
How to Write SMART Objectives

Objectives are more immediate than goals; objectives represent annual mileposts that your study needs to achieve to accomplish its goals by the end of the funding period. Objectives are the basis for monitoring progress toward achieving your study goals.

Writing SMART Objectives

To use an objective to monitor your progress, you need to write it as a SMART objective. A SMART objective is

1. Specific

Objectives should provide the “who” and “what” of your study activities.

Use only one action verb, because objectives with more than one verb imply that more than one activity or behavior is being measured.

Avoid verbs that may have vague meanings to describe intended outcomes, like “understand” or “know,” because these would likely prove difficult to measure. Instead, use verbs that document action, like “At the end of the session, the participants will list three concerns...”

Remember, the greater the specificity, the greater the measurability.

2. Measurable

Objectives should quantify the amount of change expected. It is impossible to determine whether objectives have been met unless they can be measured.

The objective provides a reference point from which a change in the target population can be measured clearly.

3. Achievable

Objectives should be attainable within a given time frame and with available resources.

4. Realistic

Objectives are most useful when they accurately address the scope of the problem and action steps that can be implemented within a specific time frame.

Objectives that do not directly relate to the study goal will not help achieve that goal.

5. Time-phased

Objectives should provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured, or a time by which the objective will be met.

Including a time frame in the objectives helps in planning and evaluating study progress.

Objectives Checklist

1. Is the objective SMART?
 - Specific:** Who? (the target population and people doing the activity) and what? (the action or activity).
 - Measurable:** How much change is expected.
 - Achievable:** Can be accomplished given current resources and constraints.
 - Realistic:** Addresses the scope of the research and proposes reasonable steps to completion.
 - Time-phased:** Provides a timeline indicating when the objective will be met.

2. Does it relate to a single result?
3. Is it written clearly?

Examples of SMART Objectives

Non-SMART objective 1: Medical students will learn about implicit bias.

This objective is not SMART because it is not *specific*, *measurable*, or *time-phased*. It can be made SMART by *specifically* indicating who is responsible for delivering the implicit bias curriculum, how many people will receive the training, who they are specifically, and by when the training will be conducted.

SMART objective 1: By mid-point in this study, the Department of Behavioral Medicine will have trained 75% of the 175 first-year medical students on evidence-based approaches to implicit bias using best practices in health sciences curricular delivery.

Non-SMART objective 2: 90% of cancer survivors will participate in our clinic's self-management course.

This objective is not SMART because it is not *specific* or *time-phased*. It can be made SMART by *specifically* indicating who will do the activity, by when, and who will participate in the self-management course.

SMART objective 2: By the end of the academic year, a team of 12 clinic staff will have enrolled and led 90% of newly-diagnosed cancer survivors from the Elms Cancer Community Center through a Chronic Disease Self-Management course scheduled once a week over a two month time period.

This reference document was adapted by Leslie Wimsatt, PhD, from the following government resource:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC Guideline – How to Write Smart Objectives; CDC-RFA-DP17-1701. Atlanta, GA: CDC; 2020. Accessed November 1, 2020 at:
https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/evaluation_resources/guides/writing-smart-objectives.htm.