# How to set SMART goals for language learning

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Have you heard people talk about **SMART** goals before? They’re a very useful tool when learning a language!

Many language learners get frustrated because in their head, they’re thinking they’re just ‘learning a language’. Their goal is usually ‘to be able to speak the language they’re learning’. But what does this actually mean?

If you want to make progress, you really need to know right from the outset what it is that you’re trying to learn.

**What are SMART goals?**

Here’s what **SMART** stands for:

* **S**pecific
* **M**easurable
* **A**mbitious
* **R**ealistic
* **T**ime-bound

So what does each of the letters mean in practice?

**SMART goals: specific**

You need to break down ‘learning a language’ into specific tasks that you’re trying to accomplish.

If you’re learning French, for example, these could be to:

* understand when to use the subjunctive
* get the intonation right when asking questions
* learn phrases that will enable you to be more persuasive when dealing with a French business partner
* be able to transcribe a song by your favourite French band.

While working on each of the objectives above, you will of course be ‘learning French’. But your learning will be more focused and more specific. This will enable you to feel more motivated and to understand when exactly you’ve met your goal and are ready to move on to the next one.

**SMART goals: measurable**

You want to put a number on each one of your **SMART** objectives. Let’s look at the first two examples above and see how you can measure them:

* **Understand when to use the subjunctive**: this could be made measurable by putting a specific number on it. For example: learn the five most usual uses of the subjunctive.
* **Learn phrases that will enable you to be more persuasive when dealing with a French business partner**: learn five adverbs that will help you emphasise what you’re trying to communicate.

This is getting even more specific now, isn’t it?

**SMART goals: ambitious**

Remember – to learn, you need to [leave your comfort zone](http://www.5minutelanguage.com/why-you-should-always-put-your-hand-up/). Whatever it is that you’ve set out to do, make sure it sounds like a challenge to you.

So, instead of setting yourself a goal of learning 10 new words every week, call it 30, or even 50 if you feel brave enough.

One thing to remember, though, is you need to be able to balance ambitious with realistic, which is the next element of **SMART** goals.

**SMART goals: realistic**

Take your lifestyle and your everyday responsibilities into account when setting your objectives.

Use your previous experiences to determine what’s doable and what’s not. For example, if you managed to learn 80 words last month, it’s probably realistic this month as well, as long as your schedule looks similar to what it looked like last month. Was it an ambitious goal, though, last month or did it feel a bit easy?

Being realistic is important because setting yourself goals that are unrealistic is counter-productive and may cause your [motivation levels](http://www.5minutelanguage.com/how-to-stay-motivated-when-learning-a-language/) to drop significantly.

**SMART goals: time-bound**

The final element of **SMART** goals is making them time-bound. But what does it mean? It essentially means setting yourself a deadline for achieving your goal.

For example, ‘learn 20 French verbs by the end of next week’. You can then see the specific chunk of time in your head and you know the learning process has to happen and get completed during that period of time.

**How to set SMART goals for language learning?**

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Writing **SMART** goals is like painting a picture of the future you want to see, as if it was already here. The important thing is that it should not be a list of tasks but **a reality that you want to see**. The tasks will form part of the actions that you will need to take to achieve this reality.

Some people like starting their goals with ‘I will have’ but I personally prefer to write them in the present tense to make them more real and more achievable. Once you start seeing the future as if it is **now**, you start believing that **it’s actually possible**.

I also like to start my goals with the ‘time-bound’ component, such as ‘It is the end of January’, ‘It is Monday’, ‘It is the end of 2015’.

**SMART** goals don’t have to be expressed in one sentence. In fact, my language learning goals are often made up of two or three sentences.

[Writing SMART goals is like painting a picture of the future you want to see, as if it’s already…](https://twitter.com/share?text=Writing+SMART+goals+is+like+painting+a+picture+of+the+future+you+want+to+see%2C+as+if+it%27s+already...&via=agamurdoch&related=agamurdoch&url=http://www.5minutelanguage.com/how-to-set-smart-goals-for-language-learning/)

Take a look at the example below.

*It is the last day of June and I can now give a 5-minute speech about the jobs I’ve done in the past, using the ‘imparfait’ and ‘passé composé’ tenses in French. I can confidently use link words such as ‘après que’, ‘puis’ and ‘malgré’ to show logical continuity when describing past events. I use five new irregular verbs to talk about my previous jobs, including ‘prendre’, ‘vendre’ and ‘sentir’.*

* This objective is **specific** in that it focuses specifically on using the two tenses – ‘imparfait’ and ‘passé composé’, as well as on learning irregular verbs in the ‘passé composé’. It also includes a speaking component – being able to give a 5-minute speech on a very specific topic.
* It is **measurable** because it specifies the speech should be 5 minutes long and the number of verbs is five. It also focuses on two specific tenses.
* It is an **ambitious** goal because it is focused on three different aspects of language learning – speaking, grammar and vocabulary.
* It is **realistic** because I might set myself this goal at the beginning of June with a plan to achieve it by the end of the month.
* It is also **time-bound** because the deadline is the last day of June.

Source: <http://www.5minutelanguage.com/how-to-set-smart-goals-for-language-learning/>