

Goal-Setting Exercise: Why Set Goals in College

Instructors and students too often overlook refining this skill so crucial for college success.

Consequently, students suffer needless maladies related to motivation and direction in the educational experience.

The ability to set and achieve goals in college is so important, that it forms the foundation upon which success or failure of all other skills for learning depend. Some benefits of mastering this skill that result in improved ability to learn are:

1. **It indicates when something has been successfully achieved.** Unless you clearly describe exactly what constitutes success or achievement in college, there is no way to determine if and when you have been successful unless you use someone else's standards for success. When someone else is allowed to define your goals and consequently the direction of your life, the risk is high of losing control over your own life unless you accept those goals as your own. **Without a definition for what is success in terms of clearly defined goals, what is to be achieved is unknown.** This is significant because goals set a direction and make seeing progress and achievement possible. Without clearly defined educational goals, you can experience feelings of stagnation, low motivation, and lack of purpose.
2. **It defines a plan of action for the process of achieving.** This step provides a map, a guide, a visible pathway towards chosen goals. When a plan of action is absent, you are likely to experience low motivation, easily succumb to distractions, or feel a goal is unreachable because it is not visible how it will be achieved. It becomes easy to lose the way and become discouraged without a plan of action.
3. **It monitors, as a continuous progress report,** how well you are advancing towards your chosen goals. A continuous progress report creates a means for feedback on whether or not the plan of action is actually moving you towards your goals, thus allowing for early discovery of non-goal oriented activities. The more frequent the feedback, the sooner the realization when you have strayed from your plan of action, need to modify your plan, or are exactly on course. Without continuous feedback on progress towards goals, there is no way to know how you are doing in the quest for success.
4. **It defines what is achievement and success for you** and signals when a goal has been achieved. When what is success has not been clearly defined, you are likely to suffer from feelings that you aren't getting anywhere, don't have many accomplishments, or aren't a successful person.
5. **It indicates when it is time to re-set goals.** One of the biggest mistakes goal setters make is not to reset goals after a goal has been achieved. Resetting is absolutely necessary if motivation and momentum are to be maintained. If resetting doesn't take place, you run the risk of losing interest, direction, and feelings of progress.

Without setting and achieving goals for success in college, you are more apt to needlessly suffer from feelings of aimlessness, boredom, anxiety, low motivation, poor academic performance, and stagnation. If you have not set clearly defined goals, it is normal for you to feel like you aren't getting anywhere in general and not in control of your life's direction.

Fortunately, most college students have some skills for setting and achieving goals or they would not be considering or attending college. For these students, the process for success in college involves refining existing goal-setting skills to the degree of mastery they choose.

Where does motivation come from?

A word about motivation is important here because of its crucial role in your college success.

Motivation comes from one source and one source only: **YOU going after something YOU want.**

For some, that "something" might be pleasing parents, getting rich, accessing a certain career, gaining status in another's eyes, impressing friends, or pleasing yourself. What is sought is not nearly as important as having something for which you choose to strive.

If you have never identified what it is to be achieved, in other words, set a goal or goals, what is necessary to experience motivation has not been done. Therefore, expecting to feel motivation without setting goals will inevitably lead to disappointment. For example, if a college student has not decided in what to major, the motivation to perform well academically, let alone excel, will likely be absent unless other goals are present in which academic achievement is important. Sometimes the desire to achieve can be hidden in goals not consciously realized such as the desire to please parents. Therefore, it may be that some have never consciously mastered the processes for setting and achieving goals but enjoy success. The good news is that the process for setting and achieving goals in college can be learned, refined, and mastered to a level as good as the most successful student.

As a student, you can learn the process for setting and achieving goals in college and refine existing goal setting skills no matter how well or poorly developed they may be. Openness of mind and willingness to learn, grow, and master the goal setting process is all that is necessary to enjoy the enormous benefits that come from this skill. With practice and perseverance, anyone can master the process of setting and achieving goals in college and achieve the same results as the "natural" goalsetters.

The Definition of a Goal

A desired position, accomplishment, or acquisition for which you choose to strive. This encompasses virtually anything your heart desires. The process of setting and achieving goals can be visualized more clearly by looking at a simple version of the game of hopscotch. The means by which humans achieve is reflected in this common game acted out on playgrounds and sidewalks around the world.

If you remember, the first step in hopscotch involves drawing a set of squares with numbers. These squares function as small goals to be achieved on the way towards the major goal of finishing or finishing first. The person who understands the process for succeeding in Hopscotch can use this same process achieving at anything.

Below is a diagram that shows the parallels between the game of hopscotch and the process of setting and achieving goals.

Hopscotch Steps

1. **Toss a token into a square.** This clearly defines what to strive for. You have a goal.
2. **The second step involves hopping on one foot to that square, picking up the token and hopping back** to the beginning, all the time remaining on one foot. This provides a progress report on how well you are doing as you move toward achieving your major goal of finishing. The number of squares successfully completed or the number of mistakes made measures your progress. Mistakes consist of stepping on a line, not containing the tossed token within the intended square, or losing your balance.
3. **The game progresses one square at a time until all the squares have been achieved.** The first one to finish is the winner. This involves setting short-term goals that must be achieved before one can reach the major goal. Resetting goals in this manner creates motivation that results in progress toward the main goal.

The game of hopscotch is an excellent example of how the process of setting and achieving goals in college works. Each time a token is tossed into a square, a short-term goal is set. As soon as each token is successfully retrieved another goal is reset. By tossing the token and retrieving it from each square, a series of short-term goals are being set and re-set until, the long-term goal of finishing or winning is achieved.

The way to achievement involves the ongoing process of repeating the same smaller steps enough times until you reach your larger goal. The same process works whether you are striving for short or long-term goals.

Hopscotch	Goal-Setting in Real Life
Choose to attempt to win the game.	Set a long-term goal.
Toss a token into the first square.	Set a short-term goal on the way to a long-term goal.
You must hop on one foot to retrieve the token.	Defines a plan of action. Shows you what to do to achieve your long-term goal.
You watch that balance is maintained and no line is stepped on as you strive for your goal of finishing.	This provides a continuous progress report that reveals how well you are doing as you move toward your long-term goal.
Return to starting point without errors.	This defines what is achievement and success, indicates when you have achieved something, and signals when it's time to reset goals to maintain motivation.
When your turn comes, you toss the token into the next square.	You reset short-term goals on the way to long-term goals. Resetting maintains motivation and assures continuous progress.

Another way to visualize the goal setting and achievement process is in the form of a continuous cycle of success.

1. **Set a goal**
2. **Move toward it**
3. **Reach a goal**
4. **Reset a goal**
5. **Repeat**

Practice

To help you better understand and begin to master the process for setting and achieving goals, complete the following exercise.

1. **Describe something you want.** It will become your **main goal** for this exercise. Put a date in the parentheses by which you want to achieve this main goal.
 _____ ()
2. **List at least 5 steps or activities,** called **short-term goals** that you must complete in order to reach your main goal. In the parentheses after each mini-goal, put a date by which you plan to complete each short-term goal.
 - a. _____ ()
 - b. _____ ()
 - c. _____ ()
 - d. _____ ()
 - e. _____ ()

3. List at least 1 potential obstacle that might arise as you pursue each short-term goal.

Short-Term Goal	Potential Obstacle
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

4. List 1 specific obstacle busting strategy for overcoming each potential obstacle.

Potential Obstacle	Obstacle-Busting Strategy
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

5. List as many benefits as you can think of, that have meaning and importance to you, which you will receive from achieving your main goal. Let your mind go.
6. Assuming you have achieved your main goal, list additional **specific** things that you want that achievement of this main goal will make possible. These become new goals that will enable you to sustain a feeling of motivation, accomplishment, and progress in your life.
7. List 3 things that you want. You can use these as new goals when it is time to reset goals.
 - a. (list goal 1 here)
 - b. (list goal 2 here)
 - c. (list goal 3 here)

Congratulations! You have just completed the process for setting and achieving goals for success in anything you choose to do. **You know more about what it takes to be a winner, now!**