

Goal Setting & Action Planning

Introduction to this workbook

Understanding goal setting and action planning can be really helpful.

It can help you

- ✓ Appreciate the pros and cons of setting goals for the future
- ✓ Create a goal for yourself that works for you
- ✓ Check your goal before you put effort into achieving it
- ✓ Feel more motivated to take action
- ✓ Make progress towards something that's important to you

In this workbook we're going to learn about goal setting, and follow a step by step guide to create a great goal. Finally, we'll learn how to build an action plan that helps you take action and make your goal happen.

Step 1: Learn about goal setting

Setting a goal for what you want to achieve isn't the only way to 'do' careers stuff. There are plenty of people out there that are happy with their career and would say that they never had a 'goal' in mind. Let's look at the pros and cons of goal setting:

Pros	Cons
<p>Increases motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A vision of what you're aiming for can make it feel more do-able. It's also easier to imagine what it'll be like when you achieve it. <p>Increases your focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You're more likely to notice opportunities that help you reach your goal if you're clear about what it is. <p>Makes best use of limited time or resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a clear, well-made goal means you can focus your time and energy on what really matters. <p>Increases confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You're more likely to feel like you're in control if you have a plan. <p>Makes a good outcome more likely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-made goal means that you're more likely to be happy with where you end up, because you've already thought about the end result. 	<p>Could be restrictive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It might be that having a clear goal means that you're unwilling to adapt to unanticipated options or events. <p>Doesn't guarantee a good outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just having a goal doesn't make good stuff happen. You have to make sure it's thought-through, do something about it, and take action to adapt or revisit your goal if things change.

So, although it's not the only way to go, the pros generally outweigh the cons!

If you can set a good goal and remind yourself that it's OK to adapt or be flexible then you're well on your way to a good result.

Step 2: Generate a goal

Give yourself a few minutes to think deeply.

1. Sit back, turn off distractions (maybe even close your eyes).
2. Take a few deep breaths.
3. Ask yourself the question: What do you want to happen for your career?

Let thoughts come and go, until you get to something which 'clicks' – something that feels like the right answer to that question. It might be a short term, medium term or long-term goal:

- short term goal e.g. 'I want to get into a good college or sixth form to do my A-Levels'
- medium term goal e.g. 'I want to study Engineering at university'
- long term goal e.g. 'I want to make things that improve other people's lives'

IMPORTANT! Make sure that the goal is POSITIVE – what you want to happen, not what you want to avoid. For example, 'I want to get into a good job...' rather than 'I want to leave school'!

What's your starting goal?

Use this answer as the basis for the next steps. It doesn't matter if you're not 100% sure about your goal right now – you can always do the process again and you'll gain familiarity with it each time you do.

Step 3: Learn about SMART goals

Next, we're going to make sure your goal is 'SMART'. You may have come across this acronym before – it's used for goals, targets or even actions on a to do list.

Specific - add details and make it less vague

*e.g. I want a good job, making **medical equipment** that improves **patients'** lives.*

Measurable – add numbers so you can check to what extent you've achieved your goal

*e.g. I want to **earn £100,000 a year** making medical equipment that improves patients' lives.*

If your goal relates to something that isn't numerical (like a feeling), you could try using a scale from 1-10. For example 'I want to rate my confidence in talking to people at 7/10'.

Achievable – are you going to be able to do this? If not, adjust

*e.g. I want to **earn enough to get my own place**, making medical equipment that improves patients' lives.*

Relevant – does this matter? Does it feel important and relevant to you right now? If not, adjust

*e.g. I want to **be working and** earn enough to get my own place, **having learnt to make** medical equipment that improves patients' lives.*

Time-sensitive - when is this going to happen? Check that this is still achievable

*e.g. **In four years**, I want to be working and earn enough to get my own place, having learnt to make medical equipment that improves patients' lives.*

You might need to do some research to see how long it usually takes to get to where you want to be.

Step 4: Build your SMART goal

Your starting goal

Specific - add details and make it less vague

Measurable – add numbers so you can check to what extent you’ve achieved your goal

Achievable – are you going to be able to do this? If not, adjust

Relevant – does this matter? Does it feel important and relevant to you right now? If not, adjust

Time-sensitive - when is this going to happen? Check that this is still achievable

Step 6: Think your goal all the way through

With your SMARTened goal, it's time to think the whole process through, checking the outcome of the goal before you put time and effort into achieving it. This approach draws on a theory of how to create 'well-formed outcomes'¹.

We're going to do this with a series of prompt questions, imagining that you've achieved your goal. After thinking for a moment about each question, write your thoughts in the box adjacent.

Imagine you've achieved your goal...

1. What do you notice that's different?	
2. Really imagine that you're there- what do you see, hear, feel, taste or smell?	
3. Having achieved your goal, how do you feel?	
4. Having achieved your goal, what do you think about your achievement?	
5. What have you done to achieve this? What specifically?	
6. Did you achieve this by yourself? If not, who else has been involved? What did you ask them to do?	
7. What resources did you need to achieve this goal (e.g. time, money, information, equipment)?	
8. What will your loved ones get from this?	
9. What might you have to give up or lose to achieve it?	
10. How might it impact your daily routine?	
Finally, on a scale of 1-10 how much do you want to make your goal a reality?	

If it's a 10

It sounds like you're really motivated after thinking this through – time to build an action plan!

If it's high, but less than 10

What would need to be different to make it a 10? Is that something within your control? If so, try making an adjustment to your goal or alternatively, just extra steps on your action plan.

If it's not something you can control, ask yourself if it would affect any goal you came up with right now? If yes, it might be an immovable external factor that you might need to accept for now. If it wouldn't affect a different goal, you could try generating a different goal without that factor. Which are you more motivated to achieve? If a '10' isn't possible, but the score is still high, it's time to build your action plan.

If it's not that high

It sounds like you might not want this! Think about what you could change about your goal to make it more appealing, or you could even try starting the process again.

Step 7: Learn about action plans

A great action plan is the difference between having a great goal and achieving a great goal.

Compare these two action plans? Which one do you think is better, and why?

Both are for the same goal: 'To get MMM in my BTEC Extended Diploma next summer'

What	When	Done
Learn everything on the course	By the exam	
Get really good at revision	By the exam	
Never miss a class	By the exam	
Improve my maths	By the exam	

What	When	Done
Read over last week's homework – check I understand mistakes	Tonight	✓
Talk to mum and figure out at least 5 things that impact my grades	Tuesday eve	✓
Ask my teacher for 10-minute chat to hear their thoughts on how I can improve	Wednesday after class	✓
Spend recommended time on this week's homework	Saturday morning – start at 9	✓

We'd say that the second action plan is better, because:

- ✓ Tasks are smaller, more immediate and feel more do-able
- ✓ Tasks are SMART
- ✓ It's getting done!

Do-able steps

Big tasks can feel demotivating. Make sure that your action plan has **really do-able steps**. This makes it more likely that you start ticking them off and keep making, progress.

Focus on tasks for the next few days or weeks.

After you've achieved this day or week's tasks, you can make a plan for the next day or week. It's a lot more motivating to have four tasks, get them ticked off, and then add four more, than to have 20 tasks and after day one feel like you've hardly made progress. Just make sure you're aware of any longer-term deadlines that might need some steps to be taken now.

Reward yourself

Find ways to reward yourself for getting your tasks done. Positive reinforcement (even from yourself) makes it more likely that you'll keep going.

Tell someone what you want to get done

If you can, show someone your action plan – they'll understand what you're trying to do, and hopefully offer some support. More than just that, the act of telling someone else what you're going to do makes it more likely that you'll do it.

Step 8: Build your own great action plan

You don't have to use our template action plan. Alternatives that might work better for you include:

- ✓ A to-do list app on your phone
- ✓ A pen and paper to do list you've made yourself
- ✓ The [online action plan tool at Careerpilot](#) (free, just need to register)
- ✓ An action plan tool in another piece of software your school or college uses

Whatever you use, three aspects are key:

- Writing what you intend to do
- When you're going to do it
- A box to tick when it's done

SMART actions

To make your action plan as successful as possible check that each action is as SMART as it can be:

Specific	Is it really clear about what exactly you're going to do?
Measurable	Are you going to be able to check if it's done or measure how far along you are?
Achievable	Is this easy to do ? If it looks pretty challenging, break it down into easier individual steps.
Relevant	Does this relate to the goal at the top? If not, you may have gone off on a tangent – keep the eye on the prize!
Time-sensitive	Make sure you fill in the when column.

OK – time to build that plan and make things happen! Try using our template on the next page...

¹The 'well-formed outcome' construct has origins in neuro-linguistic programming, particularly the work of Dilts, R., J. Grinder, R. Bandler, and J. DeLozier (1980). It was adapted for use in FE and secondary education settings by Trevor Day & Paul Tosey (2011).

Action plan

My goal:

--

What I'm going to do	When I'm going to do it	Tick when it's done