



PedPilot – Self-regulated Learning Guide for Teachers

2024-1-HU01-KA220-SCH-000250549



Funded by
the European Union

PedPilots – Supporting Self-Regulated Learning

Unit 3.

**Goal-setting, planning, time management – keeping not just your diary, but your
mind in order**

ENG 'Funded by the European Union. The information and statements contained herein represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Tempus Public Foundation. Neither the European Union nor the funding authority can be held responsible for them.'

All nine modules of the curriculum can be downloaded for free from the project's website and



used freely. <https://www.pedpilot.eu/>

Our Hungarian-language digital curriculum, designed for independent study, is available on the following website.

<https://pedpilots.jozsefattilaiskola.ro/>

3. Goal-setting, planning, time management – keeping not just your diary, but your mind in order

Compiled by:

Márta Antal, Bolyai Talent Development Grammar School and Boarding School, Senta, Serbia

Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about the three fundamental pillars of self-development: conscious goal-setting, time management tools, and methods for creating a flexible schedule. The aim of the module is to help you understand how to coordinate daily tasks and longer-term plans in a way that increases efficiency whilst reducing overload. By the end of the module, you will be able to organise your time more consciously and thereby maintain your motivation.

Objectives

During the learning process, participants will:

- become able to set realistic and motivating goals.
- master the most important tools and techniques of time management.
- develop the ability to plan flexibly, enabling them to respond effectively to unexpected situations without losing sight of the main objective.

Time allocated to the module:

2 hours

Learning outcomes

- Planning pedagogical processes and self-reflection on their implementation (differentiation to promote optimal development, motivation, and extracurricular activities)
- Reflective thinking: independent reflection, analysis of learning experiences
- Personality development, individualised approach (comprehensive personality development, conscious application of pedagogical and psychological methods)

- Commitment and professional accountability for professional development (self-reflection, collaboration with others, professional cooperation, future plans)

Study materials

Why are goal-setting and planning important in self-regulated learning?

Szilvia is a primary school teacher and the mother of two young children. She feels that at the start of the school year she is ‘starting a new life’: she wants to read more professional literature, she wants to prepare better for her lessons, and she has also resolved to exercise regularly. She writes in her diary: “1 hour of professional development every weekday (professional literature, training videos)”, “3 workouts a week”, “I always make a healthy dinner in the evening.”

She started enthusiastically in the first week, but by the second week she was already facing reality: a parents’ evening, an unexpected substitution, a sick child at home. More and more of her ambitious plans fell by the wayside. Szilvia became increasingly disappointed in herself: “If I can’t stick to the plan, then there’s no point in anything.”

Does this situation sound familiar to you?

Teachers’ daily lives change rapidly, and learning often only fits into whatever time is left over. In such cases, conscious goal-setting and planning are not merely useful tools, but fundamental prerequisites for sustainable learning and motivation. If a teacher cannot structure their learning processes, they may easily feel that the acquisition of new knowledge is constantly falling behind. Clearly defined goals provide direction, whilst detailed plans ensure that every step can be tracked and evaluated. Furthermore, conscious time management helps in dealing with external and internal time-wasters, whilst maintaining mental balance ensures that learning does not lead to burnout.

The psychology of goal-setting

Goal-setting is the foundation of self-regulated learning. For teachers, clearly defined goals are particularly important, as the role of the educator, the delivery of lessons, monitoring students’ individual progress and professional self-development all occur simultaneously. The clarity of goals has a motivating effect.

According to psychological research, clear and challenging goals increase motivation and perseverance (Locke & Latham, 2019). When a teacher, for example, sets the goal of ‘using more digital tools in my lessons’, the goal remains vague, and the risk of procrastination increases.

However, if the goal is more specific, such as “I will integrate a new digital task every month and ask students for feedback to measure its effectiveness”, the goal is measurable, trackable and motivating. The SMART model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) offers a framework to help formulate goals. According to psychological research, realistic, step-by-step goals maintain self-confidence as they provide a regular sense of achievement, whilst overly ambitious goals can easily lead to feelings of failure and burnout. A well-designed system of goals thus supports not only performance but also psychological well-being.

An introduction to the SMART model using an example

Let’s say someone wants to learn how to use an online survey creation tool (such as Google Forms). The SMART objective might look like this:

S – Specific: I want to learn how to use an online survey creation tool so that I can create and evaluate surveys independently.

M – Measurable: I will consider the goal achieved when I have created at least three questionnaires of my own and have been able to export or analyse the results.

A – Achievable: I will practise for 30 minutes twice a week, following online guides and videos. This can realistically be fitted into my daily routine.

R – Relevant: This goal is useful to me because it develops my digital skills and supports my work, studies or personal projects.

T – Time-bound: I want to be able to use the programme confidently within four weeks.

This goal is therefore clear, measurable and achievable: it is not an abstract intention, but a plan broken down into concrete steps that motivates and aids progress.

Task: Formulating your own SMART goal

1. Choose a new skill or piece of knowledge you’d like to learn!
2. Write down the goal in simple, general terms!
3. Rewrite the goal in SMART format!

S – Specific: What exactly is the goal?

M – Measurable: How can you measure your progress?

A – Achievable: Is the goal realistic given the time and resources available?

R – Relevant: Why is this goal important to you?



T – Time-bound: By when do you want to achieve the goal?

4. Write down your SMART goal in full sentences!

5. Reflect!

- Which part was the easiest to complete?
- Which one caused you difficulty?
- What can you do to actually achieve your goal?

“Well-formed goal” exercise

In educational practice, we can enhance the effectiveness of goal-setting beyond SMART goals using the NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) “Well-formed outcome” exercise. This method helps participants set clear, intrinsically motivating and achievable goals. Below, you can read the steps of the exercise. You can choose a new goal, or think of something you have been planning for a long time, putting off, but for some reason have never taken the right steps towards (though you can also consider the steps based on the goal used in the previous exercise).

It may help to lay out the steps on a table using LEGO bricks, building blocks, buttons or beans. You could ask a colleague, friend or partner to support the process by asking questions. If you carry out the exercise in this way, represent yourself on the table with a chosen symbol, and for each question and answer, place your answer with a new symbol. At the end of the process, symbolically take the first step. You can also take a photo of the finished layout, so that if you get stuck later, you can look back at it at any time and recall the train of thought. The symbolic representation of the goal and the steps leading to it can further aid clarity and the more conscious planning of its realisation.



Task: Whether working with the goal you set earlier or a new one, go through the following:

1. Define the goal precisely

- Formulate your goal in positive terms!

Example: “I would like to be able to create visual presentations for my teaching materials independently using Canva.”

2. Make it tangible

- What will I see, hear and feel when I have achieved my goal?

Example: “I’ll see the finished presentation on the screen, hear positive feedback from my students, and feel confident.”

3. What lies behind the goal? – What motivates me?

- Why is the goal important to me?
- What values does it serve (e.g. self-improvement, perseverance, creativity)?

Example: “I’d like my lessons to be visually appealing, as this would increase the students’ interest.”

4. Identifying people who can help

- Who could support me?
- Who could I learn from or draw inspiration from?

Example: “Fellow teachers, online Canva tutorials, friends who are already familiar with using Canva.”

5. Identifying obstacles

- What internal (e.g. fear, procrastination) and external (e.g. lack of time, resources) obstacles might arise?
- How can I deal with these, and what resources could I mobilise?

Example: If the obstacle is a lack of time, one solution is to break the required time down into small chunks (15 minutes a day).

6. Timeframe and specific steps

- When will I start working towards my goal?
- What specific, measurable steps will I take?

Example: Step one: Create a Canva account – today; step two: Watch a one-hour tutorial video – tomorrow; step three: Create my own presentation – by the end of the week.

7. Ecology check

- Does the goal fit with my personality, values and life situation?
- How will achieving this goal affect me and my environment?

Example: “Yes, because visual teaching and engaging students are important to me. Students’ motivation also increases when I engage them visually.”

8. Positive visualisation


- To conclude, imagine that the goal has already been achieved.
- How do you feel, what do you think, and what changes has this brought to your life?

Combining these two methods helps ensure that goals do not merely exist on paper, but—by aligning with our values and capabilities—boost our perseverance and chances of success: SMART shows us what we want to achieve, whilst a well-formulated goal shows us how and why, and helps us organise the process from within.

Time management tools

Teachers’ time is often fragmented among daily tasks: teaching, administration, meetings, communication with parents, cover teaching, professional development programmes, and continuous learning and self-improvement. This multifaceted activity results in the teacher feeling, by the end of the day, that “I’ve been working all day, yet I haven’t finished anything”. There are several factors behind this: urgent, unexpected tasks divert attention away from activities that serve truly important, long-term goals; and interruptions (phone calls, emails, requests from students and colleagues) force the mind to constantly restart, which results in a loss of time.

One classic tool for effective time management is the **Eisenhower Matrix**, which organises tasks along two axes: *important–unimportant* and *urgent–non-urgent*. Most people tend to react to urgent but not necessarily important tasks, as these provide an immediate sense of satisfaction (“I’ve done it, ticked it off”). Yet the key to long-term effectiveness lies in focusing on tasks that **are important but not urgent** – such as curriculum development, professional development, prevention, or building relationships with students. These require planning, conscious focus and a timeframe, but in the long run they reduce stress and the need for firefighting solutions.



| | URGENT | NOT URGENT |
|---------------|------------|-----------------------|
| IMPORTANT | Do it now! | Schedule it! |
| NOT IMPORTANT | Delegate! | Delete it! Ignore it! |

Figure 1: Eisenhower Matrix

Modern time management tools include microlearning and short focus intervals. **The Pomodoro Technique** (Cirillo, 2006) alternates between 25-minute bursts of intensive work and 5-minute breaks, thereby increasing concentration and reducing mental fatigue. The psychological basis of the method is that attention is time-limited, and short, well-structured time blocks facilitate the attainment of a state of flow.

One Pomodoro cycle

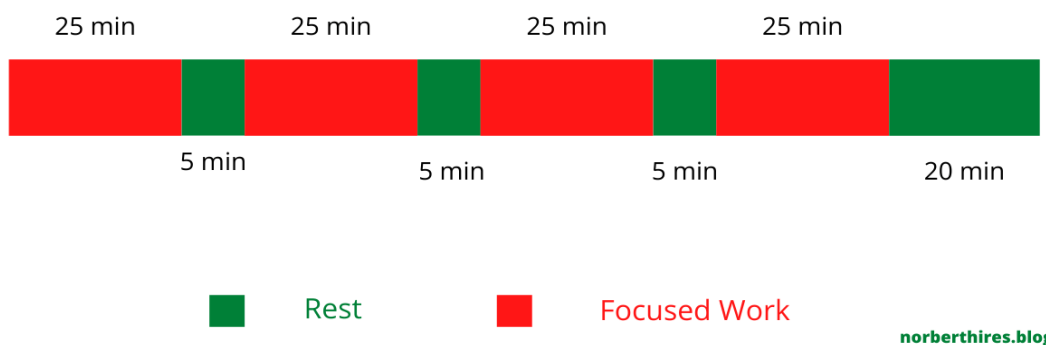


Figure 2: Pomodoro cycle (source: norberthires.com)



There is now a wealth of time-management tools available in digital form: calendar apps, task managers (e.g. Trello, Notion, Todoist), focus timers and online reminders all help with conscious time management. The key, however, lies not in the tool itself, but in consistency and self-reflection: what do I do day in, day out that truly contributes to my goals – and what do I do merely out of habit or a sense of guilt?

Alongside setting priorities, **it is essential to recognise and limit time-wasters**. Any activity that does not bring you closer to your goals counts as a time-waster, such as uncontrolled email checking, unnecessary meetings, multitasking or procrastination.

Time management is therefore a complex skill that encompasses cognitive, behavioural and emotional elements. Conscious planning, prioritisation, reducing time-wasters and utilising focus periods all contribute to a teacher's balanced and productive work.

Below you will find two tasks related to time management that may be of help to you in the future.

Task 1: Eisenhower Matrix

Objective: To raise awareness of time use and to recognise important and unimportant activities

Write down on a piece of paper or in a digital note how your previous working day went, hour by hour. List every activity, even brief interruptions: teaching, administration, reading emails, breaks, conversations, social media, phone calls, etc. The aim is to get as accurate a picture as possible of how your time was spent.

1. Eisenhower analysis:

Draw a matrix based on the diagram shown above (Figure 1):

- Important and urgent
- Important but not urgent
- Urgent but not important
- Neither urgent nor important!

Then place the activities listed in the previous step in the appropriate boxes.!

2. Reflection: Think about the following questions:

- Which activities turned out to be 'time-wasters'?
- Which important but not urgent tasks did you put off?
- How could you consciously prioritise these next week?

Task 2 (optional):

Next week, try using the Pomodoro Technique on a task you usually tend to put off (e.g. developing teaching materials, writing a project). Observe how this affects your concentration and performance!

Flexible time management

Time management is not just about organising tasks, but also about creating inner balance. A distinctive feature of teaching is that it is difficult to plan: an unexpected substitution, a problematic situation among pupils, or a sudden administrative requirement can arise at any time. This is precisely why a rigid, minute-by-minute schedule often causes nothing but frustration. The key is flexible time management, which provides both a framework and room for manoeuvre.

One of the foundations of flexible time management is the reassessment of priorities. It is helpful if the teacher recognises at which time of day they are most productive (e.g. mornings are better suited to creative tasks, afternoons to administrative work) and adapts their activities accordingly. Flexibility does not mean a lack of structure, but rather that the system is capable of adapting to real-life situations.

An important element is the inclusion of **buffer times** in the timetable. If every minute is scheduled, a single delay or unexpected event can trigger a domino effect. Buffer time – for example, a 10–15-minute break after each lesson – is not a luxury, but the key to sustainable operation. This provides an opportunity to switch gears, take a short breather and deal with unexpected situations without throwing the entire schedule into disarray.

Another fundamental principle of flexible time management is **self-reflection and adjustment**. A brief weekly review – “what went well, what took too long?” – helps to fine-tune the system. The aim is not for everything to be perfect, but for there to be conscious improvement in time management as well.

Finally, the psychological aspect of flexible time management should not be overlooked. Our relationship with time often stems from internal expectations and beliefs (‘a good teacher is always available’, ‘I can’t say no’). Part of self-development is recognising that time is not just for work, but also for recharging. Rest is not time wasted, but an investment in the next day’s performance.



Here are two exercises related to flexible time management:

Exercise: *The changing day scenario*

Objective: To practise flexibility and adaptability in everyday work

1. Draw up an overview of your ideal working day, broken down by the hour! Note down when you teach, when you deal with administrative tasks, when you liaise with parents or colleagues, and when you set aside time for rest! It is important to also note at what time of day you feel most energetic and when you experience fatigue.

2. Now imagine that your day doesn't go according to plan! How would you adjust your day so that it doesn't feel chaotic?

Think about the following questions:

- What could you postpone?
- What could you shorten without compromising on quality?
- Which activities would you definitely stick to?
- What would help keep the day manageable despite unexpected situations?
- In which areas could you remain flexible?
- What new habits or strategies could you incorporate into your daily routine in the future?

Additional task:

Over the next week, keep track of when and why you deviated from your daily plan! At the end of the week, briefly assess how much flexibility helped you to complete your tasks anyway, and to what extent it contributed to your sense of balance!

Supporting materials

Time management: https://adaptiveconsulting.hu/idogazdalkodas_tippek/index.html

Pomodoro Technique <https://nofluffjobs.com/hu/log/karrier/onfejlesztés/pomodoro-technika-utmutato-hogyan-mukodik-es-mikor-erdemes-hasznalni/>

Effective and stress-free task management in everyday life <https://c0f9314fde.clvaw-cdnwnd.com/1c5aaba974303f4464c59cd4f8eeb377/200000251-3d84d3d84f/video3635996542.mp4?ph=c0f9314fde>

Eisenhower Matrix <https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix>

Assessment tasks

A teacher's SMART goal is as follows: "I will integrate one new digital task into my lessons each month and analyse the students' feedback."

Which element does not prove that the objective is truly SMART?

- A) Specific, because it precisely defines the activity
- B) Measurable, because the number of feedback responses and the number of integrations can be verified
- C) Time-bound, because it specifies a monthly frequency
- D) Not achievable, because it involves too many tasks

Correct answer: D

Question 2 (True-False)

Internal motivation ensures more lasting results in the long term than purely external rewards or expectations.

- A) True
- B) False

Correct answer: A) True

2. Time management tools

Question 3 (Multiple choice)

A teacher's day includes the following activities: reading emails, developing teaching materials, parent-teacher meetings, and social media. How can these be prioritised correctly using the Eisenhower Matrix?

- A) Developing teaching materials – 1. Important but not urgent
- B) Reading emails – 2. Urgent but not important
- C) Social media – 3. Not important and not urgent
- D) Parent-teacher meetings – 4. Important and urgent

A

B

- C
- D

Question 4 (True-False)

The advantage of the Pomodoro Technique is that, instead of long, uninterrupted work sessions, it increases efficiency and reduces mental fatigue through short, focused time blocks.

- A) True
- B) False

Correct answer: A) True

3. Flexible time management

Question 5 (Multiple choice)

Which strategic elements support flexible time management?

- A) Building in buffer times into the schedule
- B) Weekly reflection on the success of the schedule
- C) Specifying the exact duration of each task
- D) Tasks aligned with the most productive time of day

Correct answer: A, B, D

Question 6 (True-False)

Flexibility means that we can adjust the schedule in any way, spontaneously, without taking regularity and priorities into account.

- A) True
- B) False

Correct answer: B) False

Sources

Locke, E. A. & Latham, G. P. (2019). *The development of goal-setting theory: A half-century retrospective*. *Motivation Science*, 5(2), 93-105.

Morgenstern, Julie (2004). *Time Management from the Inside Out: The Foolproof System for Taking Control of Your Schedule — and Your Life* (2nd ed.). New York: Henry Holt & Company.



Cirillo, F. (2006/2007). *The Pomodoro Technique*. FC Garage GmbH.

<https://promanconsulting.hu/eisenhower-matrix-jelentese-hasznalata/> (last accessed: 8 November 2025)

<https://norberthires.com/pomodoro-technika/> (last accessed: 08/11/2025)

<https://www.mindtools.com/agra3qw/using-well-formed-outcomes-in-goal-setting/> (last accessed: 02/11/2025)

<https://ukcpd.co.uk/well-formed-outcomes-the-key-to-goal-setting-success/> (last accessed: 4 November 2025)

