



# HOW TO SET **ACTIONABLE + ACHIEVABLE** GOALS

## KATE & THE TENDING YEAR

My name is Dr. Kate Henry and I am a Productivity Coach who specializes in sustainable and well-being-oriented productivity. I hold an MFA in Creative Writing and a MA and PhD in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. As a Productivity Coach, I guide academics and entrepreneurs to develop actionable and achievable productivity and time management practices so they can achieve short-term and long-term goals without feeling overwhelmed. In addition to my work as a Productivity Coach, I am an independent researcher and author of *Tend to It: A Holistic Guide to Intentional Productivity*.

To access more free resources similar to this guide, visit my blog, The Tending Year, at [www.TheTendingYear.com/blog](http://www.TheTendingYear.com/blog).

To learn more about my individual coaching and group programs, visit [www.KateHenry.com/work-with-me/](http://www.KateHenry.com/work-with-me/)



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## LET'S TALK GOALS!

Have you ever set a new goal with high hopes to follow through, yet never actually reached your literal or figurative finish line?

Did it make you feel horrible? Did you berate yourself for being lazy/irresponsible/not fill-in-the-blank enough? Were you embarrassed, or did you feel scarcity, like maybe you didn't even deserve your goal in the first place?

Ouch. Yeah, me too. To all of it.

I used to set goals with abandon, motivated by the preemptive ecstasy I would feel when I executed a new cuisine or showed off a shapely muscle or went on my book tour after I completed the book that I just knew I had to write. I set so many well-intentioned goals that my horse couldn't even see the cart ahead of her if she had binoculars.

Before I learned how to make my goals **actionable** and **achievable**, I found myself overwhelmed, disappointed, and buried under negative self talk. This is because I didn't have explicit how-to steps tailored to my preferences and practices!

Lucky for you, I made this FREE guidebook to show you how to identify goals, break them down into actionable tasks, and personalize your method for achieving them. This is the kind of work I do with my one-on-one Success & Accountability Coaching clients, so if you'd like some extra guidance, consider booking a session with me today by emailing [kate@KateHenry.com](mailto:kate@KateHenry.com).

# GOAL SETTING 101

## WHAT IS A GOAL?

A goal is a desired result that you hope to achieve. It's the end point of your labors: the accomplishment made tangible.

## A LITTLE GOAL SETTING HISTORY

One of the most popular resources on setting goals is the "SMART" method. Developed in 1981 by George Doran, this method is an acronym for five criteria necessary for determining an effective goal:

S: Specific  
M: Measurable  
A: Assignable  
R: Realistic  
T: Time-related [1].

Although the interpretations of the letters has expanded since 1981 (i.e., "T" may mean "trackable" or "timely"[2]), this system remains in use today.

## HOW'S THE A&A METHOD DIFFERENT?

In my own practice, I condense goal-setting down to just two words: ACTIONABLE and ACHIEVABLE.

This guide includes the actual practices I use when I set (and accomplish!) my own goals. I find that using these two A-words checks off most of the SMART criteria, such as listing specific tasks and setting time-related deadlines, and relying on just two words helps me to stay focused and feel calmer about the process.

[1]: <https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/brief-history-of-smart-goals.php>

[2]: <https://www.mindtools.com/a4wo118/smart-goals>

# THE TWO A-WORDS

The words "actionable" and "achievable" are similar, in that they both refer to something you can accomplish. However, I apply them separately to guide how I plan, labor, and track my progress from start to finish.

In general, this is how I think of them when I work:

## **ACTIONABLE**

An actionable goal has explicit steps. To set (and follow through on!) an actionable goal, you should identify the explicit steps you will need to take, from beginning to end. Each step should be broken down into its component tasks, and it's important here that you identify explicit actions to take (versus general ideas or to-dos, like "write an article" or "learn Spanish").

## **ACHIEVABLE**

An achievable goal is one that you can accomplish given your skills, timeline, access, and motivation. Goals are not automatically achievable; we need to adjust our approach to make them so. For example, while a professional pastry chef may easily whip up a gluten-free birthday cake in a day, the same task would not be equally achievable to someone who does not share the same training, timeline, and access to materials. Approaching our goals with an awareness of what can make the tasks more achievable for us as individuals is key.

# FIRST, SET A GOAL

The first step in accomplishing your goal is to choose it!

Have you chosen a word or a theme for your year? (Mine is "intention.") Perhaps you have a big deadline on the horizon (mine is to finish my dissertation), or a dream that's been looking at you with googly eyes for the last few years (mine is to learn violin).

If you're not sure which goal you want to focus on, try writing a list of all the things you would *like* to accomplish this year. Try not to get caught up in worrying "how will I ever do all these things!," because the purpose of this exercise is to brainstorm goals.

**WRITE 5-10 POSSIBLE GOALS FOR THIS YEAR BELOW**

Look back through your list and choose just one to focus on for the purpose of this guidebook. As you'll see in my example page later, I chose the goal "publish an article in a magazine."

# MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

To make your goal actionable, you should first answer a few questions.

Here's my answer for my goal of being published in a magazine:

## WHAT WILL "DONE" LOOK LIKE FOR THIS GOAL?

I will have pitched, drafted, and revised an article that is accepted by the publication, and I will have a scheduled date when my article will come out.

Write your answer below. Remember, shooting for "good enough" is totally acceptable, and even encouraged!

## WHAT WILL "DONE" LOOK LIKE FOR THIS GOAL?

# MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

Next, write down EVERY step you will need to take to accomplish your goal, from start to finish. It's very important that you don't skip over any step, even if it seems insignificant or too small.

Below is my example for my goal. I've included a blank copy of this box on the next page for you.

## WHAT ARE ALL THE STEPS INVOLVED?

- Review a few of the magazines I may want to pitch to.
- Choose which magazine to pitch to.
- Look up the magazine's submission policies.
- If they're currently accepting what I want to pitch, draft up a pitch or two.
- Get feedback from a friend about my pitch.
- Revise my pitch as needed.
- Submit my pitch to the editor.
- When pitch is accepted, celebrate!
- Talk about article with a friend to bounce ideas.
- Outline my article.
- Write my first article draft.
- Get feedback from a friend on the first draft.
- Revise the article into my second draft.
- Repeat last steps as needed.
- Submit my revised draft to the magazine.
- Revise per the magazine editor's suggestions.
- Have a friend proofread my edits.
- Revise again as needed, per friend's suggestions.
- Final proofread.
- Draft bio for magazine, if needed.
- Source author photo for magazine, if needed.
- Submit article.
- Celebrate!



# MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

Write down EVERY step you will need to take to accomplish your goal, from start to finish. It's very important that you don't skip over any step, even if it seems insignificant or too small.

**WHAT ARE ALL THE STEPS INVOLVED?**

# MAKE IT ACHIEVABLE

"Achievable" will look different for everyone, depending on the context for the project and on your individual strengths and preferences. However, I encourage everyone to start by answering the following questions. The purpose of these questions is to help you feel motivated and in control of your process.

**WHAT IS MY "WHY" (PURPOSE) FOR THIS PROJECT?**

**WHAT TYPE OF ACCOUNTABILITY WILL  
ENABLE ME TO DO MY BEST?**

# MAKE IT ACHIEVABLE

Look back at your list of steps. Consider each one its own task. Do you need to break any of those tasks down into smaller steps? If so, revise your list as needed. Then, answer the following questions. The purpose here is for you to have greater awareness of how you will approach your labor with confidence.

**WHICH OF MY TASKS WILL BE EASIEST OR QUICKEST TO ACCOMPLISH? HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THEM?**

**WHICH WILL TAKE THE LONGEST OR BE MOST COMPLICATED? HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THEM?**

# MAKE IT ACHIEVABLE

Below are a list of tools or tips that may help you to complete your individual tasks with more ease or focus. Consider which ones may be helpful for you, and try them out!

- Work backwards from your deadline and set smaller deadlines for individual tasks.
- Use a pulse and pause method like Pomodoro to help you focus in short bursts. You can learn more about this in my blog post "[2.21: Battle Work Doldrums with Pomodoro.](#)"
- Try "batchotasking" (batched monotasking sessions) your labor on particular tasks. You can learn more about this in my blog post "[2.8: Batchotasking.](#)"
- Schedule in your calendar when you will work on particular tasks. BE REALISTIC about how long it will take! Schedule in some buffer time.
- Write down your "why" and hang it above your desk or your workspace or put it as a background on your computer/phone.

## **Finally, consider booking with me for Success & Accountability Coaching!** These include:

- A one-hour, one-on-one private coaching session with me on Zoom, Skype, or phone.
- Detailed, descriptive, and confidential notes. I'll construct these and share them with you so you have explicit to-dos and next steps that you can use as a guide after our session.
- Follow-ups from me via email after or between sessions where I check in on your progress on the goals we determined together during our session.
- You'll have access to email me with questions between our coaching sessions.

You can read client testimonials and check out coaching packages at [www.KateHenry.com/work-with-me](http://www.KateHenry.com/work-with-me).

If you're interested in diving deeper into setting goals and intentions for this year (plus actually following through on them!), consider [booking a Discovery Call](#) to explore one-on-one Success & Accountability Coaching with me.

Contact me at [Kate@KateHenry.com](mailto:Kate@KateHenry.com) or use the link above to book a session. If you mention this guide, I'll give you \$10 off your first session!

You can also receive free resources like this and my habit formation guide by signing up for my twice-a-month Tending Letter at [KateHenry.substack.com](http://KateHenry.substack.com) and checking out my blog posts at [TheTendingYear.com/blog](http://TheTendingYear.com/blog).

Happy goal setting!

*Dr. Kate*

