

Developing SMART Goals

SMART is an acronym to help with realistic goal-setting. Use it as a tool to develop goals for yourself—they could be goals for your career, your studies at Walden, or even your personal life.

This resource includes the SMART goal criteria, example goals, and a template for you to develop your own academic, professional, and personal SMART goals.

SMART Goal Criteria

S is for *specific*.

The more specificity you bring to your goal, the clearer it is.

- Vague goal: “I want to advance in my company.” How exactly would you like to advance—in terms of money or title? What position would you like to hold?
- More specific goal: “I want to advance to the position of senior sales manager.”

M is for *measurable*.

You must be able to track your progress toward the goal and understand when you have attained it. Measurability allows for that.

- Not measurable: “Get better at public speaking.”
- Measurable *and* specific: “Give one class lecture without stuttering.” If you do not stutter during the class, you know you have achieved the goal.

A is for *achievable or attainable*.

One tendency with goal setting is to aim too high, but that approach can set goals beyond our reach.

- Likely not achievable: “Earn my Doctor of Nursing Practice degree within 1 year of starting.” This goal is not feasible due to workload and the established timeline of the program. Likewise, “Become an executive chef in a three-star restaurant within 2 years” is not likely to happen if you are currently a dishwasher with no culinary training. So... be conservative when determining what is actually achievable.

R is for *relevant*.

This criterion ensures that the goal is important to you right now, at this point in your life.

- For instance, if your goal is “Start my own home health care business by the end of the year,” consider what else is going on in your life. What other goals are you working toward? How does this goal help or hinder those? Perhaps you have just bought a house, which has reduced your finances; it might not make sense to invest in a business at this point as well.

T is for *timely or time-bound*.

Every goal must include a deadline or timeframe. Otherwise, why would you ever start it? The procrastinator in you might just keep waiting and waiting and never take action.

- When determining an appropriate goal timeframe, ask yourself how long you need to realistically complete the goal. This date gives you the end point, but it should also spark a desire to achieve mini-goals along the way to attaining the larger goal.

Example Goals

The key to an effective goal is to combine all of these criteria, so that your goal is *specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely* altogether. Let's look at two examples to see if they fit **all** of the SMART criteria.

Example Goal 1

By a PhD in Public Health student: *To improve my grammar, I will complete the Sentence Structure Basics and Verbs modules in the Writing Center with a 90% score within 6 months.*

- **Is it specific?** Yes. The student includes the names of the modules and where to find them, rather than just "modules."
- **Is it measurable?** Yes. The student needs to receive a certain score.
- **Is it achievable?** Yes. The student has given herself adequate time, and she is not expecting perfection. She is giving herself some leeway in the score.
- **Is it relevant?** Yes. The student is working toward a PhD in Public Health degree, and she will eventually write a dissertation. For a dissertation, proper grammar is especially important, making the goal relevant to the student's situation.
- **Is it timely?** Yes. The student has attached a timeframe of 6 months to this goal.

Example Goal 2

By an MS in Education student who is also a middle-school teacher: *I will attend two professional development workshops.*

- **Is it specific?** No. The student has listed professional development workshops in general but not which ones.
- **Is it measurable?** Yes. The student has indicated *two* workshops. When two have been attended, she knows the goal is completed.
- **Is it achievable?** Yes. It is reasonable that the student has access to professional development workshops as a teacher.
- **Is it relevant?** Sort of. Professional development is certainly relevant to the teaching occupation, but without specificity, the relevance is unclear.
- **Is it timely?** No. There is no deadline or timing information within the goal to indicate when it should take place.

Here is how the student could revise this goal to be more specific, relevant, and time-bound: *To better understand cultural implications in my classroom, I will attend two professional development workshops on diversity presented by the city of Atlanta, Georgia, during the summer of 2017.*

SMART Goals Template

Use the following template when creating your academic, professional, or personal goals. Evaluate your original goal based on each one of the SMART criteria, and then revise if needed.

My SMART Goals

Goal 1: [Type rough draft of goal here.]

- Is it specific?
- Is it measurable?
- Is it achievable?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it timely?

Revised Goal 1: [Type a revision, incorporating any SMART criteria missing from the rough draft.]

Goal 2: [Type rough draft of goal here.]

- Is it specific?
- Is it measurable?
- Is it achievable?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it timely?

Revised Goal 2: [Type a revision, incorporating any SMART criteria missing from the rough draft.]

Goal 3: [Type rough draft of goal here.]

- Is it specific?
- Is it measurable?
- Is it achievable?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it timely?

Revised Goal 3: [Type a revision, incorporating any SMART criteria missing from the rough draft.]