SMART

GOAL-SETTING FRAMEWORK

How to Develop a SMART Goal

Turn a vague idea into a goal that’s Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

WHY STRUCTURE MATTERS

“I want to get better at something” is rarely enough to make real progress.

Structure

Clarity

Direction

Effective goals need all three. Without them, goals are easy to forget, ignore or abandon. SMART builds them in — so a goal becomes **concrete and actionable** instead of vague and overwhelming.

THE FRAMEWORK

Five tests every goal should pass

S

Specific

What exactly will I do?

M

Measurable

How will I know I've succeeded?

A

Attainable

Is it realistic for me?

R

Relevant

Why does it matter?

T

Time-Bound

When will it be done?

STEP 1



CLEAR OBJECTIVE

What do I want to improve, achieve or change?

RAW IDEAS USUALLY SOUND BROAD

“I want to be healthier.”

“I want to improve my grades.”

“I want to grow my small business.”

“I want to strengthen my marketing skills.”

That’s your **raw idea** — not refined yet. The SMART framework turns it into a clear action plan.

STEP 2



SPECIFIC

Who, what, when, where and how?

Replace a vague statement with clarity. Define the exact behavior or outcome you want.

ASK YOURSELF

- What exactly am I trying to achieve?
- What resources or skills are involved?
- Who else, if anyone, is part of it?
- What actions will I take?

INSTEAD OF

“I want to get better at marketing.”

TRY

“I want to improve my social media analytics skills so I can run more effective campaigns.”

STEP 3

M

MEASURABLE

How will I know I’ve succeeded?

Measurement turns progress into something you can track, not guess.

WAYS TO MEASURE

Quantities
Increase reach by 20%

Frequencies
Practice three times a week

Benchmarks
Raise exam average to 90%

Outputs
Publish five blog posts

INSTEAD OF

“I want to save money.”

TRY

“I want to save $1,000 over the next three months.”

STEP 4

A

ATTAINABLE

Is it realistic for me?

It should stretch you, but not be impossible. Feeling overwhelmed? Scale it back — wins build confidence and momentum.

ASK YOURSELF

- Do I have the skills needed?
- Do I have the time to commit?
- Do I have the tools or support?
- What obstacles could get in the way?

UNREALISTIC FOR A GYM NEWCOMER

“Work out for 90 minutes every day.”

ATTAINABLE

“Exercise for 20 minutes, three days a week.”

STEP 5

R

RELEVANT

Why does this goal matter?

Connect it to your bigger values, priorities or responsibilities — education, career, finances, health or personal growth.

If a goal isn't connected to something meaningful, motivation fades.

Relevance keeps you committed when the work gets difficult.

FOR EXAMPLE

Marketing major
Excel skills → future internships

Student leader
Communication skills → their role

Aspiring teacher
Lesson planning → career goals

STEP 6

T

TIME-BOUND

When will it be done?

Time frames add urgency and structure, break big goals into steps and prevent procrastination.

SET THREE THINGS

1. When the goal starts
2. Key milestones along the way
3. When it should be completed

INSTEAD OF

“I want to learn Photoshop.”

TRY

“I will complete three Photoshop tutorials by March 15 and design one practice poster by March 30.”

WITHOUT A DEADLINE, A GOAL BECOMES A WISH.

A timeline turns intention into action.

FULL EXAMPLE

Putting it all together

RAW IDEA

“I want to get better at public speaking.”

SMART VERSION

“To build confidence in professional settings, I will improve my public-speaking skills by practicing one five-minute speech every week and attending two workshops this semester. My goal is to deliver my final class presentation with no more than two pauses or filler words by May 10.”

FULL EXAMPLE

How it passes all five tests

Test	Where it shows up
S — Specific	Practice speeches and attend workshops
M — Measurable	One speech a week, two workshops, two or fewer pauses or filler words
A — Attainable	A realistic weekly commitment across one semester
R — Relevant	Builds confidence for professional settings
T — Time-Bound	Weekly practice, a semester timeline and a May 10 deadline

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

From hobby to SMART goal

RAW IDEA

“I want to be better at baking.”

SMART VERSION

“To bake homemade bread for my family, I will improve my baking skills by trying one new recipe every week and taking one beginner bread-making class this semester. My goal is to bake a sandwich loaf that rises fully and slices cleanly by December 20.”

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

How the baking goal passes all five tests

Test	Where it shows up
S — Specific	Bake new recipes and take a bread-making class
M — Measurable	One new recipe a week, one class, a loaf that rises fully and slices cleanly
A — Attainable	One bake a week fits a busy schedule; a beginner class matches the skill level
R — Relevant	Connects to something meaningful: baking for family
T — Time-Bound	Weekly bakes, a semester timeline and a December 20 deadline

WRITING YOUR OWN

Six tips for writing SMART goals

Keep it short

Three to five sentences, not a full page.

Use action verbs

Increase, develop, complete, practice, reduce, analyze, design.

Be honest about capacity

Challenge yourself without getting overwhelmed.

Write in first person

“I will…” strengthens accountability.

One goal at a time

Too many goals divide your effort.

Revisit it weekly

Track progress and adjust if needed.

S M A R T

Now write yours

Start with a raw idea. Run it through all five tests. Keep it to a few sentences in the first person — then revisit it every week.

YOUR TURN

Build your SMART goal

1. ANSWER EACH TEST

S What will you do — what skill or outcome?

M What number, frequency or result proves it?

A Is it realistic with your time and resources?

R Why does this matter to you?

T When will you start, check in and finish?

2. PUT IT TOGETHER

"To [why it matters], I will [what you'll do] by [how often or how much] this [time frame]. My goal is to [a result you can measure] by [deadline]."

CHECK BEFORE YOU'RE DONE

First person · action verbs · 3–5 sentences · one goal