



How can I reach my final learning destination? : Emotion-focused goal setting

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Goal setting is important in our learning journey in UniSIM. Goal setting is usually seen as a systematic cognitive process whereby we, as learners, actualise our study plans. However, most learning journeys have the potential to be emotional roller coasters. And, a lot of times, the influence of emotions in learning is conveniently or deliberately neglected in goal-setting processes. This should not be the case as emotions are integral components of the learning process and they can “make” or “break” us in our learning journey.

When we are first accepted as students in any learning institution, we are likely to be ecstatic and excited. As these wonderful emotions diminish, other emotions may come in. This is especially so if we have not been studying in an educational environment for a long time. We may start experiencing different levels of anxiety or other similar unproductive emotions. This is because we may not know how to set our study journey in motion. In this instance, constructive goal-setting, described below, may help to allay such emotional stress.

Setting an Ultimate Goal

Knowing what we want to achieve from completing our enrolled programme would be our ultimate goal. This goal has to be important, meaningful and valuable to us. Always take this ultimate goal as our guiding light. We have to believe that we can derive feelings of fulfilment and accomplishment from chasing this ultimate goal. The moment we think we will not feel anything gratifying from working towards or attaining this goal, it is time to modify our goal or to reconsider if we want to carry on in our programme. The table below shows some of the reasons why a student may want to enrol in programmes in higher education.

Personal Reasons	Work Related Reasons	Social Reasons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience university• Gain more confidence• Learn more about subject I am interested in• Fulfil dream of getting a degree• Get an opportunity to study• Prove to myself that I am good enough for a degree• Get good grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve my career opportunities• Improve my chances of promotion• Perform better at current work• Sent and sponsored by my company to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show family and friends that I can do it• Make new friends with similar interests• Enhance my standing in the society



Setting Bridging Goals (BG)

Bridging goals are short term goals that help us to achieve our ultimate goal. Thus, we have to direct our bridging goals strategically towards the achievement of our ultimate goal. Although goals set must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely (SMART), a more important characteristic of goals is the pleasure we derive from achieving them. Thus, there is an emotional component attached to any goal and it cannot be ignored. If we do not believe we can experience any pleasure from achieving a goal, that goal will probably have a low probability of being achieved.

Committing to a Plan

There is no one effective plan to achieve our bridging goals. What is needed is a plan that we feel confident of its chance of attaining our goals. As such, when we are devising the plan to reach our bridging goals, we have to understand our personal strengths and weaknesses. We also need to be clear about the possible obstacles and resources that can influence the plan. No plan is permanent. Be open and flexible in adjusting the plan accordingly as new circumstances crop up. The bottom line is the plan must be able to achieve our bridging goals. More importantly, we need to exercise a high level of commitment to doing the tasks set in the plan. Procrastination is not an option here.

Building on Positive Emotions

Be consciously aware of the positive emotions we feel (such as optimism, confidence, passion, elation and determination) whenever we achieve a bridging goal. These positive emotions are extremely helpful in strengthening our commitment in achieving subsequent bridging goals. Let these strong positive emotions fuel the actualisation of the plan towards our goals.

Recognising and Dealing with Negative Emotions

We have to monitor our progress of set tasks regularly during our learning process. More importantly, watch out for unwanted emotions that may appear during the actualisation of the plan. If we miss any of our deadlines set in the plan, we are bound to experience guilt, fear, depression, anger, stress or other related negative emotions. We may feel some of them sequentially or concurrently to different extents. All these emotions impair learning but yet they are important as they inform us that we are not doing well in learning. Such negative emotions usually come with physical or physiological stress such as insomnia, loss of appetite, headaches, neck and shoulder pain, high blood pressure, palpitations, chronic fatigue, stomach aches or ulcers etc. These negative emotions have to be regulated before they evolve into the emotion of indifference where we are no longer affected by whether we are on track or not to reach our goals. Once we reach the stage of indifference, we no longer feel anything pleasuring in working towards or achieving our ultimate goal and the supporting bridging goals. This may spell the end of meaningful learning on our part.

The success of emotion-focused goal setting strongly hinges on our awareness of the learning emotions we experience and our ability to leverage on the positive learning emotions and to eliminate the negative learning emotions. Do try the above method if you have yet to find the best goal setting method that works for you. Below is an example of the emotion-focused goal setting exercise.



Stage	Description (EXAMPLE OF A GOAL SETTING EXERCISE)	Tick if completed
1	<p><u>Understanding your REWARDING Ultimate Goal</u></p> <p>Ultimate Goal: To get my degree in 5 years.</p> <p>List down all the reasons why this ultimate goal is gratifying to you? If you are not able to convince yourself why this goal is gratifying to you, you have to talk to someone you feel comfortable with and further explore your feelings and thoughts about it.</p> <p>It will advance my career in my current job. It will give me more options in career choices. It will allow me to develop myself professionally.</p>	
2	<p><u>Setting PLEASURABLE Bridging Goals (BGs)</u></p> <p>You need not decide on all the bridging goals to reach your ultimate goal at one go. You can do it semester by semester. They must be Specific (S), Measurable (M), Attainable (A), Relevant (R), Timely (T), Pleasuring (Pl).</p> <p><u>1st Year Semester 1 for Course A</u></p> <p>BG 1: Attend at least 2 of the 3 face to face lectures punctually. (even though attendance is not compulsory)</p> <p>BG 2: Get to know at least 3 classmates and exchange contact numbers during 1st face to face lecture.</p> <p>BG 3: I must ask the lecturer if I do not understand what s/he teaches at all times.</p> <p>BG 4: I will finish reading the notes and references (with understanding) related to my TMA by the start of 3rd week of the semester.</p> <p>BG 5: I will produce the first draft of my TMA by the end of the 4th week of the semester.</p> <p>BG 6: I must finish memorizing facts (with understanding) from Chapter 1 by end of 5th week of the semester.</p> <p>BG 7: I must get an A or B for my TMA.</p> <p>BG 8: I must score at least 80% for my CMA.</p> <p>BG 9: I must get at least a B for my overall grade.</p>	
3	<p><u>Devising a CONFIDENT plan</u></p> <p>Describe in detail how you intend to achieve each BG. Understand your strengths and weaknesses and take note of the obstacles and resources in formulating your plan. Formulate strategies to handle obstacles and weaknesses. Do you feel confident about your plan of achieving the BG? If no, revise it.</p> <p><u>Bridging Goal to achieve</u></p> <p>For BG 4: I will finish reading the notes and references (with understanding) related to my TMA by the 3rd week of the semester.</p> <p><u>List strengths, weaknesses, obstacles and resources if any</u></p> <p>I am not good at focusing on reading. Got to ask my spouse to monitor if I have done my reading. I have an important work project coming up, got to juggle it well with my plan. Will try not to think about it during study.</p> <p><u>Description of Plan</u></p> <p>I will read Chapter 1 on Monday Week 1 and clarify anything I do not understand with the instructor or my peers by Wednesday, Week 1.</p> <p>I will read Chapter 2 on Saturday Week 1 and clarify anything I do not understand with the instructor or my peers by Tuesday, Week 2.</p> <p>I will read other required references on Thursday, Week 2 and clarify anything I do not understand with the tutor or my peers by Friday, Week 2.</p>	



4	<p><u>Leveraging on POSITIVE emotions</u></p> <p>List down the rewards for any bridging goal achieved.</p>	
	<p><u>Description of Rewards</u></p>	
	I will reward myself with a movie treat if I complete BG 4.	
	I will reward myself with an overseas trip if I complete BG 9.	
	<p>What are the good emotions you are feeling? Do they help you in your study? How can I further leverage on my good emotions?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Responses</u></p>	
5	<p><u>Dealing with EMOTIONS while actualizing the plan.</u></p> <p>Monitor your plan and emotions every 3 days to gauge if you are on task. If you are not on task in your plan, ask yourself the following questions below:</p> <p>Have you been committed in performing your tasks?</p> <p>i) If YES, what is/are the reason/s for not being on task? Find out the reason/s and revise your plan accordingly in Stage 3. Put in your commitment in actualizing your new plan and monitor further. Your strong commitment can usually override any negative emotions concurrently experienced.</p> <p>ii) If NO, are you feeling any other negative emotions such as guilt, anger, depression, fear or other similar emotions? If YES, deal with them swiftly.</p>	
	<p><u>Responses</u></p>	