



1 Goal Setting

Why?

Students often ask: Why do we need to start a study session by setting goals? Many think it would be better to dive right into their work and begin learning straight away. But what happens after your first hour or two of study? What will you do next? At that point, you may find yourself feeling a little lost and unsure.

One of the hardest challenges a student faces is not knowing what to study next. Other common problems that students run into are:

- Where do you begin to study?
- Should you focus on this particular topic or ignore it altogether?
- How do you know that the information being covered is relevant to the exams?
- How much time should you allocate to each section so you can ensure that you get the course covered in time?

Even the most confident students face problems like these all of the time. These issues can lead to lost opportunities on key learning areas and a lack of clarity on how to maximise the study time available.

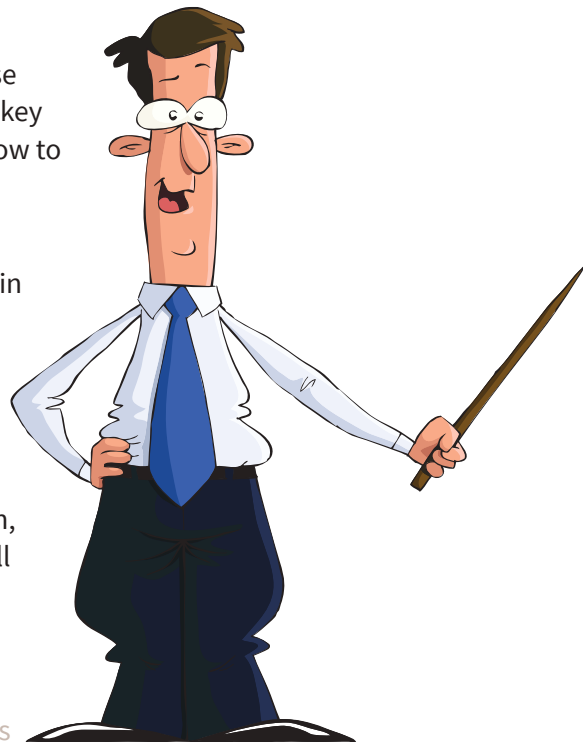
So what's the solution?

Don't forget that while you have the main control over your actions you are not alone in this and there are many other supports available. For example, your teachers are there to help you answer some of the questions above.

They can guide you in the right direction, help you grasp difficult concepts and tell you how to prepare for the exams.

A goal properly set is halfway reached.

Zig Ziglar



But knowing what to do is only the first step. What many students struggle with is the second step – taking this newly acquired knowledge and applying it in a structured and effective way. This is where goals play a very important role. They help bridge the gap between **knowing what to do** and **being able to do it**.

Goal Setting

Goal setting is the crucial initial step for students hoping to do well in their exams. To put it simply, goals produce action. They inspire you:

- to push forward with purpose.
- to get out of bed and into school.
- to turn off the TV and write that assignment.
- to get up off the couch and exercise.



You can think of a goal as the engine that drives you towards your desired outcome.

Taking action *without* proper planning is one of the biggest causes of failure for all students. Ask yourself these questions:

- 1 What will I study?
- 2 When will I study it?
- 3 What will be the effect or outcome of that study?

If you don't answer these questions you could spend hours studying a topic and, through poor planning at the start, you may forget to cover key areas that would have been identified with proper planning.

It is essential that you take time to set a number of specific goals before you plan your studies each day, for example:

'I will study Chapter 10 Respiration in Biology for one hour.'

'I will cover the following sections. . .'

'At the end of one hour I will know. . .'



Likewise, it is important that you take time to set a number of goals before you begin your studies for the year.

My Goal List for 6th year

I will study 3-4 hours nightly.

I will Revise 5th year topics in all subjects on a weekly basis.

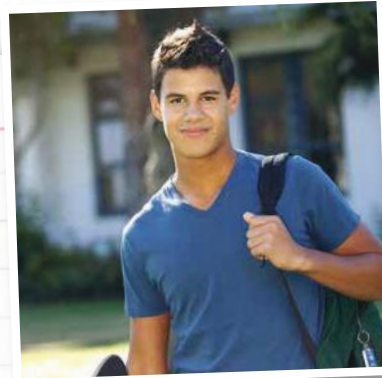
I will prepare my Irish + French Oral exam in 1st term.

I will draft my Geography/History topic before Christmas break.

I will spend time practising exam questions at weekends.

I will do a weekly to-do list each Sunday for the week ahead.

I will get to the Gym at least 3 times a week.



Before you begin, though, remember that any big goal is attained through the achievement of many smaller goals set along the way! For example, getting your dream result in French means you need to understand the four different skill sets required to achieve the best grade. Doing well in each one, e.g. oral or aural, would require individual goal setting such as 'Spend 30 minutes each week on my spoken and listening technique.'



One big goal is harder to achieve than the many smaller goals which add up: there's no point working hard to buy your dream car if you don't first learn how to drive!

The Different Types of Goals

A short-term goal is something that you want to achieve soon. This can take any amount of time **from 1 hour to a couple of days**.

‘Study for next week’s class test,’ or ‘finish my French essay,’ are examples of short-term goals.

What is an example of a short-term goal for you?

A medium-term goal is a task that you aim to finish over a **period of a few weeks** or even a month.

You can list medium-term goals on your monthly planner.

They are often comprised of many short-term goals which together help achieve something bigger.

Medium-term goals often take the form of 'class projects' or 'revising large areas of a subject'.

They are often comprised of many short-term goals which together help achieve something bigger.

What is an example of a medium-term goal for you?

A long-term goal is a target that you hope to reach over a **period of several months** or even a year.

Long-term goals should be listed on your yearly planner and are made up of lots of short-term and medium-term goals.

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[illegible]

How to Set Your Goals in 7 Steps

1 Getting started is always the most difficult step in goal setting.

So, before you read any further, pick up a piece of paper and a pen and complete this exercise as you read.

Goals

- 1 Study Maths for four hours on Saturday before barbecue.
- 2 Finish English essay by 6pm Sunday.
- 3
- 4



2 Ensure that your goals are both realistic and specific.

If you specify when and what you will do, you increase your chances of actually getting it done. Instead of saying that you will study more, for example, you could purposefully write that you will study one extra hour on weekdays, and two extra hours on Saturday and Sunday. This leaves no wiggle room for you to avoid completing these goals.

3 Divide each goal into simple, digestible parts.

Break big long-term goals into many short-term goals. The easier you make it to complete each step of the goal, the more likely it is that you will eventually achieve it.

Planning for Best Grade in Oral Irish Examination

Long-Term Goal: to achieve an A1 Irish grade in the Leaving Certificate

Method: identify areas where you can improve your performance in the Oral examination which is worth 40% of the overall marks.

Planning:

- 1 Break down the course into areas such as Poetry Reading, Picture Sequences and General Conversation.
- 2 Allocate a session each week to work on each of the above – say 20 minutes each.
- 3 Put this into your weekly planning/goal setting timetable.
- 4 If necessary be more specific, e.g. 5 minutes for Poetry Reading, 30 minutes for Picture Sequences and 30 minutes for General Conversation.

4 Each goal must have a target timeframe.

A goal with a due date and time is very difficult to put off. For short-term goals, make a note of them on your daily planner; for all other goals keep them on the monthly planner.

5 Always write down your goals on a piece of paper and keep this close by.

It's important that you make a record of your goals; it will keep you focused and remind you of what still has to be done. Read the list of goals every day to reinforce them in your mind.

6 Don't bite off more than you can chew!

Start off with a relatively small number of goals and gradually increase their number and size as you become more effective at completing them.

7 Always aim higher than you think you can achieve.

You will amaze yourself by how well you can do.



SMART Goals

A useful guide to follow when creating your goals is to make them **SMART**:

- ✓ Goals need to be **Specific**; clearly spelled out and well-defined. Otherwise, without a clear aim, it would be very difficult for you to achieve them.

- ✓ Your goals need to be **Measurable**, with checkpoints and milestones to be reached. If you can't clearly understand your progress, it can be easy to lose motivation and become dispirited. Exam results and essay marks are good ways to measure your achievements.

- ✓ Goals should be both **Achievable** and **Realistic**.

In this way, you will not hit large unforeseen obstacles or impossible challenges along the way. An obvious example is don't leave it until the night before an exam to revise the entire course – clearly an impossible task!

- ✓ Finally, your goals should have a very strict **Timeframe**.

If you spend too much time on any one goal, it will impact the rest of your studies as well as spilling over into your personal time. Resist the temptation to spend extra time on your favourite subjects!



Example of Powerful, Effective Goal Writing

Have a look at the example of powerful, effective goal writing below and then try your own.

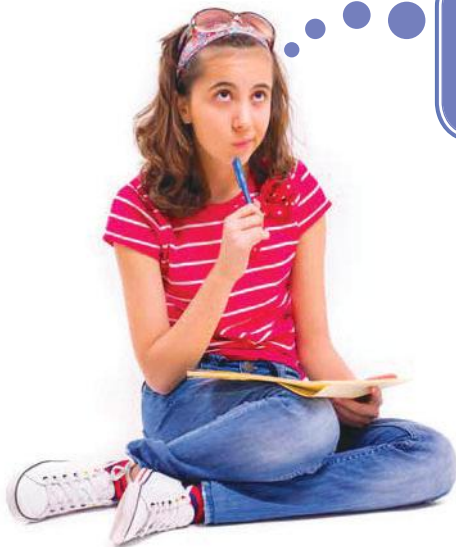
From now on, I'll get up an hour earlier from Monday to Friday – new alarm time: 6.00 a.m. I'll use the extra hour to think about my progress the day before, set my goals for the day ahead and eat a proper breakfast so I've the energy to keep going in class (e.g. Muesli, 2 eggs, beans and a glass of milk).



This goal is very clear and leaves no room for misunderstanding. It is also both achievable and realistic!

Example of Ineffective, Unclear Goal Writing

I'll try to get up earlier in the mornings and do some work before school. I'll do my best to eat a healthy breakfast...



This goal is well-meaning, but it offers no instruction for you to work with. When should you get up? What work needs to be done? Does it matter what kind of breakfast you eat? What are you going to eat?

This kind of goal is difficult to follow through on, and it would make it a lot easier for someone to give up.

Top Tip!

Reward yourself when you achieve an important goal!



How to Stick to Your Goals

Remember to:

- ✓ **review your goals** regularly.
- ✓ **measure and assess** your progress.
- ✓ **make changes** if needed. Be honest with yourself.
- ✓ **keep your goals visible** in your study area. You don't want them to be out of sight, out of mind.
- ✓ **make sure to reward or treat yourself** when you achieve an important medium- or long-term goal. You don't have to go crazy, but allow yourself some time off, a treat or even just a sense of satisfaction. Get yourself a nice cup of hot chocolate at the end of studying a particular subject and achieving a short-term goal, or allow yourself some time off to watch a favourite DVD when you have completed an assignment or a particular milestone on a difficult topic. You deserve it.
- ✓ keep a **list of your achieved goals**. Legendary American soccer player Mia Hamm, two time women's Player of the Year and the highest goal scorer in international football history, once said '**success breeds success**'. Achieving your goals helps fill you with a strong sense of self-belief, and it is this self-belief that carries you towards the next success.

Student Profile...

Student: Sarah Byrne

CAO Points Needed:
525

Course:
Occupational Therapy

Points Gained: 550

Study Summary: I've always struggled in school and never thought of myself as particularly academic. But I had a dream of becoming an Occupational Therapist so I knew I needed to change my attitude. From the first week of 5th year I spent my weekends studying and revising.

Social Life: Had to limit it to hanging out with friends for a just a couple of hours at the weekend.

Homework Approach: Did it every night and never let it pile up on top of me.

Challenging Subjects: Chemistry is really hard so I asked some of my classmates if we could start a study group. Trying to explain experiments to them and listening to their solutions helped me understand problems I couldn't figure out by myself. It was much better than reading the words from a textbook – over and over again.

Top Tip: I got (and took!) a lot of advice from my guidance counsellor. He helped me create my study timetables and this really sorted me out in 6th year.



Key Points



- Goals give you direction and a clear focus!
- Goals enable you to monitor your progress and, if necessary, aim higher.
- Goals help you get started and reach your final destination.

When it comes to your own goals there are some very simple rules that need to be followed.

- Understand the task ahead.
- Appreciate the benefits of achieving the goal.
- Most importantly, commit to your goals 100%!