

SMART GOALS

This exercise is about making sure your goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound (i.e. SMART). Luckily, with running, it's pretty easy to meet all the SMART criteria when we set our goals. Running is heavily numbers based (time, pace, place, miles per week, distance, etc.), making it easy to be specific and measurable, and race dates take care of the time-bound aspect. Attainable and Relevant leave more room for interpretation. Let's start by review each of the elements of SMART goals and making sure your goals meet all the criteria;

SPECIFIC

The more specific you can make your goal the better. Again, when it comes to running, this is very easy, "I want to make varsity." "I want to run a PR." "I want to finish my first 5K." "I want to letter." Avoid vague phrases like "I want to get faster." Also avoid goals that are outside of your control.

MEASUREABLE

Here's another easy metric when it comes to running because most of our goals are time, place or distance based, making them measurable. Just double check to make sure that's the case. If you carry this practice over into other aspects of your life, this metric may become harder to define.

ATTAINABLE

So far your goal is specific and measurable, but is it attainable. Perhaps you want to qualify for State, but that means knocking 2 minutes off your 3200 meter time. This may not be realistic in the short-term, but it could be the perfect long-term or intermediate goal. We want goals that are attainable because we can see them getting closer, which helps keep us motivated.

RELEVANT

The key when it comes to relevant goals, is making sure they're relevant to *you*. Sure all your running buddies want to do things like make the varsity team. But do you? You may really like the *idea* of making varsity, but do you like the idea of all the *work* that it's going to take to make varsity. One way to determine if your goal is relevant is to ask yourself "why?" over and over until you drill down to the heart of the goal.

Why do you want to make the varsity team? I love this team and I want to contribute to its success.

Why is that important? Because it's not easy to make the top-7 and I'd have to work hard to get there.

Why is that important? Because I want to push myself and see where this sport can take me.

Why is that important? Because running is a large part of my life and it would help validate all my hard work.

TIME-BOUND

While race dates do make it easy to set time-bound goals, it's also easy to not sign up for races and/or not show up because we don't think our training was "perfect".

The time-bound metric is another way of splitting goals into short-term and long-term. While making varsity might not be attainable this year, can you see yourself getting there over the course of the next 3 years?

Troubleshooting: If you're having trouble coming up with some SMART goals for the season, here are a couple of ways to start or check what you've come up with.

Goal check #1: Start with a time you know you can run and calculate a time that is 4% faster than that. (HINT: when calculating a 4% improvement in time, first convert your current PR from minutes and seconds to just seconds and then multiply that number by .96 and convert back to minutes and seconds.)

A 4% improvement might not seem like a lot, but in reality it's usually enough to motivate you without overwhelming you. For example, someone with a 5:00 PR would shoot for a 4:48 this season in the 1600. If looking at cross country, a 4% improvement for a 20:00 runner would lead to 19:12.

Goal check #2: Another method for determining a goal time is to think of an outrageous time that you believe is way out of your reach this season. For example, if you've run 1600 in 5:00, maybe 4:20 is unbelievable for you. That's fine. Now work backwards from 4:20 until you get to a point where you think "yeah, if everything goes amazing and I do everything right, I can see myself running that time." In the above example, that might be 4:30 for one athlete and 4:49 for another. Again, there are no right or wrong answers.