

## Setting and Maintaining Short-term Goals

Setting goals for your college coursework will help you stay on task, will help you motivate yourself, and will help you stay on course when things get stressful and you are facing multiple deadlines in multiple courses. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

1. Formulate specific goals. Your goals should be written out in very specific and positive terms. Instead of saying “my goal is to not fail my math class”, which is a negative statement, your goal should instead provide a more specific and positive statement, “I want to make a B or better in my math class”. Positive thinking goes a long way towards improving performance.
2. Goals should be realistic and attainable. If you failed your math course last semester, setting a goal of making an A in your math class is probably not too realistic. Instead, a more realistic goal might be “I want to improve my performance in my math class and earn a minimum grade of C”. Or, if your goal is to get up every morning and study before you go to work or class and you are not a morning person, then the goal of getting up early is probably not realistic for you. So, setting realistic and attainable goals are important if you want to be successful at achieving them.
3. Goals should be set to be achieved in a realistic timeline. Every goal you set for yourself should be set to occur within a specific time frame i.e. by week, month, year, etc. Setting specific and realistic goals to occur by specific deadline will help you avoid procrastination which may result in not getting the work accomplished. Thus, goals should include a specific deadline for achievement.
4. Set goals to complement your personal strengths. It is important that your goals are compatible with your personality and your lifestyle. Goals should be your own and not the goals of others. Spend some time thinking about what you do well and formulate goals that complement your strengths. If you have weaknesses that you need to compensate for, identify those weaknesses so that the resources or supports that you identify to help you achieve your goals will help you overcome those weaknesses. Setting goals that are too challenging will lead to failure to achieve the goal.
5. Goals should be measurable. A goal should be a plan that includes how you plan to achieve it. Once your goal is stated, measures should be included that will help you assess if you are making progress. For instance, if your goal is to complete your math homework by Thursday night so that you can take your exam on Friday, measures that will help you determine if you are on track might be reading the text material, accomplishing the homework practice on

time, taking a self-test, meeting with a tutor, etc. Building into your plan a way to measure whether you are on track will help you stay on track.

You should ask yourself the following questions when creating a plan for your goal:

- ✓ Is the goal stated in specific terms and do you have a deadline for achieving it?
- ✓ Have you included a way to check if you are on track? Have you defined steps or benchmarks along the way to let you know you are making positive progress?
- ✓ Have you included a way to hold yourself accountable when you don't achieve a benchmark? That is, what will you change if you are getting off-track?
- ✓ Do you have a plan for when things don't work out like you planned? Do you have a back-up plan or a strategy you will use that will allow you to adjust when unexpected change happens? Be careful not to be too strict with yourself when you get off-track, as being too strict can be counter-productive.
- ✓ Do you have a reward built in to your plan for when you achieve your goal? When you do something right, when you meet your goals, it is important to pat yourself on the back and reward yourself for staying on track. Building in a reward for yourself will help your motivation and will encourage you to continue making progress.

Once you have your goals set, you should monitor your progress and revisit your goals periodically to make sure you are on track and don't need to make adjustments. So, every one or two weeks, you should look at your goals and ask yourself the following types of questions:

- Are you sticking to your plan?
- Are there ways you can improve your plan?
- Have you had to use your back-up plan?
- If you had to use your back-up plan, did it work? If not, why not?
- Do you need to modify your plan? In what ways?
- Has the plan you created met your expectations? If not, why not?
- What can you do to improve your results?