



Western
UNIVERSITY • CANADA

Setting Goals for Academic Success

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Warm-up

Imagine you are planning to have a big and challenging journey? A special multi-day canoe trip, a hiking of a major peak taking several days, the road trip of your life, a cruise across Atlantic, etc.

- When embarking on your journey, you'd rather have an objective/goal or not?

Agenda

- Why Goal Setting Matters
- The SMART Goal Framework
- Turning Goals into Action
- Navigating Common Challenges
- Creating Your Personalized Academic Plan
- Q&A and Wrap-up

Why goal-setting matters?

- It provides direction
- It boosts motivation
- It helps with time management
- It reduces stress

SMART Goals: Your GPS to Success

SMART: A simple, but powerful tool, to make your goals more effective.

S: Specific

M: Measurable

A: Achievable

R: Relevant

T: Time-bound

(Doran, 1981; 2014)

S for Specific

- **Be very clear**
- **Vague Goal:** "I want to do better in my Biology course"
- **Specific Goal:** "I will improve my grade in Bio 100 to at least 80"
- **Questions to consider:**
 - What exactly do I want to achieve?
 - Where, when, and with whom will this happen?
 - What resources do I need?

Activity (SMART)

- S: Write a specific goal for one of your courses or projects (We will work on other aspects, MART, to complete the SMART planning).

M for Measurable

- Not clearly measurable: "I'll study more for my psychology exam."
- Measurable: "I will complete three practice exams for Psychology 2000 and review all my lecture notes before the exam at least twice"

Questions to ask:

- How will I know when I've reached my goal?
- What are the key indicators of progress?
- What metrics can I use (e.g., number of pages read, hours studied, practice quizzes completed)?

Activity (SMART)

- M: Edit your goal to make it measurable

A for Achievable

- Keep It Realistic, not too hard, neither too easy
- Unachievable: "I will read and fully learn my Psychology book in one weekend"
- Achievable: "I will read the introduction and chapter 1-2 of my book over the first weekend in September"

Questions to consider:

1. Is this goal realistic given my schedule and resources?
2. Do I have the skills and knowledge to accomplish this?
3. What small steps can I take to build up to this?

Activity (SMART)

- A: If your goal is not achievable, edit it to make it achievable.

R for Relevant

Make It Meaningful: Why does it matter?

Irrelevant: "I will get 100 in a class that's not part of my program and that I don't need to prove I can get a 100"

Relevant: "I will dedicate extra study time to my core major classes to boost my GPA "

Questions to ask:

1. Does this goal align with my overall academic and career aspirations?
2. Why is this goal important to me?
3. Does this goal make sense for my current situation?

Activity (SMART)

- M: Does your goal really matter to you? If not, work on it to make it more relevant.

T for Time-bound

Set Deadlines: Soft and Hard or just Hard ones

- Vague: "I'll finish my group project"
- Time-bound: "I will have my portion of the group project completed by Friday, October 7th "

Questions to consider:

1. What is the deadline for this goal?
2. When do I need to start to accomplish this?
3. Is this a short-term, medium-term, or long-term goal?

Activity (SMART)

- T: Work on your goal to make it time-bound

From Goals to Actionable Plans

1. **Break it down:** Divide your big, intimidating goals into smaller, more manageable steps.
2. **Schedule it:** Use a planner, calendar, or app to block out time for each task.
3. **Identify resources:** What do you need? (a quiet study space, a tutor, an online article, a peer to review with, etc.).
4. **Create accountability:** Share your goals with a friend, a peer mentor, or a family member.

Some Common Challenges

Procrastination: It's not about being lazy, it's about avoiding a feeling. Break tasks into smaller pieces.

Feeling Overwhelmed: Focus on one small step at a time. Celebrate small wins.

Perfectionism: "Done is better than perfect." Don't let the fear of a less-than-perfect result stop you from starting.

Distractions: Turn off notifications, use website blockers, and set dedicated "focus time."

Creating Your Plan

Let's Practice/Do:

Your Personalized Academic Plan

Step 1: Choose a Goal. Think about an upcoming assignment, exam, or academic challenge.

Step 2: Use the SMART Framework. Write down your goal, ensuring it is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Step 3: Break it Down. List the first three actionable steps you can take to move toward your goal.

Step 4: Schedule it. Write these steps into your calendar for this week.

Summary

What do you remember from this workshop?
How are you going to use the workshop?

Some Additional Resources

Some online project management apps:

[Notion](#)

[Trello](#)

Q&A

Learning Development and Success

- [Learning Development and Success](#): Use resources available to you, drop-in for peer support, book an appointment, and more.