

Setting goals and solving problems

Effective problem solving is one of life's most useful skills – we use it every day to deal with challenges at school, work, home, and in our relationships.

Setting goals

College should challenge you in a number of new and rewarding ways, from broadening your experience with unfamiliar classes to expanding your horizons intellectually. Yet with all these new challenges, it's also important to develop the skills you need to be able to cope with stress, a hectic schedule and impending deadlines. Learning how to set realistic, productive goals for yourself throughout each term can help you stay on top of things and make the most of your education.

Below are six smart goals for college students, as well as some criteria for setting new goals for yourself.

Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals

One of the most important things about setting goals while you're in school is that each one needs to be distinct, achievable, and rewarding in order to keep you moving forward. Before you set any major goals for yourself, try to ensure they meet the following criteria.

Specific – Know exactly what you need to accomplish and what you hope to gain from doing so, whether it's simply finishing a paper, writing a personal statement for an internship or scholarship application or finishing some research for a larger project.

Measurable – Make sure you can easily evaluate whether or not your goal was met and how beneficial it ultimately was to you.

Achievable – Be realistic when setting goals. This can help you avoid missing deadlines and getting behind, as well as giving you a more accurate overview of how much time you have to invest in other tasks throughout the week.

Results-Focused – Have very clear, distinct outcomes for meeting your goals, and hold yourself to them.

Time-Bound – Set a deadline for each goal or, for more complex tasks with multiple steps, establish deadlines for each major stage of the process.

Set a Goal for Grades in Each Class

While you always want to strive to do your best in every class, there are a number of factors that may impact how you're able to do from course to course. First, take into account the subject matter, the level of the class, how essential the course is to your degree program and the other courses you're taking during the same term. Then set a realistic goal for the grade you think you can earn if you work hard, and invest a reasonable amount of time working toward this goal. Some courses are just harder, or more relevant to your intended career path, than others, and setting a specific grade goal can help you prioritize effectively.

Plan Homework/Study Times for Every Course

At the beginning of the term, try to plan out specific time blocks for each class throughout the week, and hold yourself accountable for spending these time periods completing homework and studying. If something comes up and you're unable to devote the usual time to a course one week, make sure you can reschedule the entire block of time for that class to another day (which can help prevent you from getting behind or missing an assignment).

Visit With Each Instructor at Least Once Per Term

This one can be helpful, visiting an instructor during office hours or scheduling some time to talk over the phone or through email can be a good way to get help and support during especially difficult periods like during finals or when you're approaching graduation. Try to get to know at least one instructor well during each term, and make sure to take some time to speak personally with each one at some point.

Take an Extra Challenging Course

Look for courses that interest you outside your degree program or current area of focus, and try to challenge yourself to move out of your comfort zone. Pushing yourself to try something new can be a great way to keep yourself intellectually engaged.

Join an Extracurricular Group

Joining a student group (which you can also do when taking online classes) can be a great way to get to know other students - and sometimes faculty - in your degree program. It can be a great way to reduce stress and allow yourself to take much-needed breaks from studying and work.

Developing a Positive Attitude

Your mind is a powerful thing. If you allow yourself to keep a positive state of mind, your attitude will follow.

There are many ways to develop your positive attitude. Here are a few to help you get started.

Listen to your internal dialogue. When faced with a negative thought, turn it around to make it into a positive thought. (For example, “I am no good at this!” could be changed to, “Maybe this is not one of my strengths, but I’ve tried my hardest, and I am skilled in many other things.”)

Interact within positive environments and with positive people. Do things with people who reinforce you in a positive way. Go places that have special meanings and positive memories or associations.

Volunteer. Do something that will help others. This will give you a sense of fulfillment and make you feel happy inside.

Get pleasure out of the simple things in life. Laughter is one of the most powerful mood enhancers. Allow yourself to laugh.

Permit yourself to be loved. Everyone deserves to be loved. Everyone is loved.

Your actions and reactions toward other individuals can determine the end result of the interaction. For example, if you are receptive and respectful to individuals’ opinions, they in return could be more open to what it is you have to say.

Take responsibility for your actions, thoughts and feelings. No one can make you feel any way that you do not want to feel.

Accept that no one is perfect and that includes you. Be proud of your accomplishments and the hard work you’ve done.

Take a close look at your life. Examine your daily routine and the effects it has on your life and most importantly your attitude.