

SMART Goals

Staples Psychology

Do you know what the most common New Year's resolution is? Weight loss. If you've ever been to a gym, you know that, in January, the gym gets PACKED with people. They're all trying to "exercise" their new resolutions. But what happens come February? Attendance plummets -- like clockwork, every year.

There are several reasons why New Year's resolutions fail. One has to do with the resolution being based on an intrinsic value or an extrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivators and values tend to work better). Another reason is that the goal isn't SMART.

I'm not calling to goal dumb; SMART is actually an acronym. Goals that follow the SMART acronym are much more likely to succeed. Here's what SMART stands for...

Specific. "I want to lose weight" isn't very specific. How much? By when? How? You ever have a boss or a parent give you a task that wasn't specific? Pretty hard to follow through on it, right?

Measurable. Put a number on it! We need to be able to measure our progress somehow, and the best way to do that is to quantify it (use numbers with it).

Actionable. Some other SMART models will use the word "achievable" here, but, technically, losing 10 pounds IS achievable, right? But is it *actionable*? If I were to go get a scale and plop it down in front of you and tell you "Lose 10 pounds right now," could you do it? No. *How* do you lose weight? You exercise, you eat cleaner, you prioritize mental health as well...THESE are the actionables. So, we pick one of *them*.

Realistic. Let's choose "I want to run 3 times a week" as our new goal (it's specific, measurable, AND actionable). Is it realistic? Maybe. What if I've never run a day in my life before? It's not so realistic now. Maybe, for now, I worry about going for a walk three times a week...THAT's more realistic.

Time-Limited. We need to add another number now: time. THIS IS NOT A DUE DATE. Actually, quite the opposite, this is a time frame by which we *revisit our original goal and evaluate if we need to make changes*. So let's say "I want to walk for 20 minutes at least three times a week *for the next three weeks*". Then, in three weeks, if we weren't able to walk three times a week, then we go through our SMART acronym and see where we had the problem. Maybe we need to reduce it to once a week for a little bit. If we met our goal, then we can bump up the frequency to five times a week.

Now, it's your turn. Let's come up with a goal, and see if it's "S.M.A.R.T."

First, write your goal here:

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Is it **Specific**? If not, how can we make it more specific?

Is it **Measurable**? How many times and how often?

Is it **Actionable**? Is it something you can actually do?

Is it **Realistic**? Take small bites at a time!

Is it **Time-Limited**? Do we have a time frame to come back and re-evaluate?