

Student goal-setting guide

Overview

Most adolescents want to be heard and understood. They want their ideas to have an impact. So, while you will have access to a range of data about your students' growth, your students are most engaged with their learning when they are excited about their ideas. The classroom habits and routines within this curriculum will help you create a responsive community, where students are convinced that the world wants to hear their ideas and you are guiding them to set goals around skillfully explaining their ideas.

Data reports and numbers are not implicitly exciting to students. Why does a kid spend hours working on his jump shot in the backyard? Not so he can move from a 20 percent reliability to a 40 percent reliability, but so he can improve his ability to score in a game. Why do kids spend hours kicking the ball around in favelas in Brazil? They want to be able to make the ball do what they want it to do; they want to be key players.

Throughout the curriculum you will find methods and tips to help students set goals and to take responsibility for their own growth while providing the space for students to feel the impact of that growth. As you consider the goal-setting strategies, keep the following throughlines in mind:


- **Clarify expectations:** Students must have a clear understanding of expectations in order to set reasonable goals. Just as a little leaguer needs to know how far he must hit the ball to score a home run, a student needs clear guidance about routines and skills.
- **Help students set small, achievable goals:** A quick turnaround on small goals often has more impact than constant check-ins about a big, long-term goal. The idea of “scoring proficient” at the end of the year is abstract and tough for a 12-year-old to keep in the forefront of his or her mind. Instead, for example, a reminder that a student is expected to share once a month and a quick conference to help a student find a strong piece of evidence means the student both understands that the expectation is real and feels the success of reaching the goal quickly.
- **Provide regular, specific feedback:** Many of these skills and activities are new for your students, and they need specific and regular feedback about what the goal looks like, both in exemplars and—more importantly—in their own work. Some extraordinary athletes can perfectly mimic the tennis serve of their professional idol. Most of us, however, make much quicker progress when a coach says, “Right there, the way you angled the racket put just the right amount of spin on that serve. Try doing that again.”

Use the following tools to help students self-assess and set achievable learning goals.

Writing

Throughout the year, students will practice writing in class for 10 to 15 minutes a couple of times a week. The Get Started lessons in Unit One make sure that each of your students quickly experiences the impact of conveying his or her observations.

- They practice focus (writing about one thing that catches their attention) and quickly write something that delights them and their classmates.
- They learn the clear expectations of sharing and responding to their classmates' writing, so even the risk-averse sixth-grader understands that his or her peers will tell them one way in which their words made an impact. More than any 'A' grade you give out for sharing, the positive comment of a peer will keep them writing.
- The lessons have them set clear and realistic goals about productivity. Not "write what suits you" or "write as much as you can," but "write for the whole 10 minutes" and "work your way gradually toward X number of words." These are both expectations that students can easily self-assess.

Once the Get Started lessons are complete, your students—with your help—should use this writing time as a clear space for setting goals and receiving feedback on those goals. During this time, teachers support writers with targeted feedback about the particular skill they are practicing in the moment. You will find guidelines for this feedback by clicking on the  symbol in writing activities to bring up "Look Fors"—models of direct speech teachers can use to offer brief, targeted over-the-shoulder conferences. (See the section on feedback in this program guide for more information.) Look to these for opportunities to help a student set a goal he or she can achieve in that moment of writing. Consider this example: A teacher says, "Here you're listing several parts of the text that prove Mrs. Pratchett is a horror. Which part really stands out in your mind? Now write 3-5 more sentences explaining how her dirty hands make her a horror. Describe what grabbed your attention." When the teacher circles back to consider how the student has responded, she provides clear feedback on progress: "This direct quote about her fingernails really convinces me." Students respond to this feedback by using different strategies to improve their writing.

The sharing sessions that follow all writing practices are places where students set explicit or implicit goals. When a student generates excitement amongst his peers by sharing a piece, other students are likely to experiment with similar skills in their writing. On a more structured note, since every student has a goal to share (at least once in the first month of school) and every student understands that he or she is to respond to one something specific in a peer's writing, the teacher can help students set goals within those expectations. Perhaps an EL's goal is to share, but she is particularly anxious about sharing. Helping her choose just a section of a piece to share and practicing that read-aloud with the student will provide the support she needs to be successful with that goal.

Revision

Revision Assignments are another important place for kids to assess their progress toward goals and to keep practicing skills. Revision requires the integration of a number of skills and the perspective to see which ones are needed. All students should set goals around revising, but few middle school students can do so successfully. Instead Amplify provides students with a powerful tool called the revision assignment, where they revise a particular aspect of one section of their writing and consider the before and after.

- On each Flex Day, students have the opportunity to select one of their completed pieces of writing to revise. Help students set goals for this selection, for example, by asking them to select a piece of writing where they feel they were effective in focusing on one idea as they developed a piece of evidence.
- Students then find one small place in this writing where they can apply one specific skill, such as focus. They then compare the piece before the revision assignment with the piece after it's been revised. As they review the results of their choices in this small revision, help them gauge the impact of their choices.
- As students repeat this activity over the course of a number of flex days, they build a tool kit of revision strategies they can use independently. They then have a strategy for setting achievable goals around revision while they learn to make critical revision choices independently.

Spotlight

Spotlight allows you to display and curate your students' work as models for the skills you are teaching. Use these displays to set and celebrate achievable goals with your students. These excerpts of two to five sentences are precise and realistic models for the skills you want students to practice. When you regularly prepare and rotate your Spotlights, emphasize the specific ways students are using a skill effectively. All students now have a realistic model for achieving success with that skill.

1. Use these moments when you present Spotlights as goal-setting opportunities. Discussing and displaying Spotlights before students begin a new writing activity or a revision assignment offers a clear model for them to try to emulate.
2. Equally important, Spotlights are an opportunity for you to acknowledge and celebrate students who have been progressing toward a goal. A student who has been working hard and experimenting with a skill will inevitably have one to five sentences that use that skill in an interesting way. Posting that small excerpt is a tangible celebration of that student's work. Students are demonstrably excited when they see even a small snippet of their work showcased in this way.

Essay writing

During the multi-day essay sequence, students regularly reflect on progress and set goals. They plan their work for each day, review what they have accomplished to make decisions around revision, and determine whether to experiment with a challenge element (for example, a counter-argument) or use their time to develop other sections more completely. For example:

- Students are asked to self-reflect at the end of a day's work. They might be asked to share their most convincing piece of evidence, or to identify the work they accomplished, as in the following activity:

Check the response that best explains the work that you did today:

- I wrote one or more body paragraphs where I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.
 - I wrote one paragraph where I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.
 - I wrote one or more body paragraphs but I do not think that I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.
- Students begin most essay lessons with a review of the work they have done so far and the work they will do next. Again, there are teacher tips at the beginning and end of each essay lesson to help the teacher use these as goal-setting opportunities. In particular, the structure of the flex day—at the midpoint of most essay sequences— allows the teacher to guide students to pace their work in order to complete their body paragraphs, reconsider and refine their claim statement, or—depending on the student's progress and goals—plan a counterclaim.
 - Students are asked to apply a critical eye to the work they have accomplished. As a closing activity during one of the last lessons, students reflect on their writing and select one convincing sentence to share. "Go back and find the one sentence that you want everyone to hear. You are looking for the most interesting sentence in all that you have written so far."

Models of student work

The Amplify ELA program provides teachers with annotated exemplars or models of student work. The teacher versions of these essays are useful because teachers can see a range of writing where all the skills are represented for each grade level. The models include exemplars of students who score a 4 in every skill category of the rubric.

Some teachers share the student versions of these models so students can be actively involved in understanding how the skills work and in setting goals for their own work.

- Once teachers have introduced a skill and students have begun to apply the skill in their writing, teachers might present the student model writing for this skill. Each model is highlighted so students can see clear examples of effective skill use. The teacher presents the model along with the rubric for that skill to help students set goals for their own progress.
- Teachers can repeat this process as students learn new skills and write each essay.

Keep in mind, however, that the most effective learning happens when we show a student strong skill use in his or her own work. Many middle school writers get all tangled up in their thinking when asked to look at an exemplar; they try to imitate the exemplar and can't write clearly about their own unique ideas. Being specific about where an individual student has used a skill effectively in his or her own writing not only provides a model of skill use, but is a model that the student knows she can repeat or surpass.

Independent reading

During independent reading, students set weekly goals, reflect on their reading, and log progress.

1. Students record a reading goal for the upcoming week and later record actual pages read the previous week.
2. Students reflect on their reading when they describe and critique one reading strategy they have used and when they decide on another reading strategy they could try.

Dedicating this time to supporting independent reading has been shown to engage students and motivate them to read more and to read more deeply. Checking the reading tracker and conferencing with students about independent reading is a great way to see how students do with goal setting.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary program is designed to nurture students' love of reading; learning words allows them to dig avidly into a broader range of texts. This is obviously the teacher's first priority for building vocabulary, and the embedded Reveal Tool supports students in reading without having the academic vocabulary become an obstacle. Students also need to be conscious of their developing vocabularies and aware of how language works, and setting goals around vocabulary can help them understand how their progress with words translates into progress with reading and writing. Teachers can use reveal along with Amplify's vocabulary app to give students a clear picture of their progress with vocabulary. For example, the reveal tool creates a personal glossary for each student that contains the words whose definitions they have accessed while reading. Students can review this personal glossary as they complete each text, and consider which words they now feel comfortable with and which words they still need on this glossary. The vocabulary app allows students to set goals around when and how many vocabulary activities they can complete, while receiving clear information about their progress. Finally, each lesson presents students with a short list of "words to know"—academic vocabulary that is particularly helpful in understanding that series of lessons. Teachers are encouraged to use these words frequently, but the teacher may also ask each student to select one word from the list to incorporate into that day's writing.

Games

Goal-setting is a natural cycle within the Amplify game world. As students work independently, they internalize the cycle of setting goals, reflecting on progress, and working toward the next level. The Amplify game world provides a setting that lays out clear expectations, establishes small, achievable goals, and provides regular, specific feedback. In each game the expectations and key to progress is clear, whether students are putting together sentences that make logical sense or finding clues in texts from the library. As students work to meet game challenges—creating the sentence sequence that will build a bridge off the island or finding the correct answer from a text to gain the next clue—the game world provides the satisfaction of instantaneous feedback on progress. Students are able to work independently and internalize the cycle of setting goals, reflecting on progress and working towards the next level.