Goal setting in language learning

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The beginning of the year is a good time to reflect on what you have (not) learned/achieved so far in your language learning and – more importantly – decide where you want to get in the next semester/year. Goal setting is extremely important for your progress, especially because of your motivation. People often say things such as *I want to improve my English.* or *I want to be better at speaking/listening/etc.*

The problem with such statements is that they are too vague. It's also difficult to tell whether you have achieved the goal, let alone the fact that they might be scary because they seem too difficult. As a result, you often feel discouraged to start and – even if you don't – it's hard to decide where and how to start. You lack motivation and it's easy to give up on your learning. Is there a way out?

Of course, there is! You need to set your goal(s) in the right way – you need to set **S.M.A.R.T. goals**. What does that mean? Your goals need to be

S = **specific** – identify specific things you want to learn, e.g. vocabulary relating to making a phone call, how to use second conditional or how to get the intonation right when asking questions.

M = **measurable** – you need to be able to tell whether you have achieved your goal. For the above examples it would mean, for example, making a phone call and being able to communicate effectively; being able to make an exercise on second conditional without a mistake or taping yourself and comparing your intonation to that of a native speaker.

A = **achievable** – it is good to challenge yourself but it's good to be honest with yourself, too. If you set yourself a goal which is too difficult (e.g. getting from A2 level to C1 level in just half a year), you will only get frustrated by not being able to achieve it.

R = **realistic** – this aspect is related to the previous one. When you're setting your goals, you should take into consideration your everyday life and responsibilities. How much time can you dedicate to your language learning? Can you achieve your goal yourself or will you need any help? These are the questions you need to ask.

T = **time-bound** – in other words, you need to set yourself a deadline. The deadline can vary from one week to, let's say, one year (or even longer). If you're setting yourself a long-term goal, it's good to break it down into a series of smaller short-term goals.

Do you need an example?

To make it easier for you to set your S.M.A.R.T. goals, I prepared an example for you:

Sources: www.5minutelanguage.com

By the end of this month, I'll be able to talk for 5 minutes about my previous work experience using present perfect and past simple correctly. I will be able to use time expressions such as *before, after, since, yet* to show the continuity of the events. I will be able to use at least 5 irregular verbs including *do, become, learn*.

This goal is **specific** because it specifies the topic, grammar and vocabulary for the task.

It is also **measurable** – you will speak for 5 minutes, use two tenses, several specific time expressions and irregular verbs.

The goal is **achievable** and **realistic** but, of course, it depends on your starting point too.

And it is **time-bound** because you set yourself a deadline of one month.

Now I'd like you to take some time to **think about your SMART goals**. What is it that you'd like to achieve this semester? Write them down here:

My SMART goal(s) for the upcoming semester: