Setting and Achieving Goals

Feeling overwhelmed? Lots of college-bound high school students do. Here's one solution: Set some goals. Having a plan in place—a roadmap—takes the anxiety out of any journey or transition, including the one you will make from high school into college.

If you're having trouble focusing on your studies, if your life is too busy and complicated, goals can help you set priorities and focus on the activities that are most important to you. Keep remembering: *Your success has short-term AND long-term value to you, your family and your community*. Turning hopes and dreams, such as college and the possibility of becoming a Dell Scholar, a Smith Scholar, or a Gates Millennium Scholar, into reality takes setting and achieving goals. But where do you start?



Start S.M.A.R.T. Get S.M.A.R.T. About Goals

*A great way to take control is to set **SMART** goals—ones that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**imely*

Specific: You have a much better chance of accomplishing a specific goal than a vague, general one. "Get good grades" is vague. "Earn an A in chemistry" details *exactly* what needs to be done.

Measurable: Effective goals are quantifiable, and progress towards them is able to be tracked over time. "Feel more rested" isn't enough. "Go to bed five minutes earlier every night this week" is measurable.

Attainable: "Be the top student in every class" is probably not going to happen. Goals should be inspiring, but putting them beyond reach will set you up for failure and discouragement.

Realistic: If your ultimate goal is to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, good for you! But it probably won't happen overnight. Instead, set a goal of writing a poem every week to build a college portfolio. Setting realistic goals in the present can carry you to bigger goals in the future.

Timely: Goals need deadlines. If you never set a time frame for meeting a goal you're less likely to get started, stay focused and meet it.

"Setting and Achieving Goals." Gates Millennium Scholar's Program. Online. 10 May 2015. http://www.imagine.gmsp.org/goalstep8/body.html

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Build a Master Calendar

Start to create that time frame by building a customized monthly calendar. Here are the steps:

- Collect the important school events on the horizon, such as athletic or academic competitions, the prom, science fairs and so forth.
- Make a list of personally important dates: birthdays, anniversaries, religious holidays, special events or trips
- Combine the two lists, noting which dates overlap.
- Enter everything on a paper or electronic calendar. (The ones built into computers are especially helpful because alarms and reminders can be programmed in.)
- Mark in red all days that contain multiple items, two or more consecutive important due dates and any double-exam days.

Break it Down by Week

Now create a weekly calendar by writing down your fixed schedule—classes, part-time work hours, sports practice and so forth—and referring to the events on the master calendar.

Make a Daily To-Do List

As a last step, get in the habit of creating daily to-do lists including everything you want to accomplish in a day. Take a look at the list at a fixed time every day, like first thing in the morning or just before bed. You will find that checking items off the list can be almost as satisfying as completing the task itself.

Be sure to schedule some downtime and leave some wiggle room—time to handle unexpected things or projects that take longer to do than projected.

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