

What should you do with your goal once you've chosen it?

### Make Your Goal Official

If the goal you have chosen is a clear one, you should have no trouble writing it down. Goals that stay only in your head have too great a chance of remaining vague. Furthermore, once you write down your goal, that written record can act as a constant reminder. If you're feeling discouraged, a quick look at your goal can inspire you. (That's what the signs on the covered wagons did.) And if for some reason you forget your goal, a written description can refresh your memory.

What should you do if your priorities change?

The purpose of a goal is not to force you on a course that you don't want to follow; it is to give you a target so that your efforts can be more focused than they would be if you had nothing to aim for. Time and fate have a way of shifting our priorities. People change, and so do the things they view as important. If the goal you once wrote down no longer matches your ambition in life, come up with another goal to replace it.

## Devise a Plan

### PLANNING

How does your plan relate to your goal?

If you think of your goal as your destination, then a plan can be seen as the route that will take you there. Coming up with a plan is like drawing a map. You need to know where you are starting, where you are heading, and where you plan to stop along the way. Most goals will have several possible plans. The challenge comes in choosing the best one.

How can you choose the most efficient plan?

An efficient plan is a balancing act between what you need and want and what you are able to pay. Paying, as far as a plan is concerned, doesn't always mean money. It can mean time and energy as well. For example, a one-week plan for reviewing your notes is "too expensive" if the test is only two days away. In the same way, a plan that forces you to stay up all night will often cost too much because what you gain in knowledge you will lose in sleep. The most efficient plan will meet your goal without being too costly.

What sort of plans are the best?

The best plans aren't always obvious from the outset. For example, many students approach an exam by answering questions as soon as they receive the test. Given the time limit, that plan may seem to make sense, even though it's actually a bad idea. The most efficient strategy is to read the exam directions, look over all the questions, and even come up with a time plan before answering a single question. The first plan is fast but reckless, whereas the second is steady and dependable. Now you have a more structured and efficient approach to test taking. (For more on this plan, see Chapter 12.) When you make an effort to devise a systematic plan, you will usually gain more benefits than you would with a hastily drawn up strategy.

What sort of impact should flexible thinking have on your goal?

Devising the best plan can require flexible thinking. For example, when you look at a map, you may conclude—as commercial airline navigators once did—that the best way to get from Amsterdam to Tokyo is to head in an easterly direction along what is known as the Mediterranean route. But look at a globe instead of a map, and your perspective

When is a good plan  
the wrong plan?

**IT'S YOUR Q**

**Figure 1.2**  
**A New Way to View**  
**G.P.A.**

may change. Rather than heading east on the Mediterranean route, commercial planes going from Amsterdam to Tokyo now fly north! That's right. They take what is known as the "polar route," flying over the North Pole to Alaska, and then west to Tokyo—for a savings of roughly fifteen hundred miles! The lesson is this: After you've decided on a goal, work vigorously to accomplish it, but keep looking for ways of achieving the goal more efficiently, perhaps from a different angle. This approach is sometimes known as *reframing*.

No single plan will work for every goal, and few plans are flexible enough to work for several goals. Using the wrong plan can be inefficient and sometimes even comical. Perhaps you remember the folktale about the lazy son who gets scolded by his mother for losing the money he received as payment from a local farmer. "Next time you get paid," she tells him sternly, "be sure to carry it home in your pocket." But the following day the boy goes to work for a dairy farmer who pays him with a pail of milk instead of money. Anxious not to anger his mother, the boy dutifully pours the milk into his pocket. Although his mother's plan was a good one, it could work only when used in the right circumstance. The same idea applies to your study plans. For example, writing out your notes in full sentences makes sense if the goal is to study a textbook assignment. But if you used the same plan for taking lecture notes, you'd move so slowly that you'd miss most of what the instructor said. The secret is to find a plan that fits the goal you have in mind.

In the same way that good plans may not work for every goal, plans that work for most people may not always work for you. That's why the best way to come up with a plan for success is to balance wise advice with your own experience. This book is full of plans for success and tricks of the trade. All of them have been proven to work, and most should work for you. Use trial and error to determine which plans work best for you, and be prepared to adapt some plans to better fit your needs. Even the best plans can fail if they are used too rigidly. Allow a little breathing room. If things go wrong, don't give up. Adjust and keep on going.

**THE GPA OF SUCCESS**

GOAL—should reflect your wants and needs. Make it large and ambitious without being vague. Write it down!

PLAN—lists the route you plan to take in order to reach your goal. It should be efficient and specific. Good advice and personal experience combine to create the most effective plans.

ACTION—brings your goal and your plan to life. Requires confidence, self-discipline, and a power over procrastination.

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