

17. Vision Activity: Setting a Personal Best

You've probably heard of setting a personal best (PB) before. It's a term often used in the sporting world to explain when an athlete records their best ever time. It's something most athletes are always striving for – to push beyond a time or distance they've achieved before in an event. Quite often the goal is just to beat their last time or distance by a fraction of a second or a centimetre. The gains are usually small but make a big difference.

Professor Andrew Martin (2011) at the University of Sydney has used this strategy with pupils and found that it can make a big difference to academic performance.

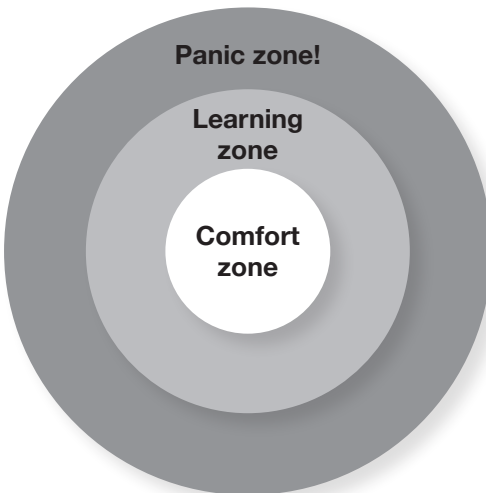
So how does it work?

There are three important things about PBs. First, they are personal. That means *you* have to decide what the target is going to be. You can ask your teacher for advice, but ultimately it's about you deciding what you'd like to go for.

Second, you need to be specific. You can't set a target that isn't specific or you won't know when you've achieved a PB. So, it might be that you set a PB for specific homework, perhaps a percentage grade that you want to achieve that's better than you've had before.

Third, you need just the right level of challenge. This means pushing yourself out of your comfort zone (see the diagram below) and into your learning zone. Be careful not to push yourself into the panic zone. You want a PB that will stretch you but it must be achievable. You can always go for another PB once you've achieved this new level.

Getting the level of challenge right



Finally, use the table below to set your PB. An example has been done for you.

| Challenge (What's the goal?) | Current score (What's the best score you've achieved?) | PB target (What's the target for your new PB?) |
|---|--|--|
| To get my best ever score in a GCSE maths paper | 67% | 70% |
| | | |
| | | |

Final Thoughts

When you set PB's there's always a point that you hit a plateau. At this point it can seem hard to make any progress. When you get to this point it's worth taking very small steps to help you progress. Remember, 1% gains over a period of time can have a significant effect.

Next time you hit a sticking point ask yourself the following questions:

Is it my knowledge of the content? Where are the gaps?

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Is it my academic skills? Do I need to speak to my teacher for guidance?

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Is it my mindset? Am I working on the things I know rather than the things I don't? How am I responding to feedback?

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