



How to write great goals for work and life

Strategic: Goal setting and planning

Successful people – people who are satisfied with their ability to create and sustain meaningful work – set ambitious but realistic goals. More importantly, they establish and follow effective strategies for achieving them.

This resource will help you to learn how to set goals and develop effective strategies that are achievable. This is an essential step in your career development and it's never too early to start.

In this activity, you will consider

- How to define and express the personal / career goals you have now;
- How to use SMART principles of goal setting to help develop goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely; and
- How to develop the strategies to achieve or refine these goals.

Step 1: Understanding the difference between goals and strategies

Setting career goals, or planning your next steps in your career journey, can be difficult.

This activity will help you to identify some of the ways in which you can think about career goals in different 'timeframes'. It will also help you to understand that the way you express the goal can influence how easily it can be achieved.

The first part of the activity asks you to consider the difference between a *goal*, which is something you want to 'be' or 'achieve', and a *strategy*, which is how you plan to achieve that goal. Both are important, but it's essential that you don't confuse one with the other.

Take each of the following statements and put it into either the 'goal' or the 'strategy' column of the table. If you can match any strategies to specific goals, put them next to each other on the table. Note that there is not an equal number of goals and strategies!

I want to:

1. Find full time work once I finish my course
2. Find out more about a role that I might enjoy doing
3. Achieve high marks in my current course/subjects
4. Be a champion ping-pong player
5. Improve my communication skills
6. Apply for as many positions as I can
7. Get a promotion at my current workplace
8. Attend two practice sessions per week at my local ping-pong centre

Goal	Strategy

Step 2: Applying the SMART principles of goal setting

SMART goals are goals that have strategies which are:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Relevant

Timely

In the previous activity, you will have discovered that only three of the statements seem to describe a strategy:

2. Find out more about a role that I might enjoy
6. Apply for as many jobs as I can
8. Attend two practice sessions per week at my local ping-pong centre

Strategies 6 and 8 match roughly with goals 1 and 4.

1. Get full time work once I finish my course
3. Be a champion ping-pong player

But are these SMART strategies?

Task 1

Return to the table and suggest strategies for the two goals that don't yet have them.

Task 2

Evaluate each strategy using the SMART principles of goal setting.

Hints:

- Strategy 8 is specific and measurable, but a clearer timeframe could be added: for example, "...for the next six months, and then review my progress".
- Strategy 6 could be improved: it is a specific 'action', but it is not measurable or 'time-bound'; it also doesn't specify that applications will be made only for relevant or attainable roles.

If a strategy doesn't meet each of the five SMART principles, suggest how it might be improved.

Strategy	Specific?	Measurable?	Attainable?	Relevant?	Timely?	How can this strategy be improved?

Step 3: Develop your own strategic goals

Use the model of a goal + strategy to identify at least three career, study or personal 'learning' goals and list the SMART strategies that will help to keep you on track to achieve them.

You can decide whether you want to focus on 'long term' or 'short term' goals' and your goals don't have to be limited to specific occupations. The important thing is that you identify specific SMART strategies to achieve each goal, whatever it might be. You can have more than one strategy per goal.

Your SMART goals

What kind of goal? (e.g. work, learning)	State your goal	Design your SMART strategy
Study	Score an A or B grade in my current courses	Next week, I will ask my lecturer or tutor for advice. I will break down the advice into steps, put these into a weekly schedule for the remainder of semester, and review my progress in three weeks' time.

Further discussion and reflection questions:

- Is it easier to think of strategies if the 'goal' is more short term, or if the goal itself is more general?
- What are some of the challenges or barriers you might face in implementing the strategies you have outlined?
- Is there a link between your 'learning' goals and work or 'career' goals?

Further reading and resources:

Health Direct (2019) Goal-Setting: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/goal-setting>

[itsallaboutyou.com](https://www.itsallaboutyou.com) has great resources for students including templates for goal setting and examples of SMART goals.

Latham, G and Locke E. (1991). Self-regulation through goal setting. *Organizational Behavior And Human Decision Processes*, 50, 212-247.

Note that the SMART principles of goal setting are found in many different sources and contexts (for example, in health, fitness, psychology, work, management and leadership). For SMART goals in your area of study or work, seek advice from careers counsellors or advisors.

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