THE FUTURE

Imagine what *comes next.*

Give your hopes a little space. Imagine a meaningful future, then make a plan to get there.



THE COMPACT GUIDE

3-5 hours / at your own pace

All the guidance. Your own notebook.

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A LITTLE ORIENTATION

Inside these pages

Follow the exercises in order, then repeat the worksheets for the traits, goals, or experiences you choose.

Before you begin 3

One Thing You Could Do Better 3

Things to Learn About 3

Improve Your Habits 4

Your Social Life in the Future 4

Your Leisure Activity in the Future 4

Your Family Life in the Future 5

Your Career in the Future 5

Qualities You Admire 6

Your ideal future 6

A future to avoid 7

Give your future a name 7

The goals that will get you there 8

Prioritize your goals 8

Evaluating Your Motives 8

Considering the Broad Personal and Social Impact of Goals 9

Considering the Detailed Strategies for Goal Attainment 10

Identifying Potential Obstacles and their Solutions 10

Monitoring Progress towards Desired Goals 11

Take your next small step 12

A moment to look back 12

GETTING STARTED

Before you begin

Give your hopes a little space. Imagine a meaningful future, then make a plan to get there.

This is a space for you. Write honestly, at your own pace. Take a break and return whenever you are ready. Suggested lengths and times are guides, not deadlines.

> Print this compact guide and write in your own notebook. Label each answer with its exercise title, and keep related worksheets together.

These pages work entirely on paper. No account or internet connection is needed after downloading. Keep your completed pages somewhere private.

Your path through this program

01 Imagine your future

02 Define your goals

03 Make a thoughtful plan

> Explore your future, give it a name, then list and prioritize your goals. Repeat the five goal-planning exercises for every goal you choose.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

One Thing You Could Do Better

If you could choose only one thing that you could do better, what would it be?

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Things to Learn About

What would you like to learn more about, in the next six months? Two years? Five years?

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Improve Your Habits

What habits would you like to improve?

At school?
At work?
With friends and family?
For your health?
With regards to smoking/alcohol/drug use?
Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Your Social Life in the Future

Friends and associates are an important part of a meaningful, productive life. Take a moment to consider your social network. Think about the friends you might want to have, and the connections you might want to make. It is perfectly reasonable to choose friends and associates who are good for you. Describe your ideal social life.

Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Your Leisure Activity in the Future

Take a moment to consider the activities you would like to pursue outside of obligations such as work, family and school. The activities you choose should be worthwhile and personally meaningful.

Without a plan, people often default to whatever is easiest, such as television watching, and waste their private time. If you waste 4 hours a day, which is not uncommon, then you are wasting 1400 hours a year. That is equivalent to 35 40-hour work weeks, which is almost as much as the typical individual spends at his or her job every year.

Your Leisure Activity in the Future / continued

If your time is worth $25 per hour, then you are wasting time worth $35,000 per year. Over a 50-year period, that is $1.8 million dollars, not counting interest or any increase in the value of your time as you develop.

Describe what your leisure life would be like, if it was set up to be genuinely productive and enjoyable.

Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Your Family Life in the Future

Take a moment to consider your home and family life. Peaceful, harmonious family life provides people with a sense of belonging, support for their ambitions, and reciprocal purpose. Describe what your ideal family would be like. You can write about your parents and siblings, or about your plans for your own partner, or about your children, if any - or about all of these. What kind of partner would be good for you? How could you improve your relationship with your parents or siblings?

Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Your Career in the Future

Much of what people find engaging in life is related to their careers. A good career provides security, status, interest, and the possibility of contributing to the community. Take a moment to consider your school or work careers, or both. Where do you want to be in six months? Two years? Five years? Why? What are you trying to accomplish?

Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Qualities You Admire

People you automatically admire have qualities that you would like to possess or imitate. Identifying those qualities can help you determine who it is that you want to be. Take a moment to think about the two or three people you most admire. Who are they? Which qualities do they possess that you wish you had?

Think and write for at least two minutes, then move on.

Suggested writing time: 2 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

Your ideal future

Now you have written briefly about your future, and have had some time to consider more specific issues. This step gives you the chance to integrate all the things that you have just thought and wrote about.

Close your eyes. Daydream, if you can, and imagine your ideal future:

Who do you want to be?
What do you want to do?
Where do you want to end up?
Why do you want these things?
How do you plan to achieve your goals?
When will you put your plans into action?
Write about the ideal future that you have just imagined for 15 minutes. Write continuously and try not to stop while you are writing. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. You will have an opportunity to fix your mistakes later.

Dream while you write, and don't stop. Write at least until the 15 minutes have passed. Be ambitious. Imagine a life that you would regard as honourable, exciting, productive, creative and decent.

Remember, you are writing only for yourself. Choose goals that you want to pursue for your own private reasons, not because someone else thinks that those goals are important. You don't want to live someone else's life. Include your deepest thoughts and feelings about all your personal goals.

Suggested writing time: 15 minutes. Take the time you need.

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE

A future to avoid

You have now written about the future you would like to have. Clearly defining your future can help reduce the uncertainty in your life, and reduce the amount of negative emotion that you chronically experience, in consequence. This is good for your confidence and for your health. Having well-defined goals also increases your chances of experiencing positive emotion, as people experience most of their hope and joy and curiosity and engagement as a consequence of pursuing valued goals (and not, as people generally think, by attaining them).

It can also be very useful to deeply imagine the future you would like to avoid. You probably know people who have made very bad decisions, and who end up with a life that nobody would want. You also likely have weaknesses yourself. If you let those get out of control, then you might also end up with a miserable, painful life. Most people know how their life could go downhill if they let it.

Spend some time, now, thinking about what your life would be like if you failed to define or pursue your goals, if you let your bad habits get out of control, and if you ended up miserable, resentful and bitter. Imagine your life three to five years down the road, if you failed to stay on the path you know you should be on. Use your imagination. Draw on your knowledge of the anxiety and pain you have experienced in the past, when you have betrayed yourself.

Think about the people you know who have made bad decisions or remained indecisive, or who chronically deceive themselves or other people, or who let cynicism and anger dominate their lives. Where do you not want to be?

Dream while you write, and don't stop. Write at least until the 15 minutes have passed. Let yourself form a very clear picture of the undesirable future.

Suggested writing time: 15 minutes. Take the time you need.

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Give your future a name

Choose a memorable title and a brief description of the future you want to build.

> In your notebook, write: a title for your future; your future, in a few words.

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

The goals that will get you there

Break your ideal future into concrete goals. We suggest 6-8, but you can start with fewer. Give each a title and a brief, memorable description.

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Prioritize your goals

Order your goals from most to least important to you.

REPEAT FOR EACH GOAL

Evaluating Your Motives

> Complete this exercise for every goal, working in priority order.

For this goal, you might want to consider issues such as the following:

Do you truly believe that pursuing this goal is important?
Would you feel ashamed, guilty or anxious if you didn't?
Do you want to achieve this goal personally, or are you doing it to please someone else? (It is often a good thing to do something for someone else, but you should know when you are doing that.)
Are you pursuing this goal because the situation that you find yourself in seems to demand it?
Is the pursuit of this goal enjoyable, stimulating or satisfying?
Is this goal part of a deeply felt personal dream?
Please spend a minute or two writing down your reasons for pursuing this goal:

REPEAT FOR EACH GOAL

Considering the Broad Personal and Social Impact of Goals

> Complete this exercise for every goal, working in priority order.

Goals can have an impact beyond the obvious. Our specific personal goals are connected to larger, more important life goals. These higher-order goals reflect our most important ideals. The specific goal of spending more time studying or reading, for example, is a specific element of the more important goal of being a well-educated person. Achieving other specific goals, such as becoming more assertive, help us to move closer to our ideal self.

You will now be asked to write about what more globally important things might be affected by your attainment of the goal listed below:

How would disciplined success change the way that you see yourself?
How would other parts of your personal life change, in consequence?
How would this affect the way that others perceive you? (You might also consider fears of being successful. Sometimes people are afraid to succeed because of the responsibility this would entail. Sometimes they are afraid of even becoming conscious of their true goals, because then they would be aware when they fail. These are not good strategies.)
How would attaining this goal affect the lives of the people around you?
What broader beneficial social impact might your success have?
Please write a short description of how attaining this goal would change additional important aspects of your life, and the lives of others.

REPEAT FOR EACH GOAL

Considering the Detailed Strategies for Goal Attainment

> Complete this exercise for every goal, working in priority order.

Goals are related to lesser, smaller sub-goals and behaviors, as well as connected to higher-order, more important abstract goals. Sub-goals are easier to achieve, but are still fundamental to reaching our greater aspirations. Sub-goals can thus be thought of as strategies for greater goal achievement. Thinking about what specific things need to be done in order to achieve your goals allows you to create practical strategies for realizing your dreams. Please take some time to write about the concrete daily or weekly things you might do to further your goal. Deeply consider what particular behaviors this goal is built upon.

Should you spend more time planning at school or at work?
Do you need to spend more time with your friends, or your children?
Do you need to discuss household chores with your roommates, partner or spouse?
Specify when you are going to work on your goal. Specify how often. Specify where. Think hard about how you are going to implement your plans. Make your plans concrete.

Write down those concrete weekly or daily things you might do to further this goal.

REPEAT FOR EACH GOAL

Identifying Potential Obstacles and their Solutions

> Complete this exercise for every goal, working in priority order.

Thinking about achieving a goal is obviously easier than going out and getting it done. Many things related to the natural environment, the social group and the self can stand in your way. It is useful to anticipate these difficulties, so that you can plan to overcome them.

Consider your goal, once again. Write down all the potential obstacles you can think up. Write down ways to overcome these obstacles.

How might you interfere with your own plans? How can you ensure this won't happen? Sometimes change is threatening to people we know and love. Will the people you know help you, or interfere? How can you communicate with them, so that they will support you? Think of realistic and worst-case scenarios. What are your options? What are your alternative plans?

Write down potential obstacles to this goal, and specify the ways you might overcome them.

REPEAT FOR EACH GOAL

Monitoring Progress towards Desired Goals

> Complete this exercise for every goal, working in priority order.

We need to know, concretely, whether or not we are progressing towards the attainment of valued goals. Of course, this is not an easy task. When we want to complete very specific tasks, feedback on our performance is relatively easy to monitor. However, if our goals are less short-term, this becomes a little more difficult.

You are now being asked to identify personal benchmarks that will allow you to evaluate your own performance.

When would you like to achieve this goal? Be specific. Even if you have to revise a deadline later, it is still better to set one.
What sorts of things will you accept as evidence that you are progressing towards your stated goal?
How often are you going to monitor your own behavior?
How will things in your life have to change, measurably, for you to feel satisfied in your progress?
How can you ensure that you are neither pushing yourself too hard, and ensuring failure, or being too easy on yourself, and risking boredom and cynicism?
Your benchmarks should be personal indicators of success. It doesn't matter what others may think defines progress towards your goal. Write down those accomplishments that would truly indicate positive movement on your part. Feel free to write as much as you feel is necessary.

Write down how you might monitor your progress with regards to this goal.

LOOKING AHEAD

Take your next small step

People often worry themselves unproductively by constantly revisiting their goals, instead of concentrating on their attainment. It is easy to undermine yourself, by always questioning your aims and intentions. Am I doing the right thing? Have I chosen the correct goals? This leads to chronic worry, unproductive behavior, and lack of opportunity to learn.

Now that you have set goals, it is best to concentrate on a daily or weekly basis on implementing the strategies you have devised for their attainment, instead of worrying about the goals themselves. It is just as important to stick to a plan, as it is to make a plan.
If you implement your goals, even if they are not perfect, you will learn enough during the implementation phase to make better goals next time. As you continue to repeat the process, you will get wiser and wiser.
Set aside some time every week or two - no more than ten or twenty minutes - to mentally review your performance. You will gather all sorts of useful information that you can use to reconsider your plans, down the road.
Researchers have found that if someone performs goal-setting tasks multiple times over a long period, there is a greater chance of health and productivity improvements.

As a result, you might wish to engage in this sort of exercise on a regular basis, every four, six, or twelve months, as your situation changes.

YOUR FINAL REFLECTION

A moment to look back

Read through your pages. You can revisit any answer as your perspective changes.

What do you understand more clearly now?

What is one small step you want to take next?

Before you put these pages away

- [ ] I have worked through the exercises I chose.
- [ ] I have reviewed my reflections.
- [ ] I have chosen a next step.
- [ ] I have put my pages somewhere private.