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SMART Goals

(343) ★★★★★

How to Make Your Goals Achievable

The trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never score.

– Bill Copeland

Do you ever feel like you're working hard but not getting anywhere? Maybe you see little improvement in your skills or achievements when you reflect on the last five or 10 years. Or perhaps you struggle to see how you'll fulfil your ambitions during the next few years.

Many people spend their lives drifting from one job to another, or rushing around trying to get more done while actually accomplishing very little. Setting SMART goals means you can clarify your ideas, focus your efforts, use your time and resources productively, and increase your chances of achieving what you want in life.

In this article, we'll explore what SMART goals are, and we'll look at how you can use them to achieve your objectives.

What Does SMART Mean?
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SMART is an acronym that you can use to guide your goal setting.

Its criteria are commonly attributed to Peter Drucker's **Management by Objectives**  concept. The first known use of the term occurs in the November 1981 issue of *Management Review* by George T. Doran. Since then, Professor **Robert S. Rubin** (Saint Louis University) wrote about SMART in an article for The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. He stated that SMART has come to mean different things to different people, as shown below.

To make sure your goals are clear and reachable, each one should be:

- **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant).
- **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating).
- **A**chievable (agreed, attainable).
- **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **T**ime bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

Professor Rubin also notes that the definition of the SMART acronym may need updating to reflect the importance of efficacy and feedback. However, some authors have expanded it to include extra focus areas; SMARTER, for example, includes **E**valuated and **R**eviewed.

How to Use SMART

Paul J. Meyer, businessman, author and founder of **Success Motivation International**, describes the characteristics of SMART goals in his 2003 book, "**Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond**." We'll expand on his definitions to explore how to create, develop and achieve your goals:

1. Specific

Your goal should be clear and specific, otherwise you won't be able to focus your efforts or feel truly motivated to achieve it. When drafting your goal, try to answer the five "W" questions:

- **What** do I want to accomplish?
- **Why** is this goal important?
- **Who** is involved?

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- **Which** resources or limits are involved?

Example

Imagine that you are currently a marketing executive, and you'd like to become head of marketing. A specific goal could be, "I want to gain the skills and experience necessary to become head of marketing within my organization, so that I can build my career and lead a successful team."

2. Measurable

It's important to have measurable goals, so that you can track your progress and stay motivated. Assessing progress helps you to stay focused, meet your deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving your goal.

A measurable goal should address questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

Example

You might measure your goal of acquiring the skills to become head of marketing by determining that you will have completed the necessary training courses and gained the relevant experience within five years' time.

3. Achievable

Your goal also needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch your abilities but still remain possible. When you set an achievable goal, you may be able to identify previously overlooked opportunities or resources that can bring you closer to it.

An achievable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How can I accomplish this goal?
- How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors?

Example

You might need to ask yourself whether developing the skills required to become head of marketing is realistic, based on your existing experience and qualifications. For example, do you

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have the time to complete the required training effectively? Are the necessary resources available to you? Can you afford to do it?

Tip:

Beware setting goals that someone else has power over. For example, "Get that promotion!" depends on who else applies, and on the recruiter's decision. But "Get the experience and training that I need to be considered for that promotion" **is** entirely down to you.

4. Relevant

This step is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. We all need support and assistance in achieving our goals, but it's important to retain control over them. So, make sure that your plans drive everyone forward, but that you're still responsible for achieving your own goal.

A relevant goal can answer "yes" to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Am I the right person to reach this goal?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?

Example

You might want to gain the skills to become head of marketing within your organization, but is it the right time to undertake the required training, or work toward additional qualifications? Are you sure that you're the right person for the head of marketing role? Have you considered your spouse's goals? For example, if you want to start a family, would completing training in your free time make this more difficult?

5. Time-bound

Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work toward. This part of the SMART goal criteria helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals.

A time-bound goal will usually answer these questions:

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- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

Example

Gaining the skills to become head of marketing may require additional training or experience , as we mentioned earlier. How long will it take you to acquire these skills? Do you need further training, so that you're eligible for certain exams or qualifications? It's important to give yourself a realistic time frame for accomplishing the smaller goals that are necessary to achieving your final objective.

Benefits and Drawbacks

SMART is an effective tool that provides the clarity, focus and motivation you need to achieve your goals. It can also improve your ability to reach them by encouraging you to define your objectives and set a completion date. SMART goals are also easy to use by anyone, anywhere, without the need for specialist tools or training.

Various interpretations of SMART have meant that it can lose its effectiveness or be misunderstood. Some people believe that SMART doesn't work well for long-term goals because it lacks flexibility, while others suggest that it might stifle creativity. For more information on the potential weaknesses of SMART, see our article, [Locke's Goal-Setting Theory](#) .

Tip:

For other goal-setting resources, see our articles, [Golden Rules of Goal-Setting](#) , [Using Well-Formed Outcomes in Goal Setting](#) , [Personal Goal Setting](#) , and [Treasure Mapping](#) .

Key Points

SMART is a well-established tool that you can use to plan and achieve your goals. While there are a number of interpretations of the acronym's meaning, the most common one is that goals should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

When you use SMART, you can create clear, attainable and meaningful goals, and develop the motivation, action plan, and support needed to achieve them.

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Apply This to Your Life

Perhaps you've always dreamed of traveling around the world, but it's never happened. Maybe you tell yourself it's because you don't have the time or the money, and you'll think about it next year.

Try setting SMART goals to help make your travel plans specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. You might find that the real reason you haven't traveled is because your plans have been too vague or unrealistic. Think about how you can adjust your vision and rephrase it as a SMART goal, so that you can make your dream come true.

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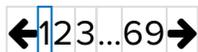


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