

## Why Goals Matter for Artists – from [artiststong.com](http://artiststong.com)

Artists often resist the concept of goal setting. Goals can feel arbitrary or restrictive, clashing with the freedom we associate with creativity. Yet research, like Anders Ericsson's studies on expertise, shows that people who excel in their fields consistently set clear, intentional goals. For artists, goal setting can be the difference between feeling stagnant and thriving in their creative practice.

### Clarity Fuels Progress

One of the most significant benefits of setting goals is clarity. When we define what we want, we pave the way for intentional action. Without goals, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of possibilities. Where should we focus our energy? Which opportunities should we pursue? Clear goals act as a compass, helping us make decisions aligned with our creative ambitions and personal values.

### Why Do Many Creatives Resist Goals?

Despite the benefits, many creatives shy away from goal setting. Why?

1. **Goals Feel Arbitrary:** Without understanding the "why" behind our goals, they can feel imposed or meaningless. Artists, who often work intuitively, may feel uncomfortable defining rigid outcomes for their work.
2. **Fear of Failure:** Goals highlight the gap between where we are and where we want to be. For some, this gap can trigger self-doubt or fear of falling short.
3. **Resistance to Structure:** Many artists cherish the freedom of their craft. The idea of setting goals may feel like confining that freedom.

But what if goals didn't have to feel arbitrary or restrictive? What if they could reflect our agency and the unique path we're carving for ourselves?

### Types of Goals for Artists

Artists can approach goal setting in various ways depending on their focus and priorities. Here are three types of goals to consider:

1. **Creative Goals**  
These focus on the art itself. Examples include experimenting with a new medium, completing a series of works, or developing a cohesive portfolio. Creative goals help us grow and evolve as artists.
2. **Professional Goals**  
These address the business side of art, like applying for residencies, growing a social media presence, or increasing sales. Professional goals can make your art career sustainable and help you connect with a broader audience.
3. **Personal Goals**  
These aim to balance art with the rest of life. For example, building confidence, improving time management, or finding harmony between art and family responsibilities. Personal goals ensure that art enhances, rather than detracts from, overall well-being.
4. **Short-Term vs. Long-Term Goals**  
Short-term goals address immediate needs, like finishing a project or attending a workshop. Long-term goals focus on the big picture, such as establishing a recognizable style or preparing for a solo exhibition. Balancing both helps artists stay productive in the present while working toward future aspirations.

## Strategies for Effective Goal Setting

So how can artists set goals that are meaningful and achievable?

### 1. Use SMART Goals

SMART goals are:

- **Specific:** Clearly define what you want to accomplish.
- **Measurable:** Include criteria to track your progress.
- **Achievable:** Set realistic expectations based on your current circumstances.
- **Relevant:** Align your goals with your values and creative vision.
- **Time-Bound:** Set a deadline to maintain focus and urgency.

For example, instead of saying, “I want to sell more art,” a SMART goal would be: “I will sell three artworks within the next six months by posting weekly on Instagram and attending two local art fairs.”

### 2. Align Goals with Values

Goals feel less arbitrary when they reflect what truly matters to us. Spend time identifying your core values. For example, if you value community, you might set a goal to collaborate with other artists or host workshops. If innovation excites you, focus on experimenting with new techniques or themes.

### 3. Break It Down

Big goals can feel overwhelming. Break them into smaller, actionable steps. If your long-term goal is to prepare for an exhibition, short-term goals might include selecting a theme, sketching initial concepts, and creating a timeline for completing the works.

### Staying Accountable to Your Goals

Setting goals is one thing—sticking to them is another. Accountability can help bridge the gap between intention and action.

You don’t have to do it alone, either. This is the kind of thing I do inside ***Self-Taught to Self-Confident***, where I guide people through filling in any gaps in their skill so they confidently express themselves through unique, original art.

I can show you how to draw or paint anything you want, and I help you articulate your goals as well as stick with them to get results.

👉👉👉 If that sounds exciting to you, you can learn more when you sign up for my workshop “How to Create Art from Your Imagination” for free. You’ll enjoy a taste of my teaching, learn more about the program, and get a special 7-day enrollment offer when you sign up. [Use the link here or in the comments below.](#)

Now let’s talk about other additional strategies of accountability to help you reach your goals.

### 1. Understand Your Tendencies

[Gretchen Rubin’s \*Four Tendencies\*](#) framework offers insight into how people respond to expectations:

- **Upholders:** Meet both inner and outer expectations.
- **Obligers:** Thrive with external accountability.
- **Questioners:** Need to understand the rationale behind expectations.

- **Rebels:** Resist both internal and external expectations.

Knowing your tendency can help you tailor accountability strategies. For example, obligers might benefit from sharing goals with a friend or coach, while rebels may need to frame goals as acts of self-expression.

## 2. Use Deadlines

Deadlines create urgency and prevent procrastination. If you're working on a self-directed project, set milestones to track progress. For instance, commit to completing one piece by the end of each month.

## 3. Try the Ivy Lee Method

This simple productivity technique involves:

1. Listing the six most important tasks to accomplish each day.
2. Ranking them by priority.
3. Focusing on one task at a time until it's complete.

By limiting your focus, this method helps reduce decision fatigue and ensures steady progress.

## 4. Leverage Neurodivergent Strategies

For artists with ADHD or other neurodivergent traits, traditional approaches may not always work. Instead, consider:

- **Body Doubling:** Work alongside someone else to stay focused.
- **Hyperfocus Batching:** Lean into periods of intense focus to complete multiple tasks at once.

These strategies can transform potential challenges into creative strengths.

If you want to lean into this discussion a bit more, I suggest you check out my bi-monthly Instagram chat with artist and educator [Erika Lancaster](#) where we discussed this topic. [I'll link it below](#) and embed it on the website for your viewing pleasure.

## Final Thoughts

Goals don't have to be rigid rules that stifle your creativity. When approached thoughtfully, they can be tools for clarity, growth, and fulfillment. By setting goals aligned with your values, breaking them into manageable steps, and staying accountable, you can move toward a creative practice that reflects your aspirations.

In summary, goals matter because they provide a sense of direction, help us prioritize what's most important, and give us the structure we need to thrive as artists. Whether you're focusing on creative exploration, professional milestones, or personal growth, intentional goal setting ensures that your time and energy are spent moving closer to the art and life you envision.

Embrace goals not as a constraint, but as a way to honor your art and the vision you hold for your future.

As always, thank you so much for watching. If you enjoyed today's video please like and subscribe so you never miss an episode.

Remember: proudly call yourself an artist.