

Developing

SMART

Learning Goals



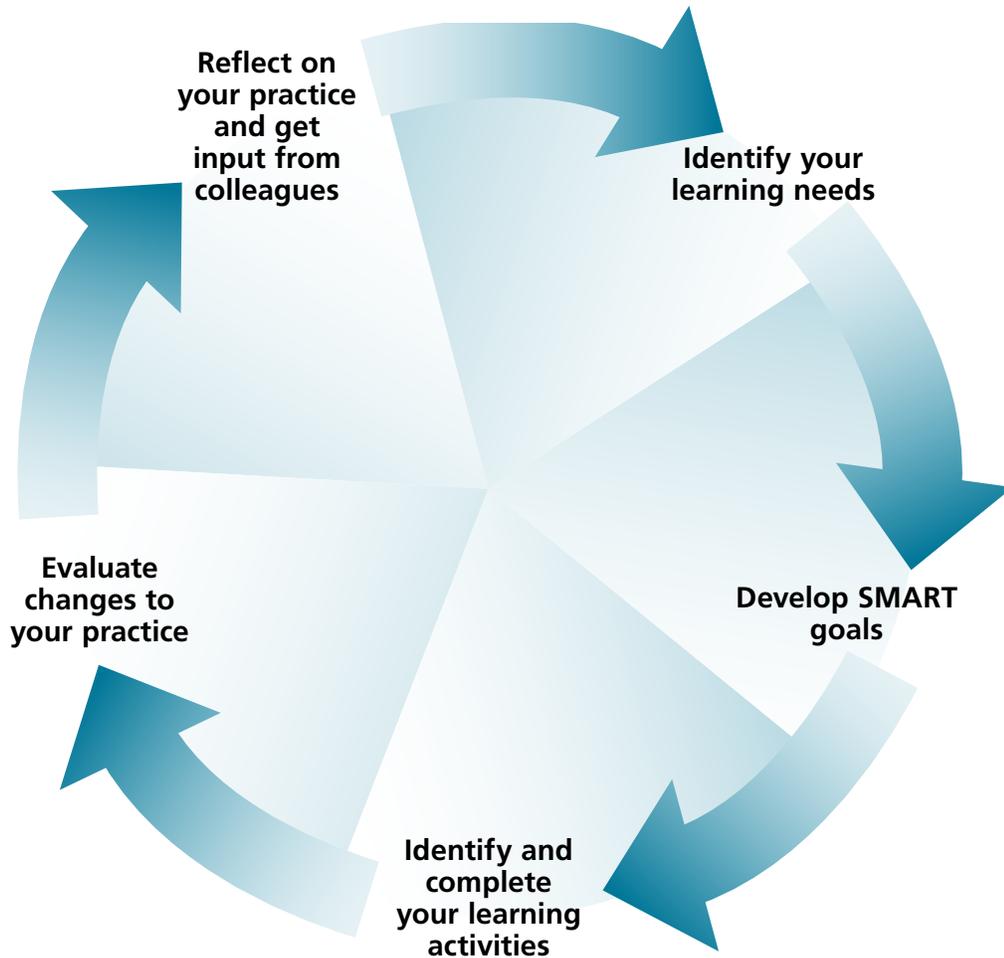
COLLEGE OF NURSES  
OF ONTARIO  
ORDRE DES INFIRMIÈRES  
ET INFIRMIERS DE L'ONTARIO

THE STANDARD OF CARE.

## Introduction

This guide will help you to develop your Learning Plan, including SMART learning goals.

This graphic shows you how developing a Learning Plan is a continual process. It includes reflecting on your practice, identifying your learning needs, developing SMART learning goals to meet those needs, completing learning activities and evaluating the resulting changes your learning has made to your practice activities.



## How do I start my Learning Plan?

Start by reflecting on your practice, and discovering what your strengths and learning needs are. Assessing your learning needs is your first step toward improving your nursing practice. For example, while reflecting on your practice you may have identified a need to manage conflict in your work place more effectively. This learning need will guide you toward developing a goal around improving your conflict management skills.

You should also get input from your peers to provide a greater awareness of your strengths and learning needs. There are suggestions to help guide your reflection in the Practice Reflection worksheet at [www.cno.org/qa-resources](http://www.cno.org/qa-resources).

## Your Learning Plan

Research shows that you are more likely to achieve a goal if you write it down. Having a Learning Plan allows you to write down your goals, and track your learning activities and outcomes all in one place. The online Learning Plan at myQA allows you to develop and update your information easily. Find it at [www.cno.org/qa](http://www.cno.org/qa).

You need to have two learning goals in your Learning Plan.

If you are a Nurse Practitioner, you must also develop a third learning goal based on your learning needs.

## What is a SMART Learning Goal?

A SMART goal is:

### 1. Specific.

A specific goal is detailed, focused and clearly stated. Everyone reading the goal should know exactly what you want to learn.

### 2. Measurable.

A measurable goal is quantifiable, meaning you can see the results.

### 3. Attainable.

An attainable goal can be achieved based on your skill, resources and area of practice.

### 4. Relevant.

A relevant goal applies to your current role and is clearly linked to your key role responsibilities.

### 5. Time-limited.

A time-limited goal has specific timelines and a deadline. This will help motivate you to move toward your goal and to evaluate your progress.

A SMART learning goal is structured so that anyone who reads your goal statement will understand what you need to learn. For your QA Learning Plan you will be developing professional goals, but you can use this format for any type of goal, professional or personal. Here are two examples of personal SMART goals:

“I want to lose 16 lbs and lower my body mass index from 27 to 24 by November 30.”

“I want to run the local charity 5k race on August 15.”

## How do I write a SMART learning goal?

1. Start by identifying what it is you want to learn.
2. Be specific and write it down in one sentence. Try not to use vague phrases such as “I want to learn about...” If you are too vague, then how will you know when you reach your goal? Use an action word to describe what you want to achieve. Using an action word makes sure your goal is measurable. Examples of action words are:
  - identify
  - develop
  - plan
  - design
  - compare
  - describe
  - evaluate
  - explain
  - demonstrate
  - create.

3. Make sure your goal is realistic, given the resources that you have. A goal set too high may set you up for failure, whereas a goal set too low will fail to challenge and motivate you.
4. Make sure your goal is related to your practice.
5. Identify a reasonable time frame to complete your learning activities and achieve your goal.

Make sure that your learning goal is about what you need to learn and is not a learning activity. For example, “I am going to enrol in a course about nursing legislation” is a learning activity, not a learning goal. The goal is to identify and explain the various legislation that governs nursing practice in Ontario. The activity is the course.

Examples of SMART goals:

Not a SMART goal	SMART goal
“I want to handle conflict better.”	“I want to be able to demonstrate effective conflict management skills by September.”
“I want to learn more about ethics at work.”	“I want to be able to identify ethical conflicts in my work environment, and apply an ethical framework to assist my team with effectively resolving ethical conflicts by November.”
“I want to understand confidentiality.”	“I want to be able to explain how PHIPA applies to patient confidentiality on my unit. I will provide an in-service to my colleagues by October.”
“I want to find better ways to keep patients safe without using restraints.”	“I will identify best practice interventions for patients experiencing agitation and/or aggressive behaviours. I will develop a resource book for all staff by May.”
“I want to figure out how to find research that will enhance my patient care.”	“By July I will identify four of the most comprehensive nursing literature databases, and be able to teach others how to effectively conduct a literature search on each database.”

## I have a SMART learning goal, what do I do next?

Once you have identified your learning goal, you must select a College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) practice document to which each goal relates. You can find all the practice documents at [www.cno.org/docs](http://www.cno.org/docs).

Review your selected practice document to make sure you have chosen the correct one for your goal. The topic of your goal should relate to the content of the practice document you select. For example, a learning goal about developing conflict management skills relates to the “Managing Conflict among Staff Members” section in the [Conflict Prevention and Management](#) practice guideline.

Don’t select a document based only on its title. For example, from the title you might think the [Working in Different Roles](#) practice guideline is about changing jobs. In fact, it is really about your accountability when working in a different role, such as an RN employed as an RPN, or an RPN employed as an unregulated care provider.

## Learning Activities

Now you can identify several learning activities for achieving your goal. Activities must have a deadline to keep your learning on track. Do not use “ongoing” in place of a deadline, because a SMART goal is time-limited.

You should have at least three different learning activities for each goal. While developing the activities, think about what type of learner you are. Do you learn best by observing? Reading? Discussing? Choose the learning activities that work best for you.

Some examples of learning activities include:

- reading (text, journal, authoritative websites)
- attending a webcast
- shadowing
- role-playing
- interviewing an expert on the topic of your goals
- simulation
- participating in a workshop

Once you have chosen an activity, you can write a detailed activity statement. This must clearly outline your learning strategy. It should be specific and based on what is realistic within your time frame.

Example of an incorrect activity statement:

“I will attend an in-service and read.”

Example of a correct activity statement:

“I will read at least two current nursing journal articles about depression, dementia and delirium by the end of April.”

## Next steps

Once you have written your activity statements, you can start completing the activities.

Describe how your learning goals support your commitment to continuing competency.

Remember, developing your Learning Plan is a continuous process. Make sure you review it on a regular basis and update it when you complete an activity and reach a goal. As you evaluate your Learning Plan throughout the process, you may need to make adjustments to your goals and activities.

If you are selected for Practice Assessment, you must submit your Learning Plan to CNO. If you have not yet reached the evaluation stage of the process, you may leave this section blank when you submit it. This will not affect your assessment. However, you are expected to update your Learning Plan with the evaluation of changes to your practice, by the end of the year.

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Additional copies of this booklet may be obtained at [www.cno.org/qa](http://www.cno.org/qa), or by contacting the College's Customer Service Centre at 416 928-0900 or toll-free in Canada at 1 800 387-5526

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