

What are SMART metrics?

SMART is an acronym that helps individuals and teams create clear, focused, and achievable objectives. It's built around five key criteria—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound—each designed to bring clarity and structure to the goal-setting process.

Using SMART metrics ensures that goals are not vague or aspirational, but instead grounded in practical steps that can be tracked, evaluated, and accomplished within a defined timeframe. Whether you're launching a new project, improving a process, or measuring performance, the SMART framework helps align your efforts with meaningful outcomes.

The visual on the next page offers a quick reference to each SMART element, with reflective questions to guide your thinking as you define your goals.

S	Specific	Do I understand how I would put an actual number to this? Or is it too vague?
M	Measurable	Is there a method to measure that number? Will I be able to tell if we've met the future goal?
A	Attainable	Is this goal ambitious but realistic, given our time and resource constraints?
R	Relevant	Am I measuring something that's important to my customer? Is achieving this goal meaningful?
T	Time-bound	What time horizons am I looking at? What is my deadline for achieving the goal?

When should I use it?

- Use it to set clear and measurable performance goals for individuals or teams.
- Apply it when planning new projects to define specific deliverables and timelines.
- Use it to track progress and ensure accountability throughout a project or initiative.
- Apply it to prioritize work and allocate resources realistically.
- Use it to turn process improvement ideas into actionable and measurable goals.
- Apply it to align goals with strategic plans and key performance indicators (KPIs).

How do I facilitate or create it?

SMART is a tool used across numerous disciplines from lean improvement process to personal nutrition goal setting.

To teach SMART, start with a relatable, vague goal and show how it lacks clarity. Introduce each SMART element—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound—using examples or interactive discussion. Then, have participants practice by rewriting vague goals or applying the framework to their own work. Wrap up by reflecting on how the SMART approach makes goals more focused and actionable, and provide a simple takeaway for future use.

Tool in Action

An easy place to start when teaching about SMART Metrics is to have everyone write a metric, and then run the SMART test on them.

Is it Specific?
Is it Measurable?
Is it Attainable?
Is it Relevant?
Is it Time-bound?

Here is an example of making a poor metric better through this process.

Poor Metric

Make hiring
faster

Better Metric

Reduce time-to-hire
(posting to offer) from
5 months to 3 months
by December 2021

Is this metric..

