Achieving your academic goals

# Introduction

The skills you develop whilst at university will serve you well in later life, so ask yourself: where do I want to be in ten years’ time, and how can I get there?

This resource will encourage you to consider your long-term academic **goals** by putting your studies into the broader context of your continued **personal development**.

It will help you to **identify** and **prioritise** the steps you need to take in order to achieve these goals.

# The Big Picture

While studying at university it is easy to view your individual assignments and projects as separate, short-term tasks or challenges. Taking a step back can help you to see how these individual challenges fit into a bigger picture

Each task gives you an opportunity to learn new things and develop skills to be used in future projects. Ultimately, these skills will contribute to your success not only during your studies but later on in life.

## Long-Term Thinking

Now take that step back and think about the bigger picture – your university experience as a whole.

Developing effective project management strategies at the start of your course will have a profound effect on how you perform during the rest of your degree. The more effort you put into establishing these early on, the more time you will save along the way and the greater the quality of your work.

### In the Beginning

“In my first year I spent some time trying out different online tools designed to help me organise myself and my time. I also looked at ways to store and share documents.”

**Along the Way**

“After some trial and error in my first semester, by the end of the first year I knew which tools and techniques suited me best and I had a system that really worked for me.”

**In the End**

“When it came to doing my dissertation, I was sorted. I used my already tried and tested methods to plan out what I needed to do and when, so the organisation side of it was a lot easier.”

# Identifying your goals

## Introduction

We often focus so intently on our **short-term goals**, the things that need doing now, that we lose sight of where we are headed. While individual assignments and tasks are important, their purpose is to bring you closer to your **long-term goal** – successfully **completing** your degree.

In this section we will look at **long-term goals** in more detail.

## These three students have different long-term goals:

**Student 1:**

“My long-term goal is to get a first-class degree.”

Short-term goals: join a study group; get advice from my academic tutor; improve my academic writing; practise my exam technique using past exam papers; develop my skills in critical analysis.

**Student 2:**

“My long-term goal is to get a graduate job in journalism.”

Short-term goals: visit careers fairs; develop my interview skills; get advice from the careers service; find out about the recruitment process; find out what skills I need for these jobs.

**Student 3:**

“My long-term goal is to become more independent.”

Short-term goals: get a part-time job; develop learning strategies that work best for me; seek advice on budgeting; develop a schedule to help me organise my time effectively; learn how to cook.

## Identifying your own goals

Now it’s your turn. Think about one of your own long-term goals: what do you want to get out of your university experience?

Once you have decided, write your long-term goal, then break it down into the smaller goals you will need to complete to achieve it.

# Prioritising your goals

## Introduction

The three key elements of any task or project are time, effort and quality. These three different elements are proportional to each other.

The more time and effort you put into a project, the better the quality of the finished product.

In this section, we will look at how you can use this model to plan and prioritise your everyday tasks.

## Time, Effort and Quality

Now, let’s go back to our diagram to see how the time/effort/quality relationship dan be applied to the university experience as a whole.

If you invest time and effort developing good ways of working in the early stages of your degree, then you provide yourself with a solid foundation on which you can build in later years.

Time will become more and more precious as you move through your degree and finding those successful strategies will increase your efficiency.

In turn, an efficient work strategy will have a positive impact on the quality of your work.

## Making Strategic Choices

Prioritising a list of tasks requires you to make strategic decisions, about how you will spend your **time** and the **effort** you will put in. In order to make these **decisions** you also need to consider the necessary **quality** of the finished product. Whilst we might want everything we do to be of the same high quality, this often isn’t **possible** within the time constraints. Therefore, the **necessary** quality of a marked essay is different to the necessary quality of an unmarked presentation for your seminar group.

Here are some things you should consider when deciding how much time and effort to devote to a task:

* How does this task contribute to my **long-term goals**?

For example, if your long-term goal is to secure a partnership in a law firm then you might want to devote more time to preparing for that unmarked presentation that you otherwise would. The ability to stand up and speak in public, as well as thinking on your feet, are essential skills for a lawyer.

* Will this experience be **useful in the** **future**?

Consider each of your tasks and then think about the existing skills you might develop or the new skills you might gain as a result. Which of these skills are likely to be of most use in the future? If you are tasked with doing an individual presentation in front of your course mates, then it is worth spending quite a lot of time structuring your presentation and preparing what you are going to say. The skills you learn during this process will serve you well throughout your life; most jobs and some interviews require you to give a presentation.

However, if you have been asked to use a specific piece of software to complete an assignment, something you are not likely to use again, then don’t waste your time learning everything there is to know about it. Learn enough to complete the assignment to a good standard.

* Where should I look for **more information** to make better choices?
1. The **assignment rubric** for your course will tell you what percentage each individual assessment contributes to your overall mark.
2. The **marking criteria** for the individual assignment will tell you how it is marked, which can be a useful indicator of which elements are more important. There is no point spending 80% of your time on designing your slides for an assessed presentation if the slides are only worth 10% of the mark.
3. **Past papers** are a good place to start in order to practise doing what you are going to be assessed on. This can help you recreate the exam conditions as closely as possible and then check your work to see how you did.