sets out a deadline so that you know when things need to be done in order to accomplish your goal. Setting smaller deadlines for the individual parts of an assignment can keep you organized and save you from a last-minute rush at the end. It is harder to put off work if you have set aside time for it. Setting a deadline for completing the project will give you a “finish line” to focus on, which can help you stay focused and deliver results.

## CONCLUSION

Using the SMART framework will help you create personalized, achievable goals. Effective goal-setting can set you up to succeed, boosting your confidence and increasing your drive to set bigger, more ambitious goals. Using the SMART goal framework can make this possible. Remember: work smart, not hard!

## REFERENCE

Meyer, J. P. (2003). *Attitude is everything: If you want to succeed above and beyond*. The Meyer Resource Group, Inc.

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