

SMART LEARNING GOALS¹

SMART learning goals are an important part of developing a learning plan. You need three learning goals in your learning plan. One learning goal should be completed each year of your three-year Professional Development Portfolio cycle.

What is a SMART Learning Goal?

A SMART goal is:

1. **Specific.**
A specific goal is detailed, focused and clearly stated. Everyone reading the goal should know exactly what you want to learn.
2. **Measurable.**
A measurable goal is quantifiable, meaning you can see the results.
3. **Attainable/Achievable.**
An attainable goal can be achieved based on your skill, resources and area of practice.
4. **Relevant.**
A relevant goal applies to your current role and is clearly linked to your key role responsibilities.
5. **Time-limited.**
A time-limited goal has specific timelines and a deadline. This will help motivate you to move toward your goal and to evaluate your progress.

A SMART learning goal is written so that anyone who reads it will understand what you need to learn such as:

I will competently perform IUD insertions by the end of the year.

¹ *Smart Learning Goals* is based on the College of Nurses of Ontario's *Developing SMART Learning Goals*. Used with permission.

How do I write a SMART learning goal?

1. Start by identifying what it is you want to learn.
What you want to learn must be related to your practice. To come up with goals consider things like your self-assessment, changes to your practise that require updating skills or knowledge, your client population and changes in professional regulation such as scope changes or new standards of the profession.
2. Be specific and write it down in one sentence.
Try not to use vague phrases such as “I want to learn about...” If you are too vague it is difficult to determine what you need to do to reach your goal. Use an action word to describe what you want to achieve. Using an action word makes sure your goal is measurable. Examples of action words are:
 - identify
 - develop
 - plan
 - design
 - compare
 - describe
 - evaluate
 - explain
 - demonstrate
 - create
3. Make sure your goal is realistic, given the resources that you have.
A goal set too high may be difficult to achieve and you won't meet it whereas a goal set too low will fail to challenge and motivate you.
4. Identify a reasonable time frame to complete your learning activities and achieve your goal.
Make sure that your learning goal is about what you need to learn and is not a learning activity. For example, “I am going to enrol in a course about record keeping” is a learning activity and not a learning goal. The goal is to demonstrate contemporaneous, accurate, objective and legible record keeping in all of my client charts by the end of the year. The record keeping course is an activity that will help you meet this goal.

Examples of SMART goals:

SMART goal	Not a SMART goal
I want to be able to demonstrate effective conflict management skills by September.	I want to handle conflict better.
I want to have the skills to identify ethical conflicts in my work environment and apply an ethical framework to assist my midwifery practice group effectively resolve ethical conflicts by December.	I want to learn more about ethics at work.
I want to gain the skills required to work as a second assist for caesarean sections at my local hospital by March.	I want to work as a second assist.
I want to be able to explain how PHIPA applies to client confidentiality and will provide an in-service to my colleagues in October.	I want to understand confidentiality.
I will identify the current clinical practice guidelines and systematic reviews about three topics (GBS, postdates induction, and routine bilirubin screening) and develop handouts for my informed choice discussions on these topics.	I want to use better research during client care.

I have a SMART learning goal, what do I do next?

Once you have identified a learning goal, you must identify the learning activities that will lead to the successful completion of that goal. It is recommended/required that you have more than one learning activity for each learning goal.

Learning Activities

Learning activities for achieving your goal must have a deadline to keep your learning on track. Do not use “ongoing” in place of a deadline, because a SMART goal is time limited.

You should have more than one learning activity for each goal. While developing the activities, think about what type of learner you are. Do you learn best by observing? Reading? Discussing? Choose the learning activities that work best for you.

Some examples of learning activities include:

- reading (journal articles, evidence-based websites, text books)
- attending a webinar
- participating in a workshop
- shadowing
- role-playing
- interviewing an expert on the topic of your goals
- simulation exercises
- taking a course

Once you have chosen your activities you can write a detailed activity statement for each activity. This must clearly outline your learning strategy. It should be specific and based on what is realistic within your time frame.

Example of an incorrect activity statement:

I will read about postpartum depression.

Examples of correct activity statements:

I will read at least two current peer-reviewed journal articles about postpartum depression by the end of April.

I will attend the hospitals in-service training about postpartum depression in December.

Once you have written your activity statements, you can start completing the activities.

Remember, developing your Learning Plan is a continuous process. Make sure you review it on a regular basis and update it when you complete an activity and reach a goal. As you evaluate your Learning Plan throughout the process, you may need to make adjustments to your goals and activities.

Midwives who are randomly selected for an audit of their Professional Development Portfolios must upload PDFs of their Learning Plans to the College. Midwives selected for a practice and practice assessment will have their Learning Plans reviewed by a College appointed assessor and will be expected to have met their yearly Learning Goals.



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE²

The purpose of reflecting on your midwifery practice is to build a better understanding of your professional actions and develop professionally by using this knowledge to modify and adapt practice. It also assists you to demonstrate your competence to practice in relation to the scope of practice and midwifery competencies.

There are several methods that you can use to write down your reflections. You may use one, or all of these methods. Always date your reflections at the time that they occurred. In order to maintain confidentiality, it is important to use initials or aliases for the clients and colleagues involved in these reflections, unless you have their express permission to use them.

Journaling

This usually involves keeping a personal and professional diary, which is private and does not have to be shown to anyone unless you wish to.

Journaling is a good habit to get into as it assists with accurate recollection of events. As you write down the events, it allows you to identify your reflections in relation to these events. It can be useful to write down your uncensored account and your thoughts on these events as they occur to you. You may find that this acts as a starting point for identifying themes or issues related to your practice. They may be edited at a later stage and developed into critical incidents and exemplars.

Critical Incident or Exemplar

A critical incident is an event in your professional or personal life that made you think about your life and your practice.

It may be:

- 1) An incident that either went well or did not go to plan
- 2) An incident in which your intervention made an important difference
- 3) An event that captures the essence of midwifery
- 4) An incident that was particularly demanding.

² *Reflective Practice* is based on the New Zealand College of Midwives *Portfolio for Midwives*. Used with permission.

Helpful questions when describing such an incident:

- 1) When and where did it happen?
- 2) Why was this important to you?
- 3) What were you thinking about?
- 4) What were your feelings?
- 5) What did you find so demanding or satisfying?
- 6) What would you have done differently?
- 7) How do you feel now?
- 8) What did you learn from the incident?

Critical Incident

The following is a useful framework for writing about a critical incident:

Construction

- Describe fully what happened, bringing to mind all aspects and constraints of the situation

Deconstruction

- Revisit your account from the perspective of an observer, and see what you find; why did you act in a certain way, what were your motives?

Confrontation

- Where do the ideas that embody your practice come from and why?
- Why do you continue to practice in this way?
- Whose interest do they serve?
- What power relations are involved?
- How do these ideas influence my relationships with women in my care?

Reconstruction

- Reconstruct the scenario, addressing the contradiction between what you think, say and do and what you actually think say and do
- Consider the historical, cultural, social and political influences on your practice
- In the light of what you have discovered, how might you work differently?

Exemplar

An exemplar is a clinical situation in which your professional skills as a midwife were instrumental in affecting an outcome for a client, or to your professional growth and development. Think of a story that was especially meaningful to you as a midwife, a story that helped shape your practice. The following is a useful framework for writing about an exemplar:

Brief Background

- The client and relevant information about them and their situation
- Your relationship in the situation
- Any other health professionals or family members involved

Action taken

- Specific situation
- What you did
- Motivation for action
- What problems were anticipated and how that affected decision making?

Outcome

- How did your action affect the outcome of the situation?
- What made your decision the best course of action in this situation?

Debrief/Significance

- How did this story change you personally or professionally?
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