

Explore



Decide



Develop



Reflection
and
Resilience



Powerful Goals

A self-help tool

Introduction

Life goals are the big aims that we have for our lives. We may have aims for where we want to live, our life-style, relationships, travel, the type of career we want, professional success and personal growth.

Our life goals don't appear magically out of thin air. They are influenced by society, our up-bringing, education, peer-groups and our own 'inner voice' – that is our intuition and natural inclinations. These influences mean that the things we *think* we want may not always be the 'right' goals for us. So how can we tell?

Psychologists argue that certain types of goals are on the whole more effective at motivating us (so we're more likely to achieve them) and more satisfying (Lyubomirsky, 2007, p. 233).

These 'power goals' have three characteristics:

1. They are things we believe in and 'own'. That is, we agree with them and think they are the right thing to do. This may sound obvious; after all, why would we choose a goal we didn't agree with? However, because our goals are affected by all the different factors that influence us, sometimes we can find ourselves following a goal because that is what is expected of us, possibly without fully realising that this is the case.
2. They are things we find deeply satisfying in themselves. Psychologists distinguish between things which are 'intrinsically' satisfying, that is, just doing them is a reward in itself. And things which are 'extrinsically' satisfying, that is things which you don't really like doing but do to get a payoff at the end. For example, choosing a career doing things you enjoy would be intrinsically rewarding. But, doing a career you didn't enjoy just to get a high salary, would be extrinsically rewarding. Extrinsic rewards are often to do with money, status and about looking good to others.
3. They are positively expressed 'approach' goals. Approach goals say what you want to do rather than what you don't want to do. For example, having a goal to work outdoors is an approach goal. But saying that you don't want to be stuck in an office is a negatively expressed (or 'avoidance') goal.

We can use these characteristics to test our goals and see how powerful they are.

This self-help tool will help you see if the goals you have chosen for yourself have the three principles of powerful goals.

If they do, this means that they are more likely to be satisfying and motivational. If they don't, they are less likely to be satisfying or motivational. We've underlined 'more likely' and 'less likely' because having or not having these characteristics, will affect the probability of achieving your goals and finding them rewarding, but it won't completely determine the outcome since everyone is different.

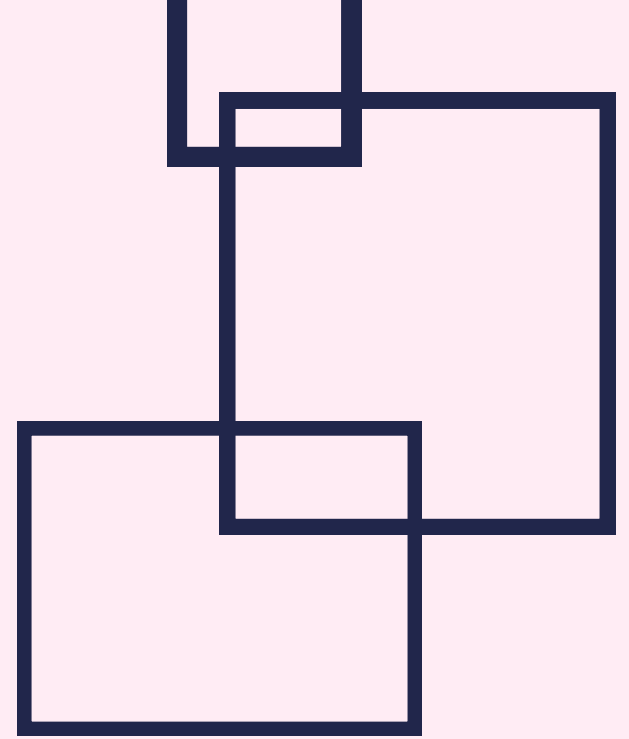
Not having these characteristics is a warning signal. While it doesn't necessarily mean you should change your plans, it does tell you there might be a problem and suggests that more thought may be required.

If you are unsure what goals to set yourself in the first place, try some of our other self-help tools that increase your self-awareness by reflecting on your values, interests and personal priorities.



This tool is designed to...

- Help you check out or audit your goals.
- Help you see what sort of goals you have chosen.
- Let you know if some of your goals may require further consideration to make sure they're right for you.



Consider using this tool if you...

- Want to check if your goals are right for you.
- Want to ensure that your goals are likely to be motivating and rewarding.
- Want to make sure your career choices are taking you the right direction for your life.

How to use this tool

Take your goal and work through each sets of questions and plot your goal (or goals) onto the 4 box matrix for each section.

First, consider ownership.

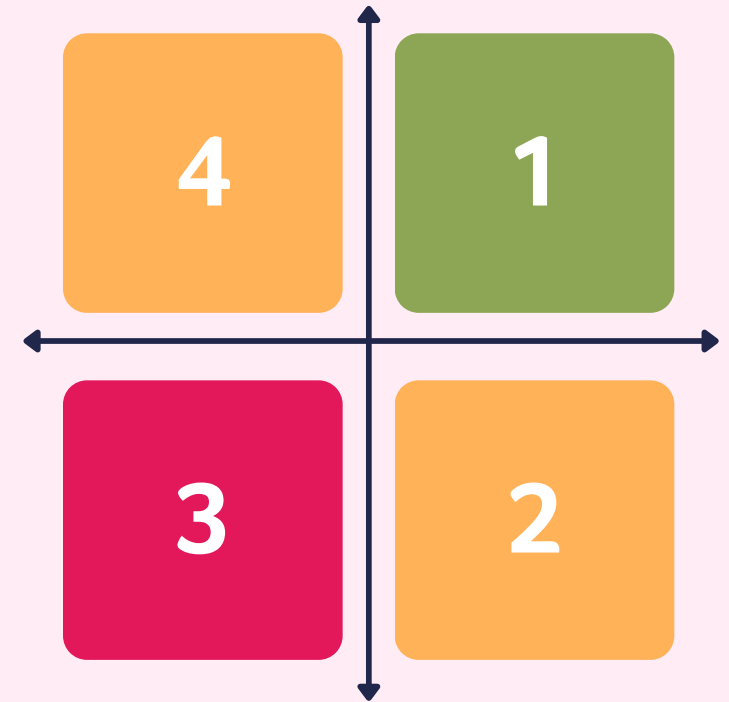
Questions to ask yourself include:

- **Did I come up with this goal (plan / idea)?**
 - How long have I had the goal? (the amount of time may indicate something about how strong it is for you).
 - What makes me believe this is a good goal for me?
 - What evidence do I have that this is the case?
- **Did someone else come up with this goal (plan / idea)?**
 - Why do I think they suggested it?
 - Do I believe that they have my best interests at heart?
 - What makes me believe this is a good goal for me?
 - What evidence do I have that this is the case?
- **How far do I agree with the goal and the thinking behind it?**
- **How far is it something I believe in and want to stick with?**

Using the 4-box matrix to consider ownership

Once you've answered the questions, decide which box your goal fits into.

- Box 1 = goals which have a high degree of ownership. Usually likely to be motivational.
- Box 2 = goals which may still be motivational, provided you agree with the other person's idea and believe that it is made in your best interest.
- Box 3 = goals with a very low level of ownership. In general, indicates that this isn't a good goal for you.
- Box 4 = goals with some level of ownership. However, although its your idea you are unsure about it or uncomfortable with it. This indicates you need to do more careful thinking about this goal as it may not be right for you.



Have a go at filling one out on the next page!

My idea



Doesn't feel right



Feels right



Other's idea



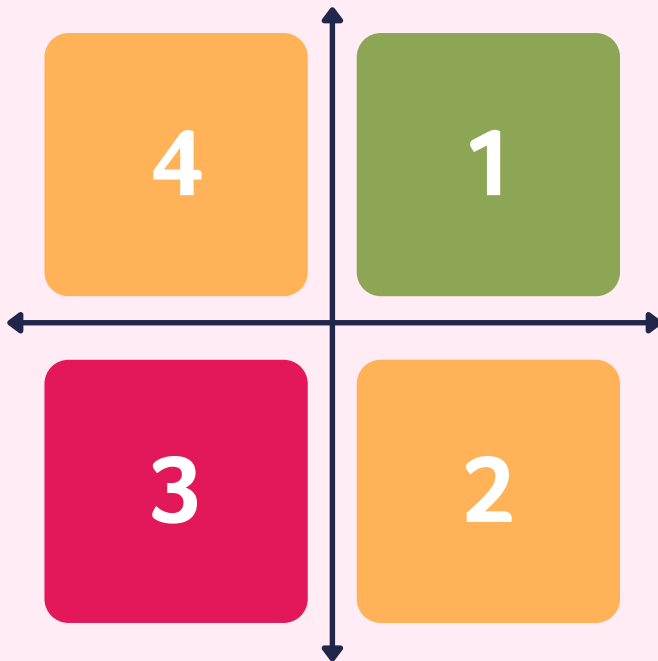
Second, consider intrinsic / extrinsic satisfaction.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- How much will I enjoy the process that takes me to my goal? (Remember though that some worthwhile goals require sacrifice and commitment to get there though).
- How rewarding will I find the process that takes me to my goal? (Things may be rewarding because they are meaningful, even if they are not always enjoyable).
- When will my goal feel satisfying: while I'm doing it, or only when I achieve it?
- What pay-offs will I get from achieving my goal?
- How does the goal express my core values and ideals?
- Would I still see my goal as valuable, even if no one else knew I'd achieved it?
- Do I want to reach my goal just for myself, or how I look to others?

Using the 4-box matrix to consider satisfaction

Once you've answered the questions, decide which box your goal fits into.



- Box 1 = goals which express your values and which you find enjoyable and/or rewarding both doing and achieving. Usually likely to be motivational.
- Box 2 = goals which may still be motivational, as you'll like undertaking the process. But, because rewards like money or status generally are less satisfying, these goals may have some downsides.
- Box 3 = goals which won't be enjoyable or satisfying until while you are doing them. These are likely to feel like a long, hard slog. And if this applies to your career goal, you may be in for a lot of unhappiness 9-5.
- Box 4 = goals which express your best values. Even though the process of achieving your goal isn't pleasurable, these are likely to be goals you believe in and find meaningful. Goals in this box may include volunteering, community work and values led career choices. Remember, though that if the tasks are tough, this may become wearing after a while and risk burn-out.

It's about doing the right thing



Doing it isn't satisfying

Doing it is satisfying



It's about looking good

Third, consider whether this is an approach or avoidance goal.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- **Approach or Avoidance?**

- Does the goal describe a positive situation I can work towards?
- Does the goal describe in detail a situation I can visualise? Being able to 'see' a future can make it more achievable, although this isn't always necessary.
- Does the goal describe a negative situation I'm trying to escape from?
- Does my goal state what I don't want to do, or what I do want to do?

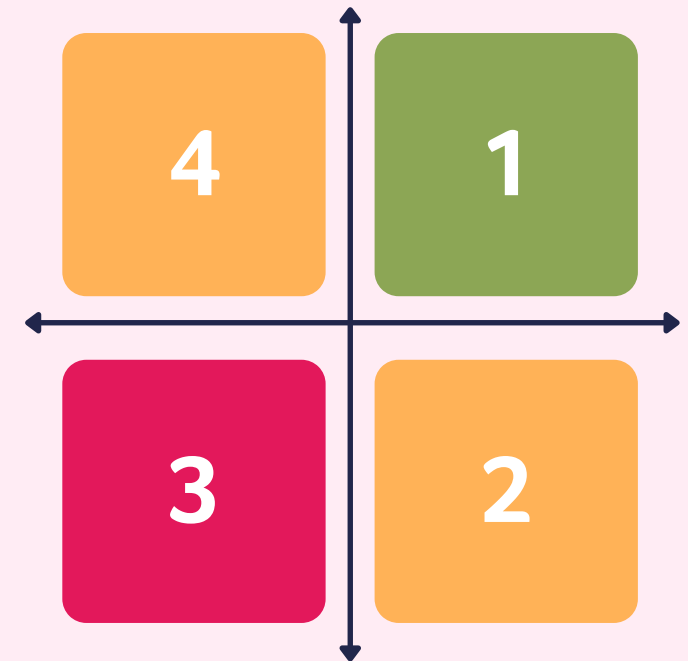
- **Positive or Negative?**

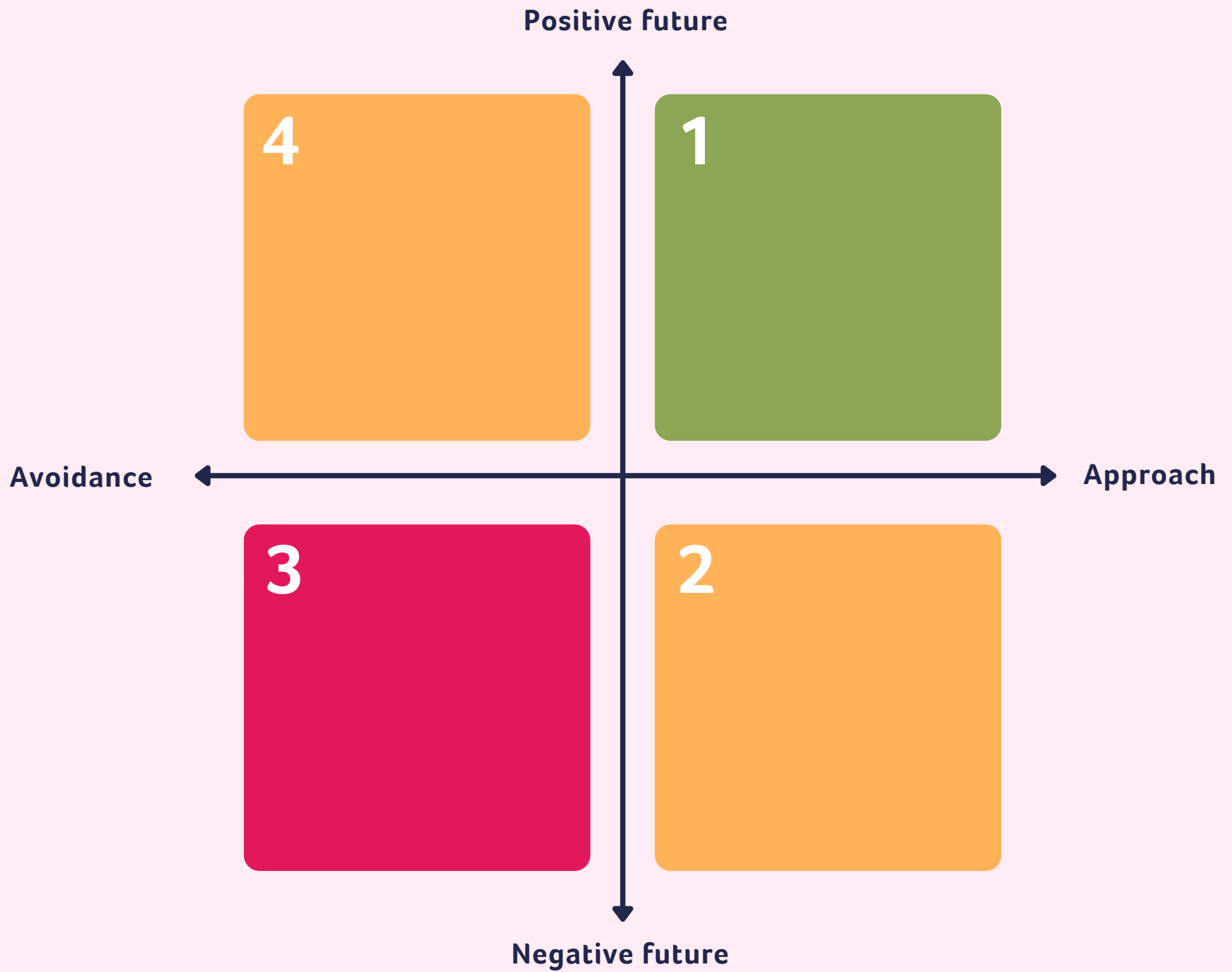
- Does the goal say what 'good' looks like?
- Does the goal give me positive energy when I think about it?
- Do I get enthusiastic when I talk about my goal?
Does my goal describe a situation where I'll be happy and flourishing as a person?

Using the 4-box matrix to consider approach and avoidance

Once you've answered the questions, decide which box your goal fits into.

- Box 1 = goals that are positive and that you can work towards. Your 'sweet spot'.
- Box 2 = goals you can work towards but on reflection you realise aren't going to take you to a good place. These are not constructive aims to have.
- Box 3 = goals which are stated as things you want to avoid and which lead you in an unhelpful direction. These are wrong on both levels!
- Box 4 = goals which describe something you want to avoid but which, by implication, point towards a good place. These aims probably just need re-writing as approach goals. For example, the goal 'I don't want to be a "wage-slave"' implies you want freedom to shape your career and do something you find meaningful. So, you just need to re-write your new goal stating what you would like to become instead. Avoidance goals should be treated as useful information which help you refine your thinking.





Pause, Reflect, Act

Look at the three characteristics of powerful goals.

- Which boxes have you put your goal(s)? Ideally, you'd hope to see your goal in box 1.
- Do your goals pass all three tests?
- How do you feel about where you have put your goals?
- Are there any alarm bells you need to listen to?
- What are the key insights you've taken from this Self-help guide?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other related self-help tools you'd like to use as well?

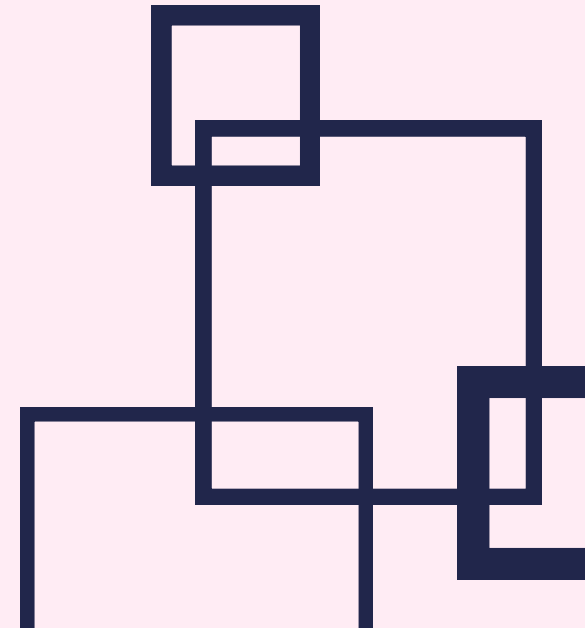
NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

Other tools especially relevant to setting goals include:

- **Unique Me** – describing what makes you unique and special.
- **Best Possible Future Self** – using creative writing to imagine what a successful future could look like.
- **Cantril Ladder** – how close are you to where you want to be, and what steps do you want to take next?
- **Expectations Under the Microscope** – do your life choices express your authentic values?
- **The Eye of the Storm** – what do you feel about the expectations that you and other's have for your career?
- **Imposter Issues** – how to stop imposter feelings hold you back.
- **Level Playing Field** – using all the resources you can find to confront social inequality.
- **The Big Questions** – how your personal life-work philosophy can inform your career choices.
- **SCALED-Up Action Plans** – a powerful way to write action plans that deliver on your goals.

References and Resources

- Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). *The How of Happiness* (2nd ed.). Piatkus.



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.