

# Goal-Setting Skills Handout

Learning to set reasonable goals and planning a strategy to achieve your goals is an important life skill. In this handout, we will talk about how to set goals, how to plan steps to achieve the goals, and how to measure whether you have achieved your goal.

*The acronym SMART is an excellent way to set goals.* It stands for:

- **Specific** – your goals need to be specific goals. For example, saying “I want to do better in math” is not a specific goal. Saying “I want to study 1 hour a day” is a specific goal.
- **Measurable** – your goals need to be something you can measure. For example, saying “I want to understand how to graph lines better” is not a goal you will be able to measure. How will you know when you have accomplished it? Instead, make your goal something you can measure, such as “I want to be able to work 15 problems out of the line graphing section and not miss more than two problems.”
- **Attainable** – your goals need to be attainable. ALL people make mistakes from time to time, including professors! Don’t try to be perfect; try to improve on what you have been doing. Set a goal that is attainable, such as “I will reduce my errors from 10 per homework assignment to 3 per homework assignment.”
- **Realistic** – your goals need to be realistic. While it would be wonderful to go from making a D on exams to making As, it’s probably not realistic. Set goals that are close to what you are currently achieving, but at a higher level. For example, if you have been making a D on exams, set your goal for the next exam to make a C. When you have achieved that goal, you can set your goal for the next exam to be a B. If you have been getting 72% on your homework assignments, set your goal to be 80%. Think of small gains that add up to huge improvements.
- **Time-based** – your goals need to have a time limit. If you want to improve your exam score by one letter grade, on which exam are you setting the time limit to achieve that goal? By the next exam? By the 4<sup>th</sup> exam? By the final exam? Depending on your situation, these are all reasonable and good goals.



Here is an example of how to work through solving an academic problem by setting a SMART goal.

*Evaluation: Got a 77 on an exam.*

*What worked well?*

1. Reviewing notes every day.
2. Reviewing the whole week on Mondays.

*What didn't work well?*

1. It was too hard to do homework every day.
2. Needed to study theorems and definitions more.
3. Had trouble finding errors on homework.

*What to change for the next exam?*

1. Do 3 hours of homework on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday.
2. Review boxes and boldface items in the text on Mondays.
3. Ask professor for help on how to find errors.

Here is a sample study planning guide to evaluate goals.

Start and End Dates	What is your goal for this period?	How do you expect to achieve this goal? What strategies will you use?	Did you achieve your goal? What actually happened?	If you did well, what worked? If not, what will you try next time to do better?
9/2--9/20				
9/22--10/11				

When you are planning how to accomplish a goal, consider setting reminders of tasks you need to accomplish on your phone.

Set a goal you would like to accomplish before the next exam. Use the table above to set your goal and evaluate your progress.