

**FAST FACTS**

Setting and Reaching Academic Goals

Goal-setting means consciously choosing the events you want to happen in the days, weeks and years ahead of you. Why should you want to set goals? Goals provide structure and order in your life, allowing you to focus on certain critical events and ignoring the less important ones. Careful planning is needed, however, in order to attain the goals you set. If you don't plan well you might find yourself making arbitrary, random decisions about what to tackle and when.

Formulating Your Goals

Goals can be either short- or long-term in nature. For example, one of your short-term goals might be for you to earn an "A" in Psychology this semester, while a long-term goal might be to graduate with a GPA of 3.75 or higher.

When formulating short- and long-term goals:

- State your goals in writing. Writing crystallizes your thoughts and helps keep you focused on the task at hand.
- State your goals in positive rather than negative terms. In other words, instead of saying, "I don't want to flunk Organic Chemistry this semester," put it this way instead: "I want to get a 'B' or better in Organic Chem." Thinking positively will dramatically improve your performance in all aspects of life.
- Make goals attainable. Setting a goal such as "graduating in seven semesters with a 4.00" may be commendably ambitious, but perhaps not realistic or even necessary.
- Make your goals compatible with your personality and life-style. If you like to stay up late Friday nights with your friends, will you really be able to arise at 7:00 a.m. Saturday to study for a statistics exam? If not, are you really going to be able to meet your goal of earning an "A" in that class this semester? You might find that you need to change your behavior in some respects to attain an end you desire.
- Make goals personal. Aspiring to someone else's goals may not be very meaningful or altogether successful. It's unlikely that you'll ever really accomplish a goal that you can't truly make your own.

Setting and Reaching Academic Goals

Three Steps to Successful Goal Planning

1. Identify your short- and long-term goals, putting them in writing. What do you want to accomplish in school this semester? What was troubling about last semester that you would like to fix? What do you want to be doing five years from now? Elaborate on your goals in detail.
2. Generate statements for each goal that clearly describe the circumstances that would convince you and others that you've fulfilled that goal. For instance, you'll definitely know that you've achieved your goal of being admitted to grad school when you have that acceptance letter in hand. Put these specifications in writing as well.
3. Keep your list handy for future reference. As time goes by, periodically review the list and evaluate your performance by determining whether you're achieving your goals based on the conditions you described.

Making Decisions

All aspects of goal setting—articulating a goal, defining objectives, etc.—require decision-making. To attain your academic goals, you need to know how to make decisions well.

A number of strategies are available to you when it's time to make an important decision. You can:

- follow an accepted rule (go by the book);

- use a rational process (think about what the expected consequences of your action will be);
- act to gain social approval (decide on the basis of what relevant people value);
- follow your intuition (decide on the basis of how you feel);
- arrange a compromise (decide on the basis of what will be of benefit to you and someone else); or
- consult an expert (decide on the basis of another person's recommendation).

Whether you realize it or not, you follow one or more of these strategies whenever you make a decision; so why not make full use of your conscientious options? Therefore, whenever you make an important decision:

1. Clarify your intentions and understand your value system. What do you want to achieve? What do you think is right?
2. Determine what your goals are.
3. Gather all necessary, relevant information.
4. Make a decision using one or more of the above strategies.
5. Evaluate that decision. What will be the consequences if you exercise plan A as opposed to plan B? Are there any negative consequences that you can see might be a result of the actions you choose?

Maintain Perspective

Try to look at the total picture and put things in perspective. Don't let the past trip you up. If you earned poor grades last semester, don't let that negative experience keep you from doing better this semester.

Imagery can be a powerful tool for success. Visualize yourself reaching your goal. Imagine the day when you are walking up to the stage to receive your diploma. Each milestone you pass in the meantime brings you closer to that moment.

Be specific when planning your intentions. Instead of thinking to yourself, "I need to study sometime soon" say something like, "I'll study physics for two hours each Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning."



Carnegie Mellon
ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

412/268-6878
Cyert Hall, Suite B5
www.cmu.edu/academic-development