

Helping Students Set Their Goals for Learning

Purpose

To help new literacy students determine their learning goals.

Rationale

Adult students often have a strong desire to learn, but they may not always articulate to themselves or others exactly why they want to learn. For example, ESOL students may know they want to speak English better, but does that mean they want to communicate better with their supervisor? Find a new job? Talk to a child's teacher? Or students in an ABE class know they are there to learn to read, but they may feel overwhelmed because they have not broken that learning process into smaller, attainable goals. The Setting Goals Form that we show on the last page and the modified instructions on how to use the form were adapted from California Library Literacy Services, a program of the California State Library. The library system uses the form with its adult learners. As you will see, the form allows students and their instructors to discuss and set goals, track progress, and determine in which of life's roles their goals apply. The library also uses the form to track learning outcomes achieved statewide.

The Basic Activity

1. Review the Setting Goals form. The California Library Literacy Services uses the form during intake interviews; another ideal setting would be the first time you meet with a student individually. To get things started, ask questions such as:

- What would you like to accomplish at work (or home, in your community, personally) that you can't accomplish now?
- I know you want to read (or write) better, but what specifically would you like to read (or write)?
- Are there things you've always wanted to do but couldn't because of limited reading and writing skills?

It's OK if you can't complete the full form during the initial goals discussion. Focus on listening to the student and taking notes. Use the form as a guide and fill it in shortly thereafter.

2. Choose goals that interest the student the most and elaborate with notes as necessary. Explain to students that the goals on the form cover various roles we all have in our lives—worker, family member, community member/ citizen, and lifelong learner. There are also blank areas on the form to indicate goals that are not already be listed.

3. Limit the number of goals you and the student will select (1 – 3 goals), as too many can be overwhelming. Focus on what students can accomplish in four to six months. Try to balance a longer-term goal such as “read a book” with something short-term, such as “get a library card.”

4. Keep a copy of the completed form and share a copy with your program coordinator. Share a copy with the student as well.

5. At least every three months, review progress toward goals. Check off the “making progress” area as appropriate and fill in “date goal met.”

6. Work with students to reset goals, if necessary, when they reflect a higher level of competency or fluency. For example, a student may be able to write an informal letter but now needs to write a formal job-related letter. Or the student may want to read a more complex newspaper or magazine. During your follow-up progress reviews, students can also indicate goals that are no longer relevant to their needs.