

Tips and tricks to define your personal goals in the context of the professional practice portfolio

A useful way of making goals more powerful is to use the SMART principle. While there are plenty of variants, SMART usually stands for:

- S – Specific (or Significant).
- M – Measurable (or Meaningful).
- A – Attainable (or Action-Oriented).
- R – Relevant (or Rewarding).
- T – Time-bound (or Trackable).

For example, instead of having "to be able to communicate better with my fellow researchers" as a goal, it's more powerful to use the SMART goal "To have talked and explained my work at the institute to at least 5 people in the institute by 30 April, 2018."

The following broad guidelines will help you to set effective, achievable goals:

- State each goal as a positive statement – Express your goals positively – "Be able to work with a titration unit" is a much better goal than "Not making mistakes anymore when doing titrations"
- Be precise – Set precise goals, putting in dates, times and amounts so that you can measure achievement. If you do this, you'll know exactly when you have achieved the goal, and can take complete satisfaction from having achieved it.
- Set priorities – When you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps you to avoid feeling overwhelmed by having too many goals, and helps to direct your attention to the most important ones.
- Write goals down – This crystallizes them and gives them more force.
- Keep operational goals small – Keep the low-level goals that you're working towards small and achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it. Keeping goals small and incremental gives more opportunities for reward.
- Set performance goals, not outcome goals – You should take care to set goals over which you have as much control as possible. It can be quite dispiriting to fail to achieve a personal goal for reasons beyond your control! If you base your goals on personal performance, then you can keep control over the achievement of your goals, and draw satisfaction from them.
- Set realistic goals – It's important to set goals that you can achieve. All sorts of people can set unrealistic goals for you. They will often do this in ignorance of your own desires and ambitions. It's also possible to set goals that are too difficult because you might not appreciate either the obstacles in the way, or understand quite how much skill you need to develop to achieve a particular level of performance.