

SMART Goals

SMART-goals. When people formulate goals, they often make a number of mistakes. The mistakes inhibit successful achievement of those goals. Wrong goals are, for example, vague: it is unclear when they are achieved, or they are phrased in a too general way. There is an easy rule of thumb to use to formulate your goals such that you avoid dysfunctional goals, and it's the acronym SMART.

These letters stand for:

Specific: a goal has to be Specific. A SMART goal is detailed, focused and clearly stated.

Everyone reading the goal should know exactly what you want to achieve. It is wrong to say, for example, "I want to improve my statistics", or "I want to write nicer". Improved versions would be "I want to understand the difference between an independent-samples t-test and a matched-pairs t-test", or "I want to be able to formulate proper transitions between paragraphs". The criterion of specificity is related to the next one: measurability.

Measurable: a goal has to be measurable. This means that it has to be specific, but you also have to be able to measure whether you achieved the goal. Measurable goals are quantifiable, meaning the results are observable and measurable. Being "better" is ambiguous—how do you know if you are "better?" Simple examples of measurable goals are, "I want to say something useful in at least 70% of the tutorials in the next period", or "I want to do an elective about recreational drug use".

Acceptable: Acceptable goals can be achieved based on your skills, resources and area of practice. This criterion is applicable mostly in situations where goals can be unacceptable. The goals you create will most likely be about self-actualisation/self-improvement, so they will probably not be unacceptable to anybody.

Realistic: the challenges that work best are those that are not too easy and not too hard. This is also true for goals. Do not set goals that you cannot achieve. Goals that are very easy to achieve, *are* realistic of course; just not very useful. The question you can ask is: Can you achieve these goals? Is it doable? An unrealistic goal could be: I want to make 200 free throw shots in one game. A realistic goal could be: I want to make 8 out of 10 of the free throw shots that I attempt. The R from SMART could also be defined as Relevant. Relevant goals are applicable to your current role and clearly linked to your key role responsibilities.

Time bound: a common mistake is to not bind your goal to a time. The intrinsic risk is that you don't evaluate whether you achieved your goal, and therefore, you don't adjust your actions accordingly. It's possible that the need for some goals disappears; or some goals can gain in urgency. Therefore, it is important to build in moments where you evaluate whether or not you achieved your goal.

Exercise: How to continue – SMART goals

1. Draft of your goal

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____

Look back at the SMART checklist. Re-read your draft goal and tick of each component if they appear in your goal.

Specific	<input type="checkbox"/>
Measurable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Realistic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time-bound	<input type="checkbox"/>

Revise your goal if necessary. Final goal:

S	_____
M	_____
A	_____
R	_____
T	_____

Exercise: How to continue – make your learning action plan!

(Sub) goal	Action	Deadline	Reward
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Example of creating a SMART goal:

SMART goal draft:

I want to start applying distributed practice in my learning.

Look back at the SMART checklist. Re-read your draft goal and tick of each component if they appear in your goal.

Specific	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Measurable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acceptable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Realistic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Time-bound	<input type="checkbox"/>

Final goal:

S	I want to apply distributed practice in my learning
M	By repeating previous tasks for 15 minutes after preparing the next task
A	
R	I will add these 15 minutes to my planning for each week
T	And I will do this in the upcoming period