Setting SMART Goals: Transcript

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Thank you for watching the Purdue OWL's vidcast on Setting SMART Goals. The "SMART" in "SMART" Goals represents an acronym first coined by George Doran, a corporate management specialist, in the 1980s and represents a framework that sees continued success in various professional contexts. SMART Goals help writers create sustainable goals that lead to more successful and productive writing sessions.

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The SMART in SMART Goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound and creates a framework to drive your goal-setting for purposeful, clearly-defined writing sessions.

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The S represents specificity. A goal lacking specificity might state, "I will work on my methods section." While you've identified the section of your document that you will be working on, you haven't clarified what you're going to draft. A more specific goal might look something like, "I will list out all of the materials I used in my experiment to incorporate into my methods section." Here, the content of what you are working on is clearer, and you've identified the section of your document that's most relevant to your work.

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The "measurable" part of SMART goals helps you quantify the measures and progress you're making towards your goals. Let's stick with the non-specific goal of "Working on my methods section." This goal is not measurable because it does not indicate when this goal will be achieved. To make this goal more measurable, consider indicators like page count, number of paragraphs written, or periods of time dedicated to the project.

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SMART goals also encourage people to make their goals attainable. An attainable goal is one that is realistic for you. This is an opportunity to be honest with your time and abilities. Let's alter this general goal we've been using just slightly to illustrate this: "I will work on my methods section" becomes "I will write my entire method section during my free hour this morning." This goal is likely unattainable because most writers would need more time to draft an entire section. To add an element of attainability you could change this goal to think about the resources you need to complete for this goal. For example, a revised goal will be: "I will use my free hour this morning to create a bulleted list of everything I need to adequately draft my methods section." Resources might include lab notes or articles that provide strong examples for how to structure a methods section in your field.

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It's important to understand the relevancy of more granular, specific goals towards your larger, overarching goals. A general goal like "I will work on my methods section" doesn't give us a lot of context, but indicating why you're working on this goal—for example, "because it will help me complete my dissertation"—places this goal in a larger context and helps you think about why this goal is relevant to your work, beneficial, and worth pursuing.

This is not something you necessarily need to write into your SMART Goal; however, being mindful of why your goal is relevant or understanding what makes a goal relevant will help you craft writing-related goals that lead to success. In short, try to keep the "big picture" in mind. How is this goal helping me achieve grander, long-term goals, or why is this goal beneficial for your writing and learning?

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Finally, a SMART Goal should be Time-Bound. This is related to attainability—you want to ensure that you can complete this goal in the time allotted to you, and you also want to make sure that this goal helps you make progress towards larger, overarching deadlines. The general goal we've been using, "I will work on my methods section," makes no allusion to time; however, a goal like, "I have 90 minutes this morning that I can dedicate to writing time. I will use this time to work on my methods section" gives us a good idea of how long you will work on this goal. As you continue to develop SMART Goals, you may become more aware of how much time you actually need to complete certain tasks.

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Now that we've broken down each letter in SMART Goals, let's see what a full, complete SMART Goal might look like, combining each element into one full to-do list item.

Our original goal was "I will work on my methods section." A revised SMART goal might say: "I will spend 90 minutes this morning working on my methods section. I will begin by listing out the materials I used in my experiment, then draft four paragraphs. As I draft, I will refer to articles that have strong examples of methods sections. This will help me progress on my dissertation."

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This goal is Specific because it identifies what you will be drafting.

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It's measurable because it identifies the number of paragraphs you plan to draft.

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It's attainable because it relies on resources that will help you complete the task.

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It's relevant because it's contributing to progress on your dissertation.

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And it's time-bound because it has a specific time limit—90 minutes.

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Drafting SMART Goals may take some getting used to, but they will help you understand how these everyday goals contribute to overall progress in large-scale projects and help you reflect on the overall attainability of the goals you set for yourself. Again, everyone

works at a different pace, so understanding what's attainable and realistic for you is another benefit of making SMART Goals.

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Check out the rest of our videos, including our additional videos on project planning and scheduling writing time.

You can also find more information about graduate writing on the Purdue OWL website.

For now, thanks for watching!