



The Individual Development Plan

...for mapping your academic and professional development

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an essential tool to help you:

- assess your current skills and strengths
- make a plan for developing skills that will help you meet both your academic and professional goals
- communicate with your mentors about your evolving goals and related skills

The IDP you create is a document you will want to revisit again and again, to update and refine as your goals change and/or come into focus, and to record your progress and accomplishments.

There are many different IDP instructions and templates. This document includes instructions and a template that are designed for University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate students (Research Assistants, NIH Supported Trainees, Fellows, and all other graduate students) and postdoctoral researchers (Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Trainees, Research Associates, Post-Graduate Trainees, and Research Interns). Since it is a fillable PDF, you can save a new version of this document each time you revise goals. Some departments and programs may use different instructions or templates so it is important to check you are using the right documents before starting this process.

Resources

The university's IDP website (www.grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp) includes resources and activities to support you as you prepare your IDP including:

- The university's IDP instructions and template
- Advice on writing specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goals
- Tips for discussing your IDP with your mentor
- Workshops on creating an IDP
- Groups designed to provide ongoing support for implementing your IDP
- The university's reporting system to let your mentor, grad program, and/or grants administrator know that you have an IDP if requested.

Overview of Steps for Creating an Individual Development Plan



Basic Steps	For Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Researchers	For Mentors
Step 1	Conduct a Self-Assessment	
Step 2	Write an IDP	
Step 3	Discuss pertinent goals with mentor Update your information in the IDP Reporting System (if applicable)	Review goals and help mentee revise as needed
Step 4	Implement the plan	
Step 5	Revise/Update IDP as needed	Regularly review and provide support



Assess

STEP 1: Conduct a Self-Assessment

Take some time to assess your skills. The goals you will include in your IDP are based on the strengths and areas of need you identify, together with the milestone activities that mark successful progress through your program (e.g., preparing for prelims), plus any other specific skills and knowledge needed to prepare for your career.

The suggested assessment items listed below are intended to cover basic/common skill areas across a broad range of fields. This list was adapted from the core competencies developed by the National Postdoctoral Association and is applicable to graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. Be sure to tailor the list to meet your own assessment needs by adding items, such as discipline- or career-specific skills that you become aware of after discussions with your mentors or others.

You are also encouraged to explore other assessment resources (see the university's IDP website (www.grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp)) so that you can create an assessment that provides a realistic picture of where you stand now versus which areas need further development.

How proficient do you think you are in the following areas?

1. Discipline-specific Conceptual Knowledge

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Technical skills related to my research area						
a. specific technical skill:						
b. specific technical skill:						
c. specific technical skill:						
Detailed knowledge of my research area						
a. specific knowledge:						
b. specific knowledge:						
c. specific knowledge:						

2. Professional/Research Skill Development

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
The scientific method						
Analytical skills/Data analysis & interpretation						
Problem-solving						
Creativity/developing new research directions						
Search strategies & critical evaluation of the literature						
Grant applications						
Scientific publishing processes						
Broad-based & cross-disciplinary knowledge acquisition						
Other:						
Other:						

3. Communication Skills

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Writing for a lay audience						
Writing for a discipline-specific audience						
Oral presentation to a lay audience (including short "elevator speeches" about one's research)						
Oral presentation to a discipline-specific audience						
Multi-media communication & digital tools						
Ability to give constructive feedback						
Ability to receive constructive feedback						
Conflict resolution, including difficult conversations & minimizing conflict						
Other:						
Other:						

4. Professionalism

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Workplace etiquette, performance standards & project goals						
Respecting the intellectual contributions of others						
Demonstrating cultural competence						
Getting along with others						
Other:						
Other:						

5. Leadership and Management Skills

	1=Needs Improvement		5=Highly Proficient			
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Inspiring & motivating others						
Understanding mission, vision & strategy						
Being a change agent						
Coaching & developing others						
Managing projects & time						
Budgeting						
Organizational skills						
Setting goals & monitoring results						
Working with diverse teams/groups						
Other:						
Other:						

6. Responsible Conduct of Research

	1=Needs Improvement		5=Highly Proficient			
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Identifying conflicts of interest						
Understanding data ownership & sharing issues						
Demonstrate responsible publication practices & authorship						
Identifying & mitigating research misconduct						
Demonstrating responsible conduct in research with human subjects (when applicable)						
Demonstrating responsible conduct in research with animals (when applicable)						
Other:						
Other:						

7. Teaching

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Mentoring						
One-on-one teaching						
Lecturing						
Leading discussion section or lab						
Serving as a teaching assistant						
Other:						
Other:						

8. Volunteer/Outreach

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Participating in public & professional service						
Other:						
Other:						

9. Job Search Skills

	1=Needs Improvement 5=Highly Proficient					
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Identifying transferable skills						
CV/Résumé building & writing cover letters						
Informational interviewing						
Networking						
Other:						
Other:						

What are your current responsibilities/requirements and career goals?

As part of the assessment process, and in preparation for creating a truly individualized IDP, ask yourself some questions related to your current responsibilities/requirements and career goals. Doing so will lead you to actions or goals to incorporate into your plan. Your aim is to develop skills that will lead to your success in your current position and beyond.

Current Position

- What are the requirements and responsibilities you must meet during the next year? Two years?
- Are there particular technical skills or discipline-specific knowledge that you need to develop?
- Are there scholarly activities you would like to accomplish or work toward during the next year? Two years? (Examples: join a professional organization, present at a conference, co-author a paper...)
- Other?

Comments:

Future Position

- What type of work would you like to do? What is important to you in your future career?
- What competencies are required for your chosen career?
- Consider using different resources to see how your values and interests align with potential career goals. See the university's IDP website (www.grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp) for resources.
- How well do your current skills match the competencies required for your chosen career?
- What are your short-term goals related to career exploration? (Examples: learn about science writing, conduct informational interviews, find out where graduates in my field are working/finding careers...)
- How will you develop contacts--a network--related to your career exploration goals?
- Other?

Comments:



Write

STEP 2: Write the IDP

The IDP helps you map out the general path you want to take toward achieving your goals. The template below can be expanded and modified to fit your own list of goals and strategies.

Some important things to remember in writing your IDP:

- It is a living document that will and should be updated and changed as often as necessary
- Identify specific and achievable objectives or skills to be learned (column 1)
- Write these in a way that makes very clear what you are going to do (use a "S.M.A.R.T. Goals" format: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound).

A **specific** goal will usually answer the five "W" questions:

What: What do I want to accomplish?

Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal

Who: Who is involved?

Where: Identify a location

Which: Identify requirements and constraints

A **measurable** goal will usually answer questions such as:

How much? / How many? / How will I know when it is accomplished?

An **attainable** goal will usually answer the question:

How: How can the goal be accomplished?

A **relevant** goal can answer yes to these questions:

Does this seem worthwhile?

Is this the right time? / Am I the right person?

Does this match my/our other efforts/needs?

A **time-bound** goal will usually answer the questions:

When? / What can I do 6 months from now? / What can I do 6 weeks from now?

What can I do today?

See the [university's IDP website](#) for more information about writing S.M.A.R.T. goals.

- Define approaches and strategies (column 2), and include a timeframe for beginning and completing the actions you've outlined (column 3)
- Make sure to have an outcome statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you've met your goal (column 4)

Meyer, Paul J (2003). "What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? Creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals". *Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond*. Meyer Resource Group, Incorporated.

SKILLS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Strengths

Development Needs

GOALS

Current position:

1. Objectives or skills to be learned

2. Approaches and Strategies

3. Timeframe

4. Outcomes



GOALS

Future position:

1. Objectives or skills to be learned
2. Approaches and Strategies
3. Timeframe
4. Outcomes

GOAL PRIORITIZATION

	Near Term (within the next 6 months)	Long term (more than 6 months away)
High priority		
Low priority		



Discuss

STEP 3: Discuss with Mentor

Discussing what you discovered from your skills assessment, and talking about your career goals and interests with your mentor might help you identify developmental needs and areas to work on. By helping you compare current skills and strengths with those needed to achieve your career objectives, your mentor can be an important ally.

Some might feel it's risky to share, for example, their weaknesses or their interest in a career outside academia with their mentor. While it's not necessary to share all results right away, consider how the feedback from your mentor might support your plan, and provide insights and resource ideas.

It is strongly recommended that you discuss your plan with your primary mentor but also be creative about whom you approach for advice. You can get useful feedback from multiple people with a broad range of experiences and perspectives including friends, family, staff and faculty other than your primary mentor.

See the university's IDP website (www.grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp/menteetips) for other tips on the discussion with your mentor.

The university has created an IDP Reporting System to let your mentor, grad/training program, and/or grants administrator know that you have an IDP if requested. Visit the university's IDP website for more information on this process.



Implement

STEP 4: Implement the Plan

Put your plan into action. Stay organized and seek out the support you need to stay on track. Commit to the plan, but also remember that you will need to be flexible and modify your plan as your goals or circumstances change. Keep your IDP in a convenient place and check it often. Add your IDP deadlines to your calendar to integrate them with deadlines for other work and personal events.



Revise

STEP 5: Review and Revise Your IDP

Review the IDP with your mentor on a regular basis (on a schedule decided upon together) and revise/update. At a minimum, you should revisit and discuss your IDP with your mentor annually.

And, importantly, celebrate your achievements!

Your name:

Today's date:

Adapted from:

Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology (FASEB) IDP for Postdoctoral Fellows: faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf

myIDP website: myidp.sciencecareers.org

Individual Development Plan for UCSF Faculty: medschool2.ucsf.edu/academy/faculty_development/Individual_development_plan.pdf

Individual Development Plan for Case Western Reserve University Postdoctoral Trainees postdoc.case.edu/current/careers.html

The National Postdoctoral Association Postdoctoral Core Competencies: www.nationalpostdoc.org/competencies