

Smart Objectives

Specific:

Provide enough detail so that there is no indecision as to what exactly you should be doing when the time comes to do it. A goal of: "Study biology" is poor. Should you be reading your text? If so, what pages? Or should you be looking over your lecture notes? A much better goal would be: "Read pp. 12 - 35 in biology text, write questions in the margin of text, and practice answering those questions after reading."

Measurable:

Your goal should be such that when you are through you have some tangible evidence of completion. It feels good to see something there in front of you indicating a job well done. Equally important, you will be able to prove to yourself that you were successful and your time wasn't wasted. The end result of a goal such as "Read Chapter 3" cannot be reliably assessed. Did you fully understand the words when you looked at the pages? A much better goal would be: "Read Chapter 3 and then write a summary from memory." The summary would indicate that you in fact did read the chapter and would allow you to evaluate your degree of understanding. Producing tangible evidence requires ACTIVE studying on your part, which research clearly suggests will produce superior learning and retention.

Attainable / Acceptable:

Your goal should be set by you rather than by someone else. You know best your strengths and weaknesses, and can use this information to maximize your chances of success.

Realistic / Reasonable:

Don't plan to do things if you are unlikely to follow through. Better to plan only a few things and be successful rather than many things and be unsuccessful. Success breeds success! Start small, with what you can do, experience the joys of meeting your goal, and only then gradually increase the amount of work that you ask of yourself. Setting goals in which every minute in the day is accounted for is unrealistic; unplanned events will crop up and wreak havoc with your schedule. Give yourself some flexibility.

Time frame:

Say when you plan to work at your goal, e.g., between 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. Anything that will take you more than two hours to complete, break into smaller, more manageable chunks.