

13 SMART objectives



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Technique sheet

Problem-based learning resources

Introduction

It's good to know where you want to go, the direction you have to take, and how far to your destination, so it's easy to know when you get there. But it's not quite so easy with work objectives. How will you know when you have hit it? Sometimes it's obvious, you have completed a task on time and to the required standard. Sometimes it's more difficult to decide when the target is hit. If your target is 'to be more patient with your colleagues' or 'work harder' how will you know when you've arrived? That's where SMART objectives are useful.

Who sets my objectives?

We can set our own objectives and it is a good idea to do this. They may be a list of jobs to do (e.g. strip down the engine and replace the spark plugs) or a standard to reach (e.g. become qualified in handling asbestos). In work, objectives are often set by your manager to make clear what they expect from you. These objectives will fit in with the overall company goal and the parts of the work

that are relevant to you. In good companies, some objectives are negotiated with the employee and some are set by the employer. Objectives will be used to assess your performance so make sure you are clear about what they are and who will judge whether you have met them.

- Make sure you have clear objectives and that you understand what they mean. Ask your manager or teacher if you are unsure.

How can I make my objectives SMART?

Objectives are things we want to get done. They can be large like 'complete this course' or a smaller part of a large objective like 'to get my next assignment in on time'. Objectives can help to focus our work and energy and most companies have detailed objectives for all employees. They describe what is expected. However, while objectives like 'work smarter' or 'improve my report writing' are not bad but it can be difficult to know exactly what they mean and how you will know when you have met them. For this reason, many people now use SMART objectives. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-limited.

- Make sure your objectives are SMART and that you understand them rather than them being wish lists or hopes.

What do 'Specific' and 'Measurable' mean?

A Specific objective details exactly what is expected. So, an objective like 'speed up on the maintenance check for the air-conditioning system' is a bit confusing – what aspects of the checks need to be checked and how fast is fast enough? A Specific objective might be 'complete all the checks listed in the maintenance schedule on the air-conditioning unit in under 30 minutes. You now know exactly what is expected. The objective is also clearly Measurable – either you complete all the tasks in under 30 minutes or not. There can be no argument about the outcome. Other measures could include things like a 30% increase in the machine throughput or a 5% drop in power consumption per unit manufactured.

- Make sure you are clear about exactly what is expected in your objective and that it is Specific and the outcome Measurable.

What do 'Achievable' and 'Relevant' mean?

There is no point in setting a Specific, Measurable objective if there is no realistic chance of you achieving it. That just guarantees failure and leads to frustration. Asking a newly-qualified electrician lacking in experience, and perhaps, confidence, to supervise seniors and check their work is unrealistic and unfair. Asking them to complete their allotted work in the time available and have it checked by a senior colleague or manager is Achievable. As they gain experience what they can achieve increases and the objectives will become more demanding. Similarly asking the electrician to check the deliveries of milk or sugar for the canteen is not Relevant to their work. If Achievable means 'I have a chance of doing this if I work well' then Relevance means 'It's work which is important to the specific role I have and the project overall'.

- Make sure that you agree your objectives are Achievable (even if it will be hard!) and that you understand how it is Relevant to you and the overall project.

And Time-limited?

Tidying your workspace is a good objective – but you're not told when it should be done! 'I'll do it tomorrow ... or maybe next week!'. SMART objectives have a clear Time-limit for when the work must be

done. These Time-limited objectives can be critical for large projects – if you don't complete the wiring for the solar panels on time the battery installers will have to wait and the whole installation project will be delayed.

- Make sure you know when your objective has to be met and stick to your deadline – other people may be depending on you!



Check yourself

You should be able to answer these questions easily after reading this sheet.

1. What do the letters in a SMART objective stand for?
2. Why is it important that your objectives are achievable?
3. Why is 'just do the job better' not a very useful objective?



Taking it further

These activities will deepen your understanding of this topic.

1. Think of any objectives you have been set in the last few weeks or months. Were they clear? Were they SMART? Think about how you might have changed them to make them SMARTer.
2. The following are some useful objectives. Rewrite them as SMART objectives and check with a colleague or your teacher – have you made them SMARTer?
 - Reduce the leakage of water from the inlet pipe to the storage tank.
 - Increase the power available to the central air-conditioning unit to help prevent failures during hot weather.
 - Develop your understanding of the use of 3D-printing technology in the aerospace industry.
3. Consider setting some SMART objectives for your next six weeks. You can discuss these with a lecturer or a friend. Make sure you review these objectives in six weeks. Your next set of objectives can then develop on your successes or gaps you feel you need to fill in your skills and knowledge.