

Setting and Reaching Goals

A goal is a result you intend to reach mostly through your own actions. Your actions can move you closer to or farther away from your goals. While studying moves you closer to successfully passing a class, sleeping through the final exam may prevent you from reaching that goal. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal or maybe you have conflicting goals. To help you obtain your goals, you need to learn to manage your time, your studies, and your social life.

Considering Your Priorities

You are a person with individual needs and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career. They may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life. It is important to do well in your classes, but it is also important to have a social life and enjoy your time off from studying. You do not have to choose between the two—except *at any given time*. Priorities always involve time: what is most important to do *right now*.

Goals vary in terms of time. Short-term goals focus on today, the next few days, and perhaps weeks. Mid-term goals involve plans for this school year and the time you plan to remain in college. Long-term goals may begin with graduating college and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (e.g., the kind of career you want) guide your mid-term goals (getting the right education for that career) while your short-term goals (such as doing well on an exam) become the steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how the little things you do every day can move you toward your long-term goals.

Writing Your Goals

Thinking about your goals is a powerful step toward making your goals come true, but it is not enough. It is important to write down your goals. The act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them. Keep in mind that achieving short-term personal goals can provide motivation for achieving the long-term goals. In other words, setting personal goals helps you to succeed.

What are your personal goals? Consider this list:

- Make more money
- Create a more secure future
- Decrease stress levels
- Improve personal relationships
- Become physical active
- Get more sleep

Setting SMART Goals

SMART Goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.

Specific. Do not write, “I will become a great musician.” Instead, write, “I will finish my music degree and be employed in a symphony orchestra.”

Measurable: If you cannot measure a goal, how do you know if you accomplished it? Saying you want to make an A in this class can be measured at the end of the semester. Did you make an A and reach your goal?

Attainable: It is good to dream and to challenge yourself, but your goals should relate to your personal strengths and abilities.

Relevant: We tend to work hard to reach goals we care about, but we are likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we do not feel strongly about the goal. If you are doing something only because someone else wants you to, then it is not your goal.

Time frame: Vague goals do not keep you motivated. If you are realistic and specific with your goals, you should be able to project a time frame for reaching your goals.

Problem Solving: When Setbacks Happen

Even when you have clear goals and are motivated and focused to achieve them, problems sometimes arise. The difference between those who solve the problem and move on and those who get frustrated and give up is partly attitude and partly experience—and knowing how to cope when a problem occurs. Setbacks may happen while you are in college—just as to everyone in life. Here are a few examples:

- A financial crisis
- An illness or injury
- A crisis involving family members or loved ones
- Stress related to frequently feeling you don't have enough time
- Stress related to relationship problems

First, work to resolve the immediate problem:

1. Stay motivated and focused. Don't let frustration, anxiety, or other negative emotions make the problem worse than it is.
2. Analyze the problem and consider all possible solutions.
3. Seek help when you need to. None of us gets through life alone, and it is not a sign of weakness to see your academic advisor or a college counselor if you have a problem.
4. Once you have developed a plan for resolving the problem, work to follow through. Track your progress in smaller steps and you will be on your way to putting it behind you.

After you have solved a problem, try to avoid it again in the future:

1. Be honest with yourself. How did you contribute to the problem? Sometimes it's obvious like I did not do the work or

study for the exam, and I failed. Sometimes the source of the problem is not as obvious but may become clearer the more you think about it. Should I have asked for help when I did not understand the assignment? Did I let anxiety make me believe I could not succeed?

2. Taking responsibility does not mean being down on yourself. Failing at something does not mean *you* are a failure. We all fail at something, sometime. Adjust your attitude so you are ready to get back on track.
3. Make a plan and stick to it.