

6.4: Goal Setting

Discover Your Values and Goals



Assessing Your Core Values

The journey of achieving success in college begins with a single step: identifying your personal values. Your personal values are your core beliefs and guiding principles. They shape the roles you play in daily life. They color your interests and passions and frame your thoughts and words. In essence, your values are a compass that helps you make decisions and choices.

Identifying your own values helps you plan for:

- Your academic goals
- Your career goals
- Your financial goals
- How you spend and manage your time
- How you spend and manage your money

Values are the things that you believe are fundamentally important in the way you live and work. They shape how you interact with others. They determine your priorities (whether you're conscious about it or not), and they shape the choices you make. They are the measures by which you judge yourself and they're also the measures by which you judge others.

When your actions are consistent with your values, you feel peaceful with the choices you make even if the outcome of those choices is not positive. When some action or decision is not aligned with your values, you feel conflicted and remorseful.

You can assess your core values by checking to see if it meets these three criteria:

1. It has been freely chosen from amongst alternatives after consideration and thought.
2. It is prized, cherished and considered precious and is publicly affirmed when appropriate.
3. It is acted upon consistently, modeled for others, and pursued even when there are consequences for doing so.

Why Find Your Core Values?

This might seem like a rhetorical question, but in fact, it is quite important to understand the power and importance of core values. They are your foundation as a person, guiding your actions and your decisions. The stronger the foundation the better and greater the person you will be able to become.

What are your values, then? Which are most important to you, and which are least important? How do your values fit into your educational goals? How do your educational goals relate to your future career? Are you spending your time in a way that prioritizes your goals? Does your budget reflect your goals?

To help you answer these questions, you can use a “self-assessment” survey. These surveys can help you evaluate your personal identity—your thoughts, actions, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors—in relationship to the task at hand, like going to college and preparing for a career.

Many different self-assessment surveys are available from college career centers and online sites. Some are designed as personality tests, like the Keirsey Temperament Sorter, or as inventories, like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MTBI®), the most widely used personality inventory in history. You may also come across instruments designed as scales, or measures, games, surveys, and more. These descriptors are often interchangeably used, although most often they refer to questionnaires. The distinctions are not as important as whether or not the instrument meets your self-assessment needs.

You can visit a career counselor at your college's Career Services Office and request the MBTI assessment to further explore your values. You can also use other assessments available through your school.

In Task #2 (see below) you will sample several self-assessment surveys to gain insights into your personal identity, values, educational goals, and career goals. By better understanding the interconnections, you are in a better position to make solid college

and career choices.

Stages Of Life

Keep in mind that your personal values and interests can and do change as you get older. This is evidenced in research conducted by a number of contemporary social scientists, like Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson. Their studies show how our values affect our choices and how our choices can characterize the stage of life we're in.

For example, college students, ages 18–26, tend to make choices that are tentative (more short-range) and support a desire for autonomy. Later, during ages 27–31, young adults may rethink decisions and lean toward more permanent choices. In ages 32–42, adults tend to have a greater sense of commitment and stability, as shown by their choices. In essence, our personal identity and values change over time, but they continue to affect our choices and can illuminate the stage of life we're in.

Keeping in mind that there are many phases of life, you can expect to see changes in your values and choices as you get older. You may experience a significant change in perspective while you are in college! To better understand your relationship with your values, you can continually reassess what is important to you. Make a commitment to examining your thinking, actions, and choices, and keep taking self-assessment tests. This will put you in a stronger position to manage changes in your educational goals, your career, living situation, hobbies, friends, and other aspects of your life. Changes are part of normal life transitions.

Setting Goals

Some people are goal-oriented and seem to easily make decisions that lead to achieving their goals, while others seem just to “go with the flow” and accept what life gives them. While the latter may sound pleasantly relaxed, moving through life without goals may not lead anywhere at all. The fact that you're in college now shows you already have the major goal to complete your college program.

A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions. Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final examination may completely prevent reaching that goal. That's fairly obvious in an extreme case, yet a lot of college students don't reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have conflicting goals. One way to prevent problems is to think about all your goals and priorities and to learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals. Also, consider whether your goals support your core values. You are more likely to achieve a goal that is aligned directly with your values.

Consider These Four Student Scenarios

Juan

To help his widowed mother, Juan went to work full time after high school but now, a few years later, he's dissatisfied with the kinds of jobs he has been able to get and has begun taking classes toward an Associates Degree in Computer Science in the evenings. He's often tired after work and his mother would like him to spend more time at home, and his girlfriend also wants to spend more time with him. Sometimes he cuts class to visit his mother or spend time with his girlfriend.

Becky

In her senior year of college, Becky has just been elected president of her sorority and is excited about planning a major community service project. She knows she should be spending more time on her senior thesis, but she feels her community project may gain her contacts that can help her find a better job after graduation. Besides, the sorority project is a lot more fun, and she's enjoying the esteem of her position. Even if she doesn't do well on her thesis, she's sure she'll pass.

Morgan

After an easy time in high school, Morgan is surprised their college classes are so hard. They have enough time to study for their first-year courses, but they also have a lot of friends and fun things to do. Sometimes they're surprised to look up from their computer to see it's midnight already, and they haven't yet started reading the assigned chapter! Where does the time go? When they're stressed, however, they can't study well, so they plan to get up early and read the chapter before class, but then they turn back to their computer to see who's online.

Sachito

Sachito was successful in cutting back her hours at work to give her more time for her college classes, but it's difficult for her to get much studying done at home. Her husband has been wonderful about taking care of their young daughter, but he can't do everything, and lately, he's been hinting more about asking her sister to babysit so that the two of them can go out in the evening the way they used to. Lately, when she's had to study on a weekend, he leaves with his friends, and Sachito ends up spending the day with her daughter—and not getting much studying done.

What do these very different students have in common? Each student has goals that conflict in one or more ways. Each needs to develop strategies to meet their other goals without threatening their academic success. And all of them have time management issues to work through, three because they feel they don't have enough time to do everything they want or need to do, and one because even though he has enough time, he needs to learn how to manage it more effectively. For all four of them, motivation and attitude will be important as they develop strategies to achieve their goals.

It all begins with setting goals and thinking about values and priorities!

Benefits of Goal Setting

Setting goals can turn your dreams into reality. You may have a dream to one day graduate from college, buy a new car, own your own home, travel abroad, etc. Any of these dreams can be broken down into a detailed goal and plan of action. For example, maybe you want to buy a home in 20 years. You will need \$40,000 as a down payment. That's a lot of money and may not feel achievable. But, if you break that \$40,000 into 20 years, that's \$2,000 a year. That sounds more manageable. And if we break it down even more, you can buy that house if you save about \$165 a month, or \$42 a week, or \$6 a day! Can you save \$6 a day, maybe by packing your lunch instead of the drive-thru? Our big dream is now an achievable, realistic goal.

Setting goals has many benefits, including turning your dreams into reality. Goal setting allows you to create a plan to focus on your goal, rather than dreaming about the future. It also reduces anxiety and worry. It is much less anxiety-producing to focus on saving \$6 a day than it is to save \$40,000. It is also motivating because you will be able to measure your progress and successes. At the end of one year, you will have saved \$2,000, which will motivate you to keep saving and maybe even increase your saving goal. You will use your time and resources more wisely, often leading to faster and increased results.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You're also a person with your own core values, individual needs, and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life. Think about what goals you would like to achieve academically, vocationally (career), financially, personally, physically, and spiritually.

Types of Goals

There are different types of goals, based on time and topic.

Long-term goals may begin with graduating from college and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (graduating with a bachelor's degree) guide your mid-term goals (transferring to a University), and your short-term goals (getting an A on your upcoming exam) become steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals. Common long-term goals include things like earning your Bachelor's degree, owning a home, getting a job in your career area, buying a new car, etc.

Mid-term goals involve plans for this school year or your time here at college or goals you want to achieve within the next six months to two years. Mid-term goals are often stepping stones to your long-term goals, but they can also be independent goals. For example, you may have a goal of transferring to University, which is a midterm goal that brings you closer to your long-term goal of getting your Bachelor's degree. Or, you may have a goal to pay off your credit card debt within the next 12 months or to save for a car that you plan to buy next year. When making mid-term goals related to your long-term goals, make a list of accomplishments that will lead you to your final goal.

Short-term goals focus on today and the next few days and perhaps weeks. Short-term goals expect accomplishment in a short period of time, such as trying to get a bill paid in the next few days or getting an A on your upcoming exam. The definition of a short-term goal need not relate to any specific length of time. In other words, one may achieve (or fail to achieve) a short-term goal in a day, week, month, year, etc. The time-frame for a short-term goal relates to its context in the overall timeline that it is being applied to. For instance, one could measure a short-term goal for a month-long project in days; whereas one might measure a short-term goal for someone's lifetime in months or in years. Often, people define short-term goals in relation to their mid-term or long-term goals.

An example of how short-term and mid-term goals relate to long-term goals is wanting to earn your Bachelor's degree. If you have a goal of earning your Bachelor's degree in four years, a mid-term goal is getting your Associates Degree and getting accepted to your top choice University in two years. This can be broken down into a series of short-term goals such as your GPA goal for this semester, your goal grade on an upcoming exam, and the amount of time you plan to study this weekend. Every long-term goal can be broken down into smaller steps and eventually lead to the question, "what do I have to do today to achieve my goal?"

You will make goals in different areas of life and at different times in your life. At this point in your life, academic goals may take precedent but there are also other areas to consider.

Academic – You clearly already have an academic goal and are actively working on pursuing it. Academic goals may include things like a target GPA, completing your Associate's Degree, or transferring to a University. It may also include short-term goals like completing your homework before the weekend.

Career – At this point, your career goals are closely linked to your academic goals, such as getting a degree or certificate in your chosen career field. You may also have career goals of gaining experience in your field through internships and work experience.

Financial – Your financial goals are often tied to your career goals. You may have a salary goal or you may have the goal of saving for a home, a car or a vacation. You may also have goals to reduce debt and manage your budget.

Health/Physical – Almost all of us have worked on physical goals. Many people have the goal to lose weight, to increase their exercise or to drink more water. Other health goals could include establishing a regular sleep schedule, eating more fruits and vegetables, or seeing your doctor regularly. Health goals can also include mental health such as meditating or working to reduce stress and anxiety.

Social/Relationships – Even though it may feel like it sometimes, your life is more than school and work. You should also establish goals for your social relationships. For example, make a goal to stay in contact with a friend who moved, or to visit your family every week, or to have a date with your significant other once a week. Your social relationships are a vital part of your life and deserve your attention and focus.

Spiritual – Many people have religious goals, such as attending church regularly, practicing daily prayer, or joining a church group. Even if you aren't religious, you may have spiritual goals such as time alone to meditate.

Personal/Hobbies – In addition to work and school, you may have hobbies or personal interests that you want to devote time and energy to. Perhaps you have a goal of rebuilding a motorcycle or learning how to knit or sew.

SMART Goals

Turn your dreams into reality by following the SMART goal-setting process. SMART goals are commonly associated with Peter Drucker's management by objectives concept. It gives structure and organization to the goal-setting process by establishing defined actions, milestones, objectives and deadlines. Creating SMART goals helps with motivation and focus and keeps you moving forward. Every goal can be made into a SMART goal!

When writing your goals, follow these SMART guidelines. You should literally *write* them down because the act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them.

- **Goals should be SPECIFIC (S)**

- What exactly do you want to achieve? Avoid vague terms like “good,” and “more.” The more **specific** you are, the most likely you are to succeed.
- A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal.
- To set a specific goal, **answer the six “W” questions:**
 - Who:** Who is involved?
 - What:** What do I want to accomplish?
 - Where:** Identify a location.
 - When:** Establish a time frame.
 - Which:** Identify requirements and constraints.
 - Why:** Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

“I will get a 3.5 GPA this semester so that I can apply to the Surgical Tech Program.”

- **Goals should be MEASURABLE (M)**

- Break your goal down into **measurable** elements so you have concrete evidence of your progress.
- Using numbers, quantities or time is a good way to ensure measurability.
- When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience success!
- To determine if your goal is measurable, ask...
 - How much?
 - How many?
 - How often?
 - How will I know when it is accomplished?

“I will study 18 hours per week, 3 hours per day for six days a week.”

- **Goals should be ATTAINABLE (A)**

- A goal should be something to strive for and reach for but something that is **achievable and attainable**. For example, completing an Associate's Degree in one year may not be attainable while working full time with a family.
- Ask yourself if you have the time, money, resources and talent to make it happen
- Weigh the effort, time and other costs your goal will take against the benefits and other priorities you have in life.
- You can attain most any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps.

“I will complete 9 credit hours this semester while working part-time.”

- **Goals should be REALISTIC (R)**

- Your goal should be **realistic and relevant**. Ask yourself if your goal and timeline is realistic for your life, why is the goal important to you, and what is the objective behind your goal? What makes the goal worthwhile for YOU?
- Be sure the goal is relevant to you.
 - Why is this goal important to you? (Make sure your goal aligns with your values.)
 - What are the benefits and rewards of accomplishing this goal?
 - Why will you be able to stay committed in the long-run?
 - Is it something that will still be important to you a month or year from now?

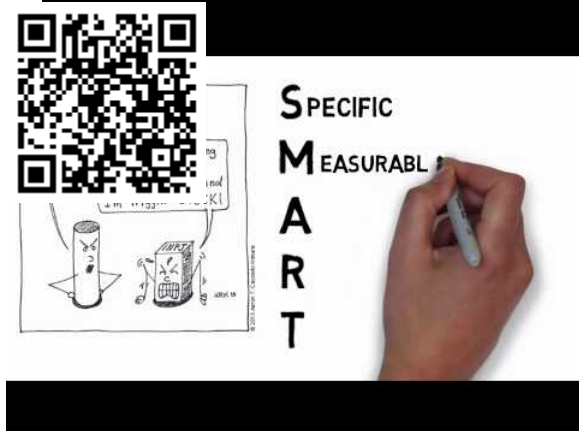
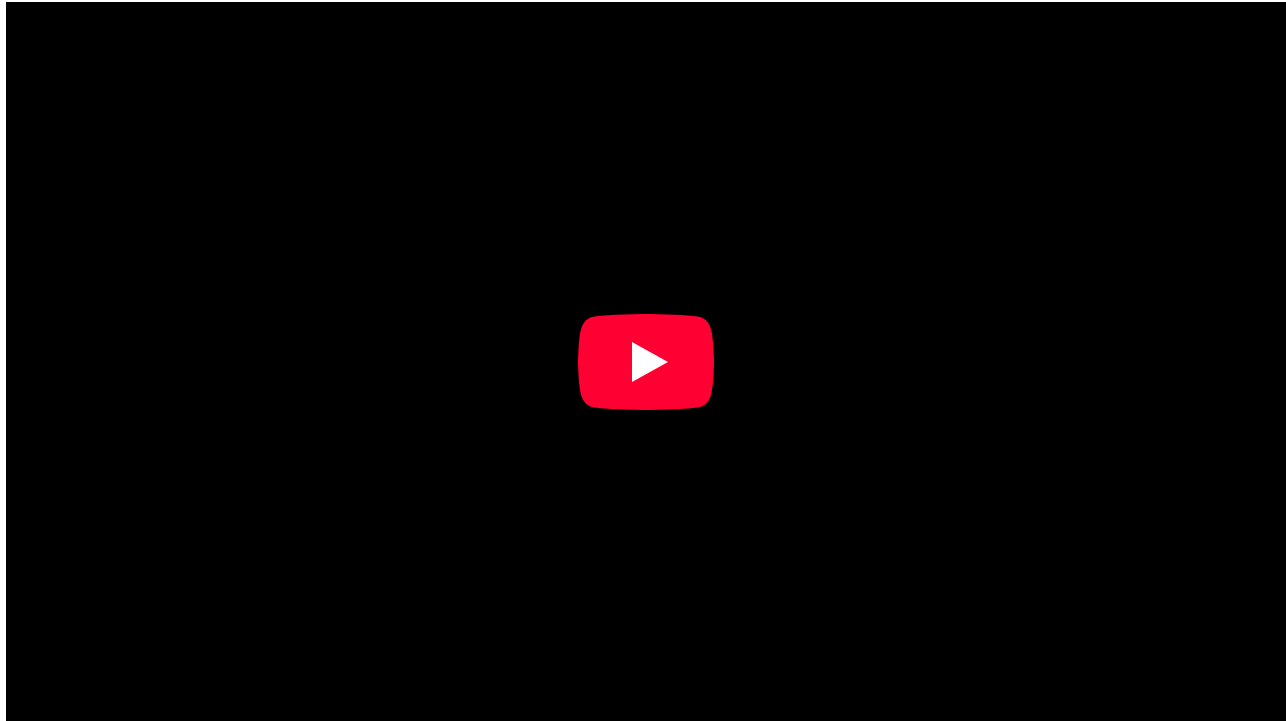
“I will become a Surgical Technician in two years to pursue my interests and values in helping others and provide for my family.”

- **Goals should have a TIMEABLE (T)**

- Your goal should have a clear deadline. This will help you stay accountable and motivated.
- Keep the **timeline** realistic but also a little challenging to create a sense of accountability and avoid procrastination.
- With no deadline, there's no sense of urgency, which leads to procrastination.
 - “Someday,” “soon,” and “eventually” are not deadlines.
 - Be specific with each deadline for each step along the way.

“I will complete the draft of my research paper one-week before the deadline.”

You can watch this supplemental video on SMART goals if you wish to explore the idea further.



SMART Goals

Putting Your Goals Into Action

Be certain **you** want to reach the goal. We are willing to work hard and sacrifice to reach goals we really care about, ones that support our core values. But, we're likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we don't feel strongly about a goal. If you're doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it's not your own personal goal—and you may have some more thinking to do about your life.

Writing down your goals helps you to organize your thoughts and be clear with your goals, ensuring you meet the SMART goal criteria. When you write your goals, state them positively, stating what you *will* do rather than what you won't do. When you focus on doing something, that behavior often increases. On the other hand, when you focus on *not* doing something, that behavior also often increases. For example, if you have a goal to increase your health, you may focus on increasing your water intake to at least 64 ounces per day. This will lead you to think about and drink more water! But, if you focus on *not* drinking soda, you are likely to think about soda all day and end up drinking more.

After you have written down your goal, post it in a visible place to remind you every day of what it is you are working toward. When you see your goal, ask yourself, "Did my choices today help move more toward my goal? Are my actions supporting my goals?" Being reminded of your goal can help you stay motivated and focused.

Consider sharing your goal with friends, family or classmates. Sharing your goal with supportive people who care about you will help you stay on track. Share your goal with people you know will be encouraging and cheer you on as you work toward your goal. In return, offer the same support for your friends' goals and dreams.

How to Stay Motivated

Watch this video that adapts a presentation by Daniel Pink that explains "the surprising truth about what motivates us." Do you think you need a big reward in order to stay motivated to work on your goal? Or, do you need a strict consequence if you don't meet your goal? Watch the video to find out.



Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There are three criteria for identifying your core values. Identifying your core values is the first step of the goal-setting process.
- Self-assessments can help you define your core values.
- Your stage of life influences your personal values and interests.
- Goal setting is a process with many rewards and benefits that allows you to get what you want from life.
- There are short-term, mid-term and long-term goals. They are often stepping stones to meet bigger goals.
- You will create goals in several areas of your life including academic, financial, career and personal.
- The SMART goal setting model is a very effective system for identifying and creating goals.
- A Personal Action Plan can help you define your goals using the SMART goal model.

Journal Assignment

After reading the above content and watching the above videos, take some time to consider each of the questions below and document your thoughts:

1. What is the difference between a fixed and growth mindset when it comes to setting and achieving goals? Identify an example of each in your own life.
2. What are some common obstacles that might prevent someone from achieving a goal? How can a growth mindset help overcome these obstacles?
3. Should people focus more on long-term or short-term goals when working to develop a growth mindset? Why?
4. Imagine you set a goal but don't achieve it on your first attempt. What adjustments could you make while maintaining a growth mindset?
5. How do you think goal setting can impact your motivation, resilience, and self-confidence over time?

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