

TU Dublin Student Counselling Service

GOAL-SETTING AND MOTIVATION

A HOW-TO GUIDE



Welcome!



ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The purpose of this booklet is to support you to understand more about goals and goal-setting; what we mean by “goals” and the best way to set goals in order to achieve them.

This booklet also contains information about motivation and how to build motivation. This is a very important part of goal-setting.

We hope that this booklet will be useful for you in learning more about this topic.

Why set goals?

Goals provide a framework for action and direction. They help identify what needs to be done, by when, and why. Goal setting is the process of deciding on achievable, meaningful steps that will support someone to achieve those goals.

Setting goals can also energise performance via building motivation, and appropriate goal-setting can support people to persist in activities over time.

Goal-setting also helps to direct people’s attention to positive behaviours and away from behaviours which are negative or detrimental to the person’s overall achievement.



STEP ONE:

CHOOSE YOUR GOALS



In order to make a goal-setting plan, you need to know what you're working towards and choose some goals! But how do you know which goals to choose? First, have a think about your life right now. Start with what you're happy with. What's working well in your life? Then, think about what's not working well. What do you want to build on or improve?

Once you've thought about what isn't working well, ask yourself: what do I want to achieve? What is it that I want to change? Where do I want to be in 5 years? The answers to these questions form a good foundation for choosing goals. Focus on what you really want in your life; this could be anything from having more fun, travelling more, to having a certain work environment.

Remember, at this point in the process, you're choosing long-term goals. This is the ultimate thing that you want to achieve.

Write your Long-Term Goals here:



STEP TWO: SMART GOALS

The next step of the goal-setting process is to choose incremental goals. These form stepping-stones that will help you to achieve your long-term goals. Your incremental goals should be SMART - that is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound. This will help you to pick realistic goals, track your progress, and support motivation.



Specific: When setting a goal, be specific about what you want to accomplish. Consider your goal in quantifiable terms by asking yourself the following questions: What do I want to accomplish? What actions will I need to take? It might also be useful to consider the answers to popular to the popular ‘w’ questions: “What,” “Who,” “Where,” “When,” “Which” and “Why.”



Measurable: Include some way to measure your progress in completing a goal. For example, if your goal is to write a section of your assignment, you could include a word count. Your goal will then be “I will write 500 words in my assignment.” This will help you to measure your progress in achieving your long-term goal.



Achievable: This focuses on what you can do to make your goal attainable. Bear in mind that this may require developing new skills and changing your mindset. Think about:

- How are you going to accomplish this?
- Do you have the tools/skills needed?
- If not, how could you address that?



Relevant: This is the point in the process where you give yourself a reality check. Your goal should be something you can achieve, instead of something aspirational or unlikely. A relevant goal can answer “yes” to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Do I need to do this now?
- Can I do this without exhausting myself, or missing out on something else I’d really like to do?



Time-Bound: Making sure you have enough time to work on your goal is crucial, but you also want to avoid giving yourself too much time, as this can lead to difficulty with motivation. You also might be exhausted at the end of the time allotment. Think about how much time you realistically need to complete your goal. Then, remember to think about the other things you need to do - you need to eat, rest, and relax as well.



STEP TWO: SMART GOALS

Here is an example of how to make a goal SMART: “I’ll work on my assignment at the weekend” = “I will write 500 words of the assignment on Saturday from 2pm - 4pm, and then another 500 from 3pm - 5pm on Sunday.”

Review your long-term goals, and then think of with some incremental goals that will help you achieve them. Write down your incremental goals, using the SMART system, here:



STEP THREE: MOTIVATION



Motivation - What is it anyway?

Motivation has many meanings. The simplest is simply wanting something - wanting something to be different, wanting to change something or wanting to have something. Usually, when people say motivation, they mean the thing that describes why they do something. Motivation is the driving force behind human actions. It is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviours.

There are two types of motivation:

- **Extrinsic motivation** refers to external factors that drive you toward a goal. These can be things like wages, getting good grades, etc.
- **Intrinsic motivation** refers to internal factors that encourage you. This might be working in an area that you're passionate about or doing something that you really enjoy.

Motivation has three parts: **Activation**, **Persistence** and **Intensity**

- **Activation** is the decision to initiate a behaviour. An example of activation would be enrolling in a course in order to earn your degree.
- **Persistence** is the continued effort toward a goal even though obstacles may exist. An example of persistence would be showing up for class even though you are tired.
- **Intensity** is the concentration and vigour that goes into pursuing a goal. For example, a student might not attend classes or study (minimal intensity), while another student studies regularly, participates in classroom discussions, and so on (greater intensity).

When you feel unmotivated, it's a good idea to try to identify which one of these three you're having trouble with. That will point you in the right direction when trying to build motivation.

Think back to the last time you lost motivation in pursuit of a goal; was your motivation intrinsic or extrinsic? Which of the three parts of motivation did you struggle with?





What Motivates You?

Everyone responds differently to different kinds of motivators. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you work harder when there's a reward at stake?
- Do you find satisfaction in the act of achieving your objectives?
- Do you work better if you have complete control over how you do the work?
- Do you work to impress your peers?
- Do you wish to be an expert in your field?
- Do you like inspiring others to reach their potential?

Some of these might be more important to you than others. It's a good idea to rank your answers to these questions; this will give you an idea of what motivates you best.

Once you know that, you can set goals aligned with those motivators.

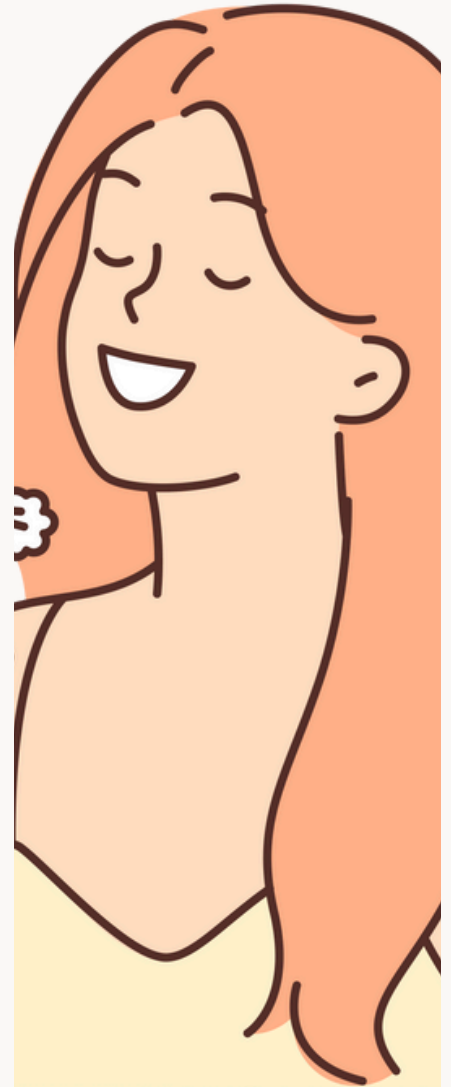
What motivates you? Answer the questions above and see what you find. Are your answers pointing towards intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?



How to Build Motivation

1. **Set Realistic Goals.** Use the SMART system to ensure that your goals are achievable and manageable.

2. **Recognise Your Efforts:** Praising ability rather than efforts can decrease motivation. When someone achieves a high score on a test, praising them by saying "You're so smart!" actually makes them more likely to give up in the future when they encounter a problem that is very difficult. Why? Research suggest that stressing innate ability (intelligence, appearance, etc.,) leads people to hold a fixed view or mindset of their traits and characteristics. Then, if they don't do as well as they expected on something connected to that ability, they can start to doubt their own personal characteristics. This decreases motivation. Instead, praising the effort and process that went into solving the problem ("I worked really hard on that,") helps people see their abilities as malleable. Instead of believing that they are either smart or dumb, they view themselves as able to improve through effort and hard work. This can increase intrinsic motivation



3. **Use External Incentives Carefully.** If someone already enjoys doing something, then it stands to reason that rewarding them for the behaviour would make them like it even more, right? In many cases, the answer is actually no. Giving incentives for activities that people are already driven to perform can sometimes impair motivation. Incentives can work well to increase motivation to engage in an activity that is otherwise unappealing, but over-dependence upon such rewards might actually end up decreasing motivation in some cases. So, remember:

- Use extrinsic rewards sparingly.
- Rewards can be effective if you truly have no intrinsic interest in the activity.
- If you're trying something new, give yourself an extrinsic reward during the initial learning period, but phase out these rewards as you become more interested in the activity.



How to Build Motivation



4. **Leverage Your Social Support.** The mere presence of people increases motivation, magnifying what you do. Additionally, having other people around may help you set expectations for performance, provide resources, join you (e.g., study groups), and can also serve as role models. Try working on your goals with friends; set up a study group, or work on a project together, research something you're both interested in, etc. Even the simple act of telling your friend that you're going to study, and then telling them about it afterwards, can help with increasing motivation.

5. **Visualise the Process Not the Outcome:** One of the most common tips for getting motivated is to simply visualise success, however, research suggests that this might be counterproductive. The problem is that people often visualise themselves achieving their goals, but skip over visualising all the effort that goes into making those goals a reality. So what does work?

- Instead of imagining yourself suddenly successful, imagine all the steps it will take to achieve that success.
- Think about what challenges you might face. Knowing what you might encounter can make it easier to deal with when the time comes.
- What can you do to overcome those challenges? Try to plan ahead as much as possible. This will leave you better prepared to overcome any difficulties you might face.

Some Other Tips:

- **Worst-first:** Do the task that you're dreading first. This way, everything else seems easier.
- Or **Use Momentum:** Start your work with the task that you most like or find fun. This will help to energise you, and you can use that energy for other tasks.
- Schedule time once a week to **analyse your progress** and accomplishments. Review what has and hasn't worked, and make adjustments along the way.
- **Ask for feedback** on your progress from others.
- Always **break difficult or long tasks down** into more manageable, easier to achieve chunks
- **Use rewards!** Have you achieved a goal? Great! Mark the occasion with something you find rewarding.
- **Rest.** Sometimes our bodies and minds just need a break. Give yourself a day off to just rest and do nothing.



How to Build Motivation

How can you build motivation to achieve your incremental goals? Review your earlier work around difficulties with motivation - what can you change?



PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

What are your Long-Term Goals?

What are your Incremental Goals?

What can you do to motivate yourself?



A DEDICATED

NOTES SPACE

