

S-M-A-R-T Learning Goals

What are SMART Learning Goals?

A learning goal is much more than simply saying that you want to learn about and/or improve on something; rather, it more specifically describes what you want to achieve. SMART learning goals, with their detailed structure, provide focus as well as a clear idea of what you want to achieve. This structure makes it easier to 1) plan relevant learning activities, 2) measure your progress toward achieving the goal and 3) know when you have met your goal.

S Specific	<p>A specific goal is detailed, focused and clearly stated. Everyone reading the goal should know exactly what you want to learn or achieve.</p> <p><i>Consider who, what, when, where, why and how in developing the goal.</i></p>
M Measurable	<p>A measurable goal, which is the most important consideration, is quantifiable, meaning you can see the results. Include precise amounts, dates, and so on in your goals so you can measure your degree of success.</p> <p><i>How will you know when you have reached your goal and how successful you were, because here is the evidence?</i></p>
A Achievable	<p>An achievable goal can be attained based on your skill, resources and area of practice.</p> <p><i>How can you decide if it is achievable? 1) It is measurable, 2) others have done it successfully, or something similar, 3) it is theoretically possible, and 4) you've assessed the limitations.</i></p> <p><i>You need to know: 1) do I have the skills to do a good job, 2) do I have the time to complete it, and 3) are the resources available?</i></p>
R Relevant	<p>A relevant goal applies to your current role and is clearly linked to your key role responsibilities.</p> <p><i>Is this something that is important to me? Does it motivate me? Will it affect my growth as a physician? Will it positively affect other people or things?</i></p>
T Time-limited	<p>A time-limited goal has specific timelines and a deadline. This will help motivate you to move toward your goal and to evaluate your progress.</p> <p><i>When will each step be completed? Break the overall goal into mini steps (i.e., activity statements) and assign a due date to each step.</i></p>

How to Write SMART Learning Goals?

1. **Identify what you want to learn.** Reflect on your learning needs, review your self-assessment, and/or discuss with your mentor or one of your peers.
2. **Write it down in one sentence.** It must be:
 - Specific (*clearly stated*)
 - Measurable (*quantifiable*)
 - Achievable (*available skills, time, resources*)
 - Relative (*applies to my role, important to me*)
 - Time-limited (*deadlines*)

3. **Use action words** in your goal such as identify, design, create, develop, plan, explain, evaluate, etc. This makes it more specific and measurable.

Example:

Perhaps TVH surgical skills lag behind others at your PGY level and you would like to improve these skills.

- **NOT a SMART Goal:** I will improve my surgical skills.
- **SMART Goal:** I will work with the Director of Ob/Gyn Simulation (DOS) to develop my TVH surgical skills' so that they are equivalent to the level of my peers within the next 3 months (Completion date: October 10th).

4. **Develop activities for achieving your goal.** Each goal should have at least 2-3 activities. These "activity statements" need to be very specific, using action verbs, and include timelines.

By writing out the individual steps, and then crossing each one off as you complete it, you'll realize that you are making progress towards your ultimate goal. This is especially important if your goal is big and demanding, or long-term.

SMART Goal: I will work with the Director of Ob/Gyn Simulation (DOS) to develop my TVH surgical skills' so that they are equivalent to the level of my peers within the next 3 months (Completion date: October 10th).

Example Activities:

- **Incorrect activity statements:**
 1. I will read books and journal articles on improving surgical skills.
 2. I will practice my surgical skills during my downtime.
 3. I will ask some of my peers for advice.
- **Correct activity statements:**
 1. I will develop a personalized training plan (with the assistance of the DOS) to address TVH surgical skills by August 1st.
 2. I will practice TVH surgical skills twice weekly for a period no less than 1-hour using the TVH model.
 3. I will meet with the DOS once every 2-weeks for 1-hour for observation and direct feedback on my TVH surgical skills over the next 2.5 months (i.e., 5 times).

Things to Consider When Setting SMART Learning Goals

1. Set Goals that Motivate You

Motivation is key to achieving goals. This means making sure that they are important to you, and that there is value in achieving them. Set goals that relate to your priorities.

2. Set Performance vs Outcome Goals

You need to set goals for which you have as much control as possible. For example, you would have more control over “developing strong presentation skills for public speaking” (performance goal) than “winning the top presenter award at Resident Research Day” (outcome goal). With the later goal, you can’t predict who else is presenting or how skilled they may be?

3. Set Goals in Writing

Research shows that you are more likely to achieve a goal if you write it down. Try to post them in visible places as reminders.