

# How To Use Short-Term Goals To Achieve Big Dreams

Discover how setting short-term goals can help you achieve your long-term ambitions.



A short-term goal may be something you want to do for its own sake. For example, you may want to clean out your closet, read that book that's been collecting dust on your nightstand, save the money you need to go on a long-overdue vacation, or finally run a 10K. Or, short-term goals can also be things that you want to do in the process of accomplishing longer-term ambitions and goals. You may want to earn a professional certification so that you can broaden your career prospects, get a good grade on the next test so that you go to your first-choice college, or save money for a down payment on your first home so that you can build intergenerational wealth.

A good short-term goal may be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (Macleod, 2012):

- **Specific** – You may have more success with goals that are precisely defined. The goal to “do well in biology” is not specific. A specific version of this goal might be “score at least 90% on the next three biology quizzes”.
- **Measurable** – How will you know whether you have successfully achieved the goal? Goals with clear criteria for success may be more effective than goals with ambiguous outcomes. “Learn cellular metabolism” may be a commendable goal, but is difficult to measure. In contrast “Be able to diagram the Krebs Cycle” is much more measurable.

- **Achievable** – Is this goal realistically within your reach? If you currently have a B-average in biology it may not be realistic to strive for a perfect grade. However, you may be able to work towards an A.
- **Relevant** – Why is this goal relevant to your long-term goals, plans, or desires? Why are you trying to achieve this goal? You may find yourself much more motivated to work towards your short-term goal if you can connect that goal to a longer-term goal. For example, you may want to connect your short-term goal of doing well in biology to your longer-term goal of attending medical school and becoming a physician.
- **Time-bound** – When should this goal be completed? You may be more motivated to act if you have a specific date by which you plan to have accomplished your goal.

Short-term goals, especially work goals, may be most successful when they adhere to the acronym FAST (Sull & Sull, 2018):

- **F – Frequently** discussed and revised as needed. Regular feedback on how things are progressing may lead to improved outcomes. Moreover, in dynamic workplaces, goals may need to be changed, reprioritized, or even eliminated.
- **A – Ambitious.** The most successful companies don't limit their workforce to setting goals where success is guaranteed.
- **S – Specific** metrics and milestones. Goals should not be vague and should be paired with quantifiable metrics of success whenever possible.
- **T – Transparent** for everyone in the organization to see. Goal transparency has many benefits including eliminating redundant or unaligned work across teams, increasing accountability, and helping all employees see how their contributions fit into the organization's broader goals.

The FAST metrics may be applied to a variety of specific work goals. For example, a marketing manager of a startup may be tasked with increasing awareness of the brand. An ambitious, specific, and transparent short-term goal that serves this longer-term objective may be to gain 100,000 followers on the organization's Facebook page. And as new social media platforms come to prominence, this goal may need to be revised.

## Using Short-Term Goals To Reach Long-Term Goals

Long-term goals are the goals and ambitions that express your beliefs, core values, and worldviews. Short-term goals are the day-to-day actions that reflect these long-term beliefs (Doran, 1981). Short-term goals may be more satisfying and fulfilling if they serve long-term goals. For example, if your long-term goal is to feel a stronger sense of community and connection within the world, you may want to choose specific short-term goals to reflect these values. Setting yourself a short-term goal of spending at least 10 hours a month in acts of service may help you work towards your long-term goal of increased connection and community.

### References

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