

Setting objectives for personal development

Here are some guidelines for the effective planning of your personal development objectives:

Three steps for setting sound personal development objectives:

Step 1 – Define and/or revisit your goals:

- Do you remember why you are committed to your goals? What would help motivate you? A personal development objective could be to go for a run and keep a good perspective, or improving a specific skill that would help to achieve your goals.
- Do you have specific achievable goals for research, career, and other areas of your life?

Step 2 - Identify what (if anything) is stopping you from achieving your goals and what would help you in achieving these?

- Look at the Research Councils [Joint Skills Statement](#) and the skills inventory.
- Discuss with your supervisor how your research might progress and what particular areas of development and training you might need to focus on in order to maximise your effectiveness, and balance your research with other areas of your life.
- When discussing development and training needs with your staff development department / graduate school, bear in mind your abilities, experience, specific responsibilities (see also [Tools to help assess your own skills](#))
- If you are struggling with some aspects of your research then concentrate on getting these right first.
- Match correct tools with your 'problem' solving - e.g. training courses, consultation with experts, GRADschools, web resources, for example [Database of Practice](#))
- Look ahead - if you will be attending a conference, a priority might be to hone your [networking skills](#)
- Extend yourself a little - e.g. if delivering presentations to your group is something you can do with your eyes closed, you may want to volunteer to speak to an outside group.

Step 3 - By now, you will have a whole list of priorities that can underpin your work for the next year. Check that:

- Priorities you have singled out support successful completion of your studies and skills development (see also [Planning a Doctorate - schedule for success](#)).
- You don't have too many key objectives, if so, you need to weed some out in order to maintain focus, remember to prioritise by the importance of the task, not its urgency.
- You have identified the specific resources you need in order to achieve your objectives.
- You are setting some deadlines - e.g. by tonight, tomorrow, next week, next month...

SMART Objectives

If you haven't tried the **SMART** method before, then try it out and see whether you find it useful:

Are your targets, goals and objectives **SMART**? In other words are they:

- S Specific:** Are they clearly identifiable or are they vague?
- M Measurable:** If they're not measurable, how will you know when you've achieved them?
- A Agreed:** Have you discussed these with your supervisor?
- Achievable:** Can you actually do them?
- R Realistic:** Are they "do-able", are they achievable within the limited timeframe you have and do they contribute to the end product of a doctoral thesis submitted within the registration period?
- Relevant:** Do they sit within the scope of your Project – or is this simply for your personal amusement?
- T Time-bound:** Impose your own deadlines and stick to them. There is no one else to do it for you.

If you are planning to attend a GRADschool in the future, make the most of it by identifying your **development needs** now so you can make the most of **resources** and **people**. The course will help you further **increase** your **self-awareness** and give you time away to **think about** the **direction** of your PhD and your **future**. Details of the 2007 GRADschools can be found on our website so visit www.grad.ac.uk/courselist to book a place!