# Transforming Personal Goals into Study Plans

At some point, you identified the goals you hope to achieve by completing your online program of study. While these goals should provide the motivation for ongoing participation, they are also useful as a starting point for program planning.

This section will offer some suggestions for developing concrete plans for program completion. It will provide a vital link to the next section on time management, where you evaluate the impact of these plans on your daily schedule.
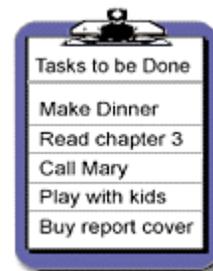
Converting Goals into Tasks

The first step in planning is to determine just what *needs* to be done. This may seem obvious, but many of us are overwhelmed to the point of paralysis because we fail to identify our priorities and choose our activities accordingly.

Creating task lists based on the goals we want to achieve can help us make such decisions. Alan Lakein, author of *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* (1996), suggests that such "To Do" lists be generated on a daily basis. The tasks or objectives included in these daily "To Do" lists should have the following characteristics:

1. *They should be **short-term**-- something that can be accomplished within the day's schedule.

2. *They should be **specific**-- something you can get to work on right away. Instead of *study pharmacology,* your task should be stated as, "read Chapter Three and complete the 5 review questions."

3. *They should be **attainable**-- it's much better to set a goal that you know you can achieve within the allotted study time, than to be too idealistic and set yourself up for failure.

4. *They should be **measurable**-- something that you can verify was accomplished. "Read five pages in Chapter 2" or "Complete six problems on the take-home exam" are two examples.

ABCs of Task Prioritization

Lakein also recommends using a system for prioritizing tasks based on which goals are most important.
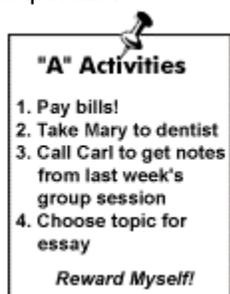
Where:

A = tasks that have high value (contribute to the highest priority goals)

B = tasks that have medium value (contribute to moderately important goals)

C = tasks that have low value (contribute to relatively unimportant goals)

This kind of a scheme makes it easy to determine which tasks should be completed first and which can be put off until later. Remember that as your goals shift in priority, the ratings of each task will also change.

Looking at Your Academic Calendar

As you proceed through your program, it will be helpful for you to look at what you need to accomplish over the next several weeks and record these requirements on a calendar. Then, for each of requirement, do the following:
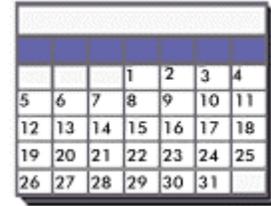
1. *Identify the tasks* that have to be accomplished to meet each requirement.

2. *Break down the task,* if necessary, into smaller, more manageable steps.

3. *Schedule the tasks* or steps over the available time frame, taking into account other demands on your time.

Strategies to Make Your Plans Work

1. *Keep Close Tabs on Your "A" Activities.* If you can, carry a personal organizer with your To Do lists. At the very least, keep a list of your "A" activities in your pocket, wallet, or purse and cross each one out as it is completed.

2. *Maintain a balance between discipline and flexibility.* Expect the unexpected, but stick to your schedule as much as possible. Reschedule any activities that were not completed as soon as you can.

3. *Reward yourself for task completion.* Celebrate your accomplishments with recreational activities or tangible rewards and build a history of successful experiences.
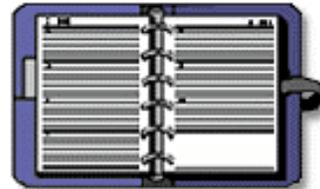
Additional Resources

Ellis, K. (1998). *The magic lamp: Goal setting for people who hate setting goals*. New York: Three Rivers

Gaub, K. (1993). *Dreams – how to have them, plans – how to make them, goals, how to reach them*. New Leaf Press.

Lucas, S. & Kreinberg, L. (1994). *The book of goals: Achievements, plans, and dreams of a lifetime*. First Step Publications.

Rouillard, L. A. (1998). *Goals and goal setting*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications.

Wilson, S. B. (1994). *Goal setting*. New York: AMACOM.

Goal Setting Articles (http://www.topachievement.com/articles.html)