

Creating SMART Goals

SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Tangible. SMART goals are more likely to be met and to be able to be described than non-specific, non-measurable, non-actionable goals.

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Tangible

Specific: What needs to be done? What results do you want?

Provide enough detail so that there is no indecision as to what exactly you should be doing when the time comes to do it. A goal of: "Study biology" is poor. Should you be reading your text? If so, what pages? Or should you be looking over your lecture notes? A much better goal would be: "Read pp. 12 - 35 in biology text, write questions in the margin of text, and practice answering those questions after reading."

A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To set a specific goal you must answer the six "W" questions:

Who: Who is involved?
What: What do I want to accomplish?
Where: Identify a location.
When: Establish a time frame.
Which: Identify requirements and constraints.
Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

EXAMPLE: A general goal would be, "Get in shape." But a specific goal would say, "Join a health club and workout 3 days a week."

Measurable: How will you know whether the goal has been met? Can the results be quantified?

Your goal should be such that when you are through you have some tangible evidence of completion. It feels good to see something there in front of you indicating a job well done. Equally important, you will be able to prove to yourself that you were successful and your time wasn't wasted. The end result of a goal such as "Read Chapter 3" cannot be reliably assessed. Did you fully understand the words when you looked at the pages? A much better goal would be: "Read Chapter 3 and then write a summary from memory." The summary would indicate that you in fact did read the chapter and would allow you to evaluate your degree of understanding. Producing tangible evidence requires ACTIVE studying on your part, which research clearly suggests will produce superior learning and retention.

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goal.

To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as.....How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

Attainable: Can objectives pertaining to the goal be carried out? In what manner will they be carried out?

Your goal should be set by you rather than by someone else. You know best your strengths and weaknesses, and can use this information to maximize your chances of success.

When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals.

You can attain most any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Goals that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable, not because your goals shrink, but because you grow and expand to match them. When you list your goals you build your self-image. You see yourself as worthy of these goals, and develop the traits and personality that allow you to possess them.

Realistic: Is the goal possible to achieve? What are forces at play that will help or hinder the accomplishment of the goal? Are there any hindrances that are insurmountable?

Don't plan to do things if you are unlikely to follow through. Better to plan only a few things and be successful rather than many things and be unsuccessful. Success breeds success! Start small, with what you can do, experience the joys of meeting your goal, and only then gradually increase the amount of work that you ask of yourself. Setting goals in which every minute in the day is accounted for is unrealistic; unplanned events will crop up and wreak havoc with your schedule. Give yourself some flexibility.

To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be. But be sure that every goal represents substantial progress. A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished actually seem easy simply because they were a labor of love.

Your goal is probably realistic if you truly believe that it can be accomplished. Additional ways to know if your goal is realistic is to determine if you have accomplished anything similar in the past or ask yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this goal.

Tangible (and timely): When should the goal be completed?

A goal is tangible when you can experience it with one of the senses; that is, taste, touch, smell, sight or hearing. When your goal is tangible, or when you tie a tangible goal to an intangible goal, you have a better chance of making it specific and measurable and thus attainable.

Intangible goals are your goals for the internal changes required to reach more tangible goals. They are the personality characteristics and the behavior patterns you must develop to pave the way to success for reaching some other long-term goal. Since intangible goals are vital for improving your effectiveness, give close attention to tangible ways for measuring them.

Say when you plan to work at your goal, e.g., between 4:00 - 5:00 p.m., anything that will take you more than two hours to complete, break into smaller, more manageable chunks.