



Identifying and Setting Goals

Some goals may be long-term dreams that invigorate and excite you, like climbing a mountain or getting a promotion. Others may be more mundane, like passing a difficult course. Nothing builds self-confidence like achieving your goals. Our goals allow us to make choices and pursue options that give our lives direction and purpose.

Jot down as many goals as you can think of right now. Then use these tips to review your list:

- **Set goals that you are committed to achieve.**
Achieving a goal is hard work—so be sure the goals you set are worth the effort. Achieving goals builds self-confidence. Conversely, setting a goal to which you are not really committed can tear down your self-confidence. Make sure you are committed to achieving each of the goals you have written down. On the other hand, don't toss out a goal just because you might not reach it. If the goal is something you really want, keep it even if you doubt your ability to achieve it.
- **Set your goals high enough.**
Make sure the goals you are setting are high enough to make them worth the effort. Of course, some goals may be quite routine and not very inspiring. Don't throw those out—we all need a few mundane goals. But some of your goals should inspire you to achieve more and work harder than you have before.
- **Set goals that address all aspects of life.**
Sometimes we focus on our education or career when we set goals, and leave the rest of our lives to chance. Think about all aspects of your life and set goals that will establish some balance. If your goals are primarily related to school or work, add some health and family/friendship goals so that those aspects of your life will receive the attention they need. Think carefully about what you need in your life to be happy. Make sure you write goals that address these needs.
- **Check for contradictory goals.**
Often, we find that one goal contradicts another. For example, “Devote my life to caring for others” and “Earn a high salary” might be contradictory. Compare each goal to the other goals and consider whether all goals can be achieved at the same time.
- **State your goals as accomplishments rather than outcomes.**
Let's assume that one of your goals is to earn a gold medal in a certain competition. This outcome is not really within your control because the outcome depends on the others who are competing for the same prize. If possible, state your goal in terms you can control. For example, instead of winning a gold medal, you could aspire to achieving your personal best score in the competition. This goal is within your control.

- **Be specific.**
The more specific you can be about your goals, the more likely it will be that you reach them. Right now, for each goal, take a few minutes to visualize yourself achieving it. What will it look like when you get there? What will it feel like? How will your life change? After visualizing achieving the goal, see if you can write the goal in a way that is more specific. Add any details that make the goal more real for you.
- **State each goal in positive terms.**
Do you have any goals on your list that use words like “Don’t,” “Avoid,” “Stop,” or other negatives? Try to restate these goals as positives. Think about what you want to achieve, rather than what you want to avoid. We are usually far more motivated by positives than by negatives.
- **Write down your goals.**
It is very important to be clear about the goals you have set for yourself. Writing them down is a good way to make them real and to achieve focus and clarity. After writing down your goals, be sure to review them regularly to keep them fresh in your mind. Each day we face hundreds of choices, and it is important to evaluate the choices in relation to your goals, so that you can stay focused and go in the direction you have set for yourself.

You may want to read “Setting Priorities” and “Achieving My Goals” for tips on reaching the goals you have set for yourself. If you are having difficulty identifying and setting goals, seek assistance from a friend, advisor, or counselor.