

Action Planning

Whereas a goal is where you want to be, a plan is the strategy you employ to get there. Planning turns goals into tangible “bite-sized” steps of action. A plan details the activities necessary to accomplish the stated goal and identifies both short term and long-term goals.

The plan organizes your dreams so that you can move forward with confidence and helps you take charge of your career plan. Remember, a plan is not a life sentence. As your interests and expertise change, adjust your plans and goals accordingly.

Develop an Action Plan

Working backwards, write down the tasks that need to be completed to achieve your goal:

Action Plan:	Date
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	
Sub goal:	

Effective planning involves the following elements:

- **Define clearly the steps you will take** (“How do I get there?”). Think of all the possible things you could do to take you closer to achieving your goal. Break down any large steps into smaller components, so it doesn’t seem so difficult to achieve.
- **Identify the end point for each step and** give yourself a small **reward** for achieving it!
- **Arrange the steps in a logical, chronological order and put a date by which you will start each step.** Put these dates into your diary or onto a calendar. Try to set yourself weekly goals: what research you will do into jobs, what skills you will concentrate on learning, etc. It’s also a good idea to get into the habit of planning a timetable each evening listing your tasks for the next day or two.

Action generates the impetus for further action: if you want something done quickly, give it to a busy person. The best time to do something is usually NOW!

- You need to consider if your plans are attainable and what will happen if you fail to achieve your goals. **Try to map out alternative paths to your goal**, then if one becomes blocked another is available: build flexibility into your planning. People tend to strongly underestimate how long a project will take, especially if working in a group because they tend to visualize everything going according to plan with no problems. As well, be open to changing your plans as you progress. New information may become available as you progress through your plan suggesting additional or alternate steps. Effective planners have a goal in mind but are open to adapting their plans.
- **Anticipate the type of problems you might encounter at each step.** What barriers are in the way of achieving your goal? Think about ways to deal with those problems.
- **Review your progress.** Keep a diary or log of your daily activities and record your progress as things happen: this keeps your plan as concrete as possible. A good time to start your review is about two weeks after you have begun. Review how far you have progressed towards your objective, identify any mistakes you made and what you can learn from them, look at any new ideas or opportunities that may have presented themselves and then revise your plan to incorporate these.
- **Mix with positive people** who will encourage you to keep going! Create accountability by **telling your friends or significant others about your goals**. They will provide support when the going gets tough and will also give you an incentive to keep going, as you'll feel embarrassed if you have to tell them you've given up!