

# Investing Students in the Rules

Once students know the basic routines of the classroom, they're ready to become invested in the classroom rules. The process of investing students has four steps:

- Setting SMART goals
- Connecting goals to rules
- Connecting rules to concrete behaviors
- Making the rules come alive

## Setting SMART Goals

Start by asking students to think of three goals for their year ahead at school or for a shorter time period, such as the first quarter or by the end of the month:

### 1. Behavioral Goal

This goal helps students think about their own behaviors that support or impede them in school.

Sample prompts for helping students write a SMART behavioral goal:

- What might help you develop greater persistence in completing homework and sticking with other tasks, even when challenging?
- What can you do to improve your skills for working as part of a team?

Examples of SMART behavioral goals:

- This quarter, learn strategies for sticking with a task.
- By the end of this month, learn how to maintain self-control when I get upset.

### 2. Academic Goal

Although teachers may expect students to readily come up with a relevant academic goal, this area is one in which young adolescents will benefit from coaching and by being asked genuine questions about how they'd like to improve or build upon their unique abilities, interests, and wonderings.

**Teach Students SMART Goals**  
The most effective goals are:

**S = Specific (clear and concise)**

**M = Measurable (concrete)**

**A = Achievable (realistic)**

**R = Relevant (connected to their lives)**

**T = Time-Bound (there's a deadline)**

Sample prompts for helping students write a SMART academic goal:

- What do you want to see as an end result of your academic efforts this year?
- What do you think would be the best way for you to show your learning this unit?

Examples of SMART academic goals:

- Get an A in math on the end-of-quarter final exam.
- By the end of this unit of study, learn how current immigration laws came into place.

### 3. Social Goal

Young adolescents experience a strong drive to connect to something larger than themselves, especially with a group or groups of their peers. However, they are not always able to identify peers and peer groups who will support them in positive ways without our support and guidance.

Sample prompts for helping students write a SMART social goal:

- What do you expect from your social relationships in school this year?
- What aspects of your peer relationships do you want to change and make stronger?

Examples of SMART social goals:

- Get to know three new people better this quarter.
- Ask to join others in doing something that interests us all by the end of this month.

### Helping Students Overcome Resistance to Setting Goals

As self-consciousness increases in middle school students, defensiveness also increases. If they fear the judgment of peers, some students may assert superficial or unrealistic goals for the year, such as “I want to play computer games all day.” Others may try to make a joke of the process by naming a farcical goal, such as “Turning the school into a mall.”

Waiting to do goal-setting until you’ve built some trust and affiliation will help prevent much of this behavior. By then, most students will have decided that it’s safe to share their true goals. For any lingering resisters, try handling them in a one-on-one conversation with a combination of a light touch and a serious intent. In general, most middle school students will welcome the opportunity to think and talk about what matters to them in school when assured of a safe, respectful audience.