

The Student Goal and If-Then Plan Sheet

A goal without a plan that names a moment is a wish with a deadline attached. Student-facing. Built for grades 6–12.

Five tests — run your draft against these first

1	You wrote it.	Not the teacher, not the class. A goal handed to you is an assignment.
2	It names a behavior, not a wish.	Something a stranger could watch you do.
3	It is optimally challenging for you.	Roughly a sixty percent chance of hitting it. Some of these are supposed to be missed, and missing one is not trouble.
4	It is close enough to act on.	This week or the next two, not in May.
5	There is an if-then plan under it.	Page one is not finished without the box below.

Wish, goal, plan

	What it sounds like	Why
Wish	"I will study more."	No behavior, no moment, nothing to check.
Goal	"I will redo every problem I get wrong, within two days, until the unit test."	Names a behavior, a number and a date.
If-then plan	"If it is Tuesday and I have finished eating, then I will redo the two problems I got wrong before I open my phone."	Names the moment, the action, and the thing it replaces.

Adding a specific if-then plan to a goal had a medium-to-large effect on whether the goal was reached — $d = .65$ across 94 studies (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). The effect split $d = .61$ for getting started and $d = .77$ for getting back on track after something went wrong. Honest limits: that meta-analysis spans health and behavior change across a wide age range, not a set of secondary classrooms, and the strong effects showed up mainly when the student actually wanted the goal.

My goal

A behavior, a number, and a date. Not a grade — a grade tells you nothing to do on Tuesday.

My if-then plan

If it is [a specific time or trigger], then I will [a specific action].

The Two-Week Check-Back

Every two weeks, on a date already on the calendar, in writing. Three questions, six minutes. A student who missed and says why has not failed the routine.

Anything longer and the goal stops being operative. Anything shorter and you are spending class time on the system instead of the work.

Date	Did you do the thing you said you would do?	What is the evidence?	Same goal, or a different one?

Four worked examples

Subject	The goal	The if-then plan under it
Math	Redo every problem I get wrong within two days, until the unit test.	If it is Tuesday and I have finished eating, then I will redo the two problems I got wrong before I open my phone.
Social studies	Write one question from the reading before every class discussion this unit.	If I have finished the reading, then I will write the question at the bottom of the same page before I close the book.
Science	Turn in every lab write-up on time for the next three weeks.	If the lab ends and the bell has not rung, then I will fill in the data table before I leave the room.
English	Use evidence from the text in every paragraph of my next two essays.	If I finish a paragraph, then I will underline the quotation in it before I start the next one.

None of these is about a grade. Grade goals are the ones students reach for first and the least useful — a grade is an outcome the student only partly controls, and it gives no instruction about behavior. If a student insists on one, ask the follow-up: what would have to be different in your week for that to happen? The answer is the actual goal.

For the teacher — the arithmetic

Six minutes times a hundred and forty students is not a thing anyone does every two weeks. Rotate: five or six conversations per cycle, everybody else writes, and every student gets a real check-in roughly once a quarter. Choose the five deliberately — the students who most need to say it out loud rarely raise a hand.

A student who misses every goal is not failing at goal setting. It is a miscalibration, and the calibration is the adult's job: sit down, cut the goal in half, and let them hit one.