



## Goal Setting and Reflecting on Learning within the OLP

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With the start of a New Year, many of us have looked back over the past year to assess what went well, and what may need improving during 2016. This might have then prompted some goal setting and a few New Year's resolutions, for example: losing a few pounds, spending less time on social media, de-cluttering, or even increasing fiscal responsibility. There may be a few out there who think there is no point in setting New Year's resolutions; within a few weeks those well-intended resolutions end up falling to the wayside, leaving one feeling disheartened.

Do not despair; there are some great tips that will help in setting those New Year's goals. Try setting a goal that is specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic, and timely. <sup>1</sup> Does this sound familiar? It should, as these are the key steps in setting SMART learning goals within your Online Learning Plan (OLP). Like setting New Year's resolutions, the beginning of a new 5-year QAP Cycle brings the start of setting new learning goals.

We are often asked at the CDHBC office "Why do I need to write a learning goal?", and "How do I set a learning goal?". Developing learning goals organizes one's learning while providing more meaning and a focused direction for professional development. We advise registrants to develop learning goals as soon as possible after completing the QAP Assessment Tool. Low scoring areas from the QAP Assessment Tool fall within Content Categories identified within the registrant's individual OLP. Timely development of learning goals ensures that any low scoring from the QAP Tool areas are still fresh in one's mind. This allows for learning goal development that specifically addresses the identified topic while providing a more meaningful learning experience that will have a positive impact on one's practice. Content Categories may be referenced on page 15 of the [QAP Information Guide](#).

If this is a registrant's first attempt at developing a SMART learning goal, we appreciate that this may be out of the "comfort zone". With that in mind we have developed a table defining the components of the SMART learning goal with some examples of what the SMART components would look like if they were poorly written, or conversely, well developed:

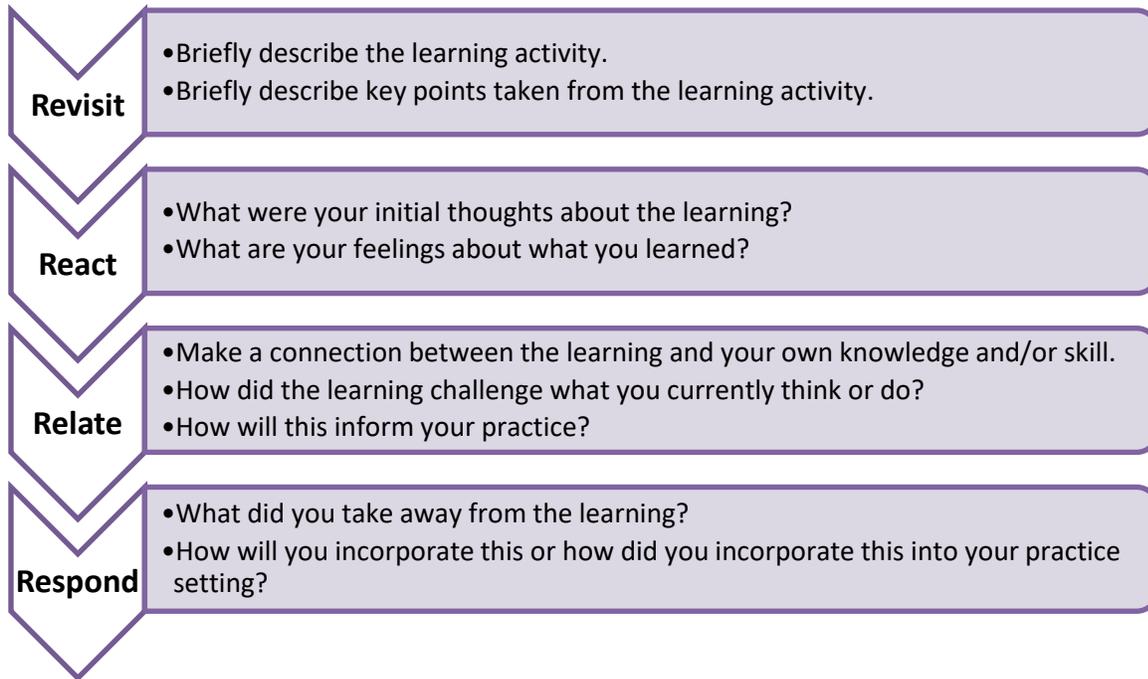
SETTING SMART LEARNING GOAL			
Identified Content Category: D. Dental Hygiene Clinical Practice 1. Health Assessment/Pharmacology			
SMART	DEFINITION	WEAK EXAMPLE	BETTER EXAMPLE
Specific	An ambiguous goal is hard to achieve, make sure the goal is detailed	Know all medications	I will know the most common prescribed medications for high blood pressure, heart failure and diabetes and considerations associated with these, and look up medications I am not familiar with in a drug reference guide

<b>Measurable</b>	Include tangible criteria to know when the goal is completed	Have a drug reference book	Purchase the text <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry (21<sup>st</sup> ed)</i> to reference in my operatory
<b>Action Oriented</b>	Include an action verb to provide a greater understanding along with providing an observable product	I will look up medications	I will purchase the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry (21<sup>st</sup> Ed)</i> to keep in my operatory in order to review any medications clients are taking I am not familiar with. This will ensure I understand any considerations or contraindications associated with dental hygiene care
<b>Realistic</b>	Is the goal realistic? Can it truly be achieved? Is it reasonable? The goal should be attainable and challenging	I will memorize all drugs associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes and any side affects they may have that could interfere with dental hygiene care	By March 31, 2016 I will have the <i>Lexicomp Drug Handbook</i> in my operatory and ensure I reference any medications I am not familiar with that clients are taking to be familiar with any considerations or contraindications for dental hygiene care
<b>Timely</b>	Set a due date for when the goal will be accomplished	I will purchase a new edition of a drug information guide	By the end of March 2016 I will purchase the 21 <sup>st</sup> edition of the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry</i>
<b>Final SMART Learning Goal</b>	By March 31, 2016, I will have purchased the 21 <sup>st</sup> edition of the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry</i> . I will reference medications I am not familiar with associated with diabetes, hypertension, and heart failure to be aware of any considerations or contraindications to dental hygiene care so I ultimately provide safe care for my clients.		

Another question presented to us at the College is “What is expected when writing a reflection on learning?” By definition, “reflection” guides life-long learning and contributes to improvements in one’s dental hygiene practice; as such, it is a critical component of one’s OLP. Reflecting on a learning experience may be challenging to begin with, as it is often complicated to put personal thoughts and feelings of growth on paper if this is not already a practiced habit. It is more common to write a description of the learning activity in a factual format. However, writing a reflection involves not just the facts but the thoughts, values, and feelings on how the learning provided a better understanding and/or changed one’s practice.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to remember that reflection related to professional learning should be in one’s own words. Discuss the specifics of what you have taken away from the learning activity and how the

learning or a specific component of the learning has been incorporated into your practice setting. There are several ways to develop a reflective statement; the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Dental Hygiene Theory and Practice* identifies one such model titled “The 4 R’s of Reflection”. These include revisit, react, relate, and respond. <sup>2</sup> This 4 R formula for reflective writing is one of several methods to start building the skill of developing meaningful reflections on learning within one’s OLP. The following chart summarizes these 4 reflective points. <sup>2</sup>



Whether reflecting on last year’s resolutions or planning for the development of your learning goals for the next 5 year QAP Cycle, understanding how to create a meaningful learning goal and continued practice will improve one’s confidence over time. Reflection is a critical component of ongoing learning, and in combination with a well-developed learning goal, it will provide continued professional growth in one’s practice.

The College has several resources meant to assist registrants as they become familiar with developing learning goals and writing reflections based on a learning activity. The following resources may be found by visiting the CDHBC website or clicking on the link provided:

- [OLP PowerPoint](#)
- [SMART Learning Goal Tips](#)
- [SMART Learning Goal Worksheet](#)

#### References:

1. College of Dental Hygienists of BC (2016). *Quality assurance program information guide*. Available from: [http://www.cdhbc.com/Documents/CDHBC\\_QAP.aspx](http://www.cdhbc.com/Documents/CDHBC_QAP.aspx)

2. Darby ML, Walsh M. Dental Hygiene Theory and Practice. 4th ed. St-Louis, Missouri: Saunders Elsevier; 2015.