

# PURSUING MULTIPLE GOALS

Let's see... You are determined to make the sports team, improve your math grade, *and* eat healthier. Do you find that it's tough to work towards all of these goals at once? *Your* goals might be a little different than these, but there's a good chance that you struggle with multiple goals too. Want to learn a few tips about how to do this better?! *Sometimes* pursuing two goals at once can actually *help* you reach both goals, while other times, double-pursuit hurts you. If you understand the scientific research about goal selection, you will be able to set goals that help you get the most out of your effort.

## Complimentary versus Interfering Goals

When goals compliment each other—wow! You're more likely to have a positive experience. "Feel-good" experiences motivate you to work harder, and effort is the secret to success. However, when goals conflict with one another, these conflicts create a "tug-of-war" inside your brain's thinking and feeling centers. Brain "tug-a-wars" drain your energy, and you greatly increase your chances to give up on all the goals in conflict.<sup>1</sup>

What tells you that two goals make sense together? One way is when progress towards one goal already represents progress towards another goal.<sup>2</sup> For example, doing very well in school sets you up for going to college *and* earning a scholarship. Goals also compliment each other when the very same action step is included in both goal plans.<sup>3</sup> For example, you join the soccer team to improve your health *and* to make new friends. This experience of developing two goals is rewarding. Research shows that coupled goals are especially important when you're working towards a long-term dream.<sup>4</sup>

Goals can also interfere with each other. Sometimes two goals compete for the same limited resource. For instance, playing on the sports team might take time away from studying to improve your math grade. Other times, strategies for achieving two goals are simply not compatible, such as losing weight and eating dinner with a family that serves up pizza nightly. Interfering goals actually slow down your progress, and a "slow-down" drains your motivation and excitement.



## Use Your Resources Wisely!

Improve your chances to achieve goals by picking ones that allow for efficient use of *resources*—particularly your time and energy.<sup>5</sup>

Explore these reflection questions to determine whether your goals compliment or interfere with each other. Talk to your mentor about ways to apply your limited time, energy and resources.

How often are your action steps for one goal, promoting another goal at the same time?

Do you have a goal where you are investing less time, because another goal pulls on your attention? What motivated you to prioritize one goal over the other?

Do you have a goal that conflicts with your other desires? How can you become more aware of that conflict and realign goals to improve chances of success? <sup>6</sup>

**Footnotes**

1. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1512.
2. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1511.
3. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1511.
4. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1522.
5. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1522.
6. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1513.

**References**

Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc. (2004). Vol. 30, No. 12, December 2004. Pp. 1511-1523.