



MAGNET MIND DEVELOPMENT

Uncover your infinite potential.

Guide to Goal-Setting

A Step-By-Step Guide to
Setting, Maintaining, and
Achieving Your Goals

By Mary Reiss Farias

Setting Goals in 10 Steps

An athlete's first experience in their life with goal-setting is likely to be in their sport. Before a child creates their own goals for themselves, they likely absorb or repeat the goals their parents or coaches have for them. A child may have goals for themselves, but unless they can organize their thoughts and take ownership of them, then their goals can remain fuzzy and more like dreams or wishes. Coaches and parents are present and should be available to help their athletes with the development of life skills such as goal-setting. Athletes should know that making and pursuing goals is healthy, self-esteem-building, highly individual, and extremely worthwhile.

This guide will help athletes walk step-by-step through the process of setting goals, breaking them into smaller, more manageable pieces, maintaining them, and attaining them. It will also help coaches and parents direct their athletes through the process. This is a great activity to do during practice time set aside for mental work as a team, or for athletes to do on their own. (Although this guide is specifically tailored to athletics, it develops an important life lesson that anyone can use.)

It is good practice for athletes to have a notebook or journal to write in so they have everything about their sport in one spot. Don't forget to write in your favorite color pen to make writing in your notebook your own unique experience. You'll also need a monthly calendar that you can write on.

Let's get started!

What is a goal?

Nathaniel Branden said it best when he said that a goal is a commitment that you make to yourself. You can wish and hope all you want, but until you create a real goal for yourself, things will remain wishes and dreams. The first step you need to take is to make a goal — make a commitment to yourself that you will work to attain a specific thing, whether it is a skill in athletics, a grade in math class, or a certain occupation when you grow up. Only when you finally have a destination will you be able to create a roadmap of how to get there.

Why is it important to make goals?

Goals are important because goals offer direction. People need clear-cut goals, otherwise they may be easily swayed one direction or another. Goals create a sense of urgency, and a sense of responsibility and interest in what we are doing. We all need an end result to strive for. We need to believe that what we are doing everyday is worthwhile. We need to have a sense of purpose for everything we do. “It is not that achievements ‘prove’ our worth but rather that the process of achieving” is what gives us our sense of pride and effectiveness (Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*). Having a goal is integral to building a healthy self-esteem.

Forming goals creates in a person the motivation or drive to better themselves. Goals provide people an opportunity to think about what they *want* and choose what to do for *themselves* — they give an athlete a taste of independence and purpose all their own — *my goal, my purpose*. Having goals provides a person with a firm sense of identity. Having goals helps a person with decision-making and provides them with the knowledge that what they choose to do to pursue that goal is right for them. Each person gets to be in control of their future. They have the power to pursue the goals they want. They get to choose how they spend each day working toward and reaching their goals.

Specifically in athletics, goals are necessary to help make the difficulty worthwhile to the athlete. There needs to be a reward at the end of the day. Goals help to teach perseverance and persistence in the face of difficulty and adversity.

Step 1: What is your main goal in your sport?

Begin by asking yourself, what is your main athletics goal? At the end of your career, what do you want to have accomplished? What do you want to work hard to attain? What end result will make you happy? What will make you content with yourself and your efforts? This can be as simple as wanting to make it to a competitive team, or as complicated as making it to the Olympics, and everywhere in between. The important thing is that it is *your* goal, and not anyone else's. *You* are doing the work. This is *your* decision. *You* get to choose.

Having a main goal is the important first step in fleshing out the rest of your goals (as you'll see, you can't just have one!). Keep in mind that your main goal can change over time; don't think that just because you designate one now, it is set in stone. Plenty of athletes start out, for example, wanting to make it to the Olympics, and most eventually redirect their focus to something else more realistic for them and their circumstances. On the other hand, some athletes set their goal to make it to compete on a team, but improve so quickly that they increase their goal to become an elite athlete or an Olympian. Goals are extremely personal, and they can change.

In creating your main goal, you need to take into consideration how long you have to go in the sport. For example, if you are 10 years old, you will have more years in the sport before you graduate high school than if you are 16 years old. This is important for two reasons. One, later on in this guide, you will be creating timelines for your goals. Two, you will need to take this potential time you have in the sport and see if you believe your main goal is realistic.

Step 2: Break your main goal into benchmarks.

Your main goal is big, and it cannot be achieved overnight. You need to break it into smaller parts, or benchmarks. In doing this, you create many smaller, more manageable goals that you can achieve over time, leading up to your main goal. (If your main goal *can* be achieved overnight, then you have underestimated yourself, and your goal was much too small!)

Time is a great way to create benchmarks. Break your main goal into benchmarks by deciding what you need to accomplish each year in order to reach your main goal. For example, imagine that your main goal is to make it to level 9 in your sport. Right now, you are a level 7 and a sophomore in high school. You have three years of the sport left before high school is over. Next year, your benchmark would be a level 8. Your senior year you then have the possibility to be a level 9.

During this step, do not get much more specific than the above example. In the next steps, you will get more detailed.

Once you have created your benchmarks, take a look at them and decide if they are realistic or not — can this really happen? Or will you need to fly through three levels in one season in order to make it to level 9? Be sure to be honest with yourself and check your timelines. Revise your benchmarks if you need to. If necessary, you might need to revisit your main goal and revise that if your timeline doesn't turn out to be realistic.

Step 3: What are your subgoals for this year?

Now that you have made your benchmarks for each year that you plan on doing your sport, you can concentrate on subgoals for this year. *According to your timeline, what do you need to accomplish this year in order to reach your main goal?*

This is the time to be specific. If you need to make it to level 8 in a year, then you need to know exactly what skills you need in order to get there. If you are unsure of the requirements, then you should ask your coach so you can be as specific as possible.

List all of the skills that you will need to learn and attain in each part of your sport in order to reach your subgoal for the year. Take a look at your list. Is it realistic given your timeline? Revise if you need to.

Step 4: Break down each subgoal into parts.

Most sports require the development of more than one skill in order to reach a certain level. What skills will you need this year in order to reach your benchmark? Not only will you need a certain skill, but you will need to know what parts of the skill you need to develop in order to get there, i.e. strength, conditioning, and certain drills. Be sure to work with your coach so he or she can help you break it all down.

Move on through all the events or facets of your sport. This process may take some time and research on your part. But once you are finished, you will have a very detailed list. Take a look at what you've got. Is it realistic? Keep in mind that it can still be realistic even if it is daunting!

Step 5: Create an action plan for each subgoal.

It's time to get out an annual monthly calendar that you can write on and have for yourself. Grab a pencil, because you may need to change some of your shorter timelines. Pick a different pen color for each event or part of your sport, and write down each of your subgoals for the year on the date on the calendar you need to complete it. From that date, you will be working backwards. Some sports require more time and experience with skills than others before they are competition ready. How long will you need to have your skill/subgoal before you compete it? Some sports have a very specific deadline for when athletes need to have all their competition skills in order to compete them. If this is the case for you, then you will need to work within these parameters. Write down what you need to accomplish on its due date.

Continue to work backwards from there. You will need to apply your specific set of circumstances to your timeline. You will need to set dates for each of these smaller subgoals.

Write these smaller skill goals on your calendar. (I would write them in pencil so you can erase and change is necessary.) Again, take a look at what you have written. Is it realistic? Do you believe that it can happen? Do you need to revise?

Step 6: What do you need to accomplish this month?

Take a look at your calendar. What do you need to do this month? What accomplishments do you need to attain in order to stay on track? Write a heading in your notebook called “This Month” or label it with the name of the month. Make a list of everything you need to do this month.

Step 7: What do you need to do this week?

Take another look at this week’s calendar. What is on it for this week? What do you need to focus on this week in order to get yourself on track to attain your goals for the month? Again, make a list called “The week of...” and put in the week’s dates.

Step 8: What can you do today to get you one step closer to reaching your goals?

Perhaps you’ve been working for awhile on a certain skill or drill, but are having some issues. Perhaps you are inconsistent, but you need this skill in order to keep up with your timeline. *Sometimes the only adjustment that you need to make beyond doing what you already do in practice is a mental one.* What one thing can you do today to help you reach your goals? Maybe it’s to have a more positive attitude. Maybe you’ll try visualizing your skills before practice. Maybe you’re going to pay extra close attention to detail, especially on basic skills and drills. Whatever it might be, make a commitment to yourself and decide what one thing you are going to do differently today in order to help you reach your goals.

Step 9: Stay connected to your goals.

You've made your goals. They look realistic, but it'll definitely take some work. You're excited! Now what?

For starters, don't forget all the work that you put in to making your goals and breaking them down. Stay connected with your goals. Do this by carving out 10-15 minutes each day to read over your goals. Go over what you need to do today, this week, next week, and this month. Take this time to update your goals with subgoals that you've attained (be sure to make a big checkmark next to all that you've accomplished!), and revise your timelines when necessary.

Step 10: Celebrate your small successes!

You are on your way! Each time you attain a subgoal, or a benchmark, pat yourself on the back. Give yourself credit for a job well done — you made a goal for yourself and you accomplished it — great job! This will help you to stay motivated. After all, you can't get to the top of the staircase without climbing the bottom step. Each step is a step closer to your main goal. You're getting there — keep going!

Congratulations!

It took you a lot of time, energy, and dedication to your goals to complete this guide step-by-step. Take a minute and celebrate that you have taken the initiative to think about, create, and make an action plan for your goals! Be sure to keep up the dedication and help give yourself the best possible chance to accomplish your goals. Remember that you have made your goals, that they are your responsibility, and that you are following through!

About the author

Mary Reiss Farias has been involved in the sport of gymnastics for over 35 years. She attained great success as a high-level competitor, then a Division I athlete for four years. She has coached the sport for over 25 years. She is living proof that great success can be achieved in a positive environment. She has also been involved in many other sports throughout her career and understands how the mind plays an important role in success in any sport. As a coach, Mary has researched extensively on how to create a successful and positive environment for her athletes, and as a certified consultant for the Proctor Gallagher Institute, she has uncovered a tremendous wealth of information that she wants to share with as many athletes as possible. The secret is that everything starts with our Minds First. As the Athlete Mindset Coach, Coach Mary teaches athletes the fundamental concepts they need to understand just how powerful their minds really are and bolsters the belief that they can reach the success they desire in their sport and in life beyond.

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