

How to write a professional development plan

Continuous development is important in a career, no matter your line of work. Whether it's to keep up with technology or upskill for promotions, ongoing learning and training will only benefit you.

This is where a well-structured professional development plan (PDP) comes into play. A PDP helps you stay competitive and relevant in your field, and ready to take advantage of any job opportunities that come your way. It serves as a guide, outlining your [career objectives](#), the skills you want to develop, and the steps required to achieve them.

Here's how to create a PDP that will help you realise your [career aspirations](#).

How to write a development plan

Creating a [professional development plan](#) takes time and consideration. You have to make sure it's realistic and in tune with your overall career objectives – the things you want to achieve in your work life. Whether you're just starting out in your career or looking to take the next step, here are some personal development plan examples to get you on your way.

1. Self-assess to find areas of improvement

The first step of creating a PDP is self-assessment. This involves taking a look at where you are professionally, where you hope to be in the future, and any skill gaps that might be stopping you from getting there. To do a self assessment, begin by asking yourself these questions:

- **Where am I in my career?** Are you a [graduate just starting out](#), a mid-level manager aiming for a more senior role or someone looking to change into a

new industry? Look at your current job responsibilities, achievements, abilities – and any feedback you've received from peers or supervisors.

- **Where do I want to be in X years' time?** Whether it's a 5-year or 10-year plan, having a clear idea of where you want to be is important. This could be landing a [leadership position](#), becoming an expert in your field, or starting your own business. Your goals should be achievable, pushing you to grow but remaining realistic.
- **What skills am I currently lacking?** Identify the skills and knowledge gaps that are stopping you from reaching your goals. This could include [technical skills](#) relating to your industry, [soft skills](#) like communication, or broader like [critical thinking](#).

Useful tools for self-assessment

- **The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF):** this provides information about sector-specific job roles and the skills required for them. You can refer to this when identifying the skills you need to develop.
- **Holland Code Assessment (RIASEC):** the Holland Codes refer to personality types. Determining yours can help you understanding what career path best match your interests and passions.
- **MBTI personality test:** the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator can offer insights into your personality type, helping you understand your work preferences, communication style and how you interact with others in a professional setting. You can do free tests online to find out yours.

Case studies and examples

1. Maya is a marketing professional. After carrying out a self-assessment, she realised her lack of data-analysis skills was getting in the way of becoming a [marketing manager](#). By identifying this gap, she was able to enrol in the right courses and take on projects at work that improved her ability to analyse digital marketing data specific to her industry.
2. Raj is an IT professional. Through the RIASEC model, he discovered his strong investigative interests, leading him to transition from a generalist IT role to a specialised career as a [cybersecurity analyst](#), aligning his career path with his interests and skills.

2. Establish clear goals

Setting clear goals is an important part of your [professional development plan](#). These goals should be short-term, mid-term and long-term, providing stepping stones towards

your larger career objectives.

Short-term goals (within a year)

Short-term goals are goals you can achieve in a year. These might include finishing a course, learning a skill or [networking with industry professionals](#). For example, a software developer might aim to learn a new programming language within six months.

Mid-term goals (2–5 years)

Mid-term goals are goals you can achieve in two to five years. They often build on your short-term goals. For example, the software developer building their own portfolio site after learning several coding languages.

Long-term goals (5+ years)

Long-term goals are goals you set out to achieve in the next five years or so. For example, the software developer being promoted to a senior independent contributor role at a leading tech company.

3. Build strategies

Once you have worked out exactly what your goals are, the next step is to build strategies to help you achieve them.

- **Identify top development goals:** focus on the goals that will drive your career forward. Prioritise them based on what will bring the biggest benefit to your professional growth.
- **Include a target date to achieve your goals:** this helps in tracking progress.
- **Identify resources required:** determine what learning resources you'll need to achieve your goals, such as a short course or [mentorship](#).

4. Create a timeline to achieve your goals

It's important to break down each goal into smaller tasks and add a timeframe, so your goals seem more manageable and you can [stay on track](#).

Example of a professional development timeline

- **Year one:** complete a course 3D animation and attend at least three workshops and/or industry events.
- **Years two to three:** use 3D animation skills to get a promotion. Mentor junior designers. Create an online portfolio of work.
- **Years four to five:** aim for a team leader position or build a freelance client base.

Flexibility is key in any development plan. Give yourself options in case something doesn't go to plan. If your goals change, adjust your timeline. Regularly review and update your plan to reflect your current situation, new opportunities and changes in the industry.

Professional development goals and organisational objectives

Your professional growth at a company should be tied to the goals of the organisation you work for. By matching your professional development with the organisation's aims, you can play a role in the company's success, which creates a [win-win scenario](#) that will skyrocket your opportunities there.

Examples of beneficial alignment

- **Mutual benefit:** when your professional development goals are in line with your organisation's objectives, it benefits both parties. For instance, if your company is focusing on using generative AI for content, developing skills to harness that technology furthers your career and benefits your organisation.
- **More job satisfaction:** employees who see their personal growth reflected in their work tend to be more engaged and satisfied.
- **More opportunities for promotion:** companies are more likely to promote from within when an employee's skill set and ambitions align with the company's future direction.

Use HR resources for professional development

Many organisations offer resources and budgets for employee development. Talk with your HR department to understand what's available to you. This could include:

- Free access to training programs and workshops
- Sponsorship for professional courses or certifications

- Opportunities for internal job rotations so you can learn new skills

Some companies allocate a specific budget for each employee's professional development. This can be used for attending conferences, enrolling in courses or buying educational materials.

Professional development plan template

A well-designed PDP guides you towards achieving your professional goals. It includes key information such as short-term and long-term goals, action steps and timelines. Here's a professional development plan example to guide you.

Short-term goals

Goal: *improve public speaking skills*

Action steps:

- *Enrol in a public speaking workshop*
- *Practise by presenting at team meetings*

Measurement:

- *Receive feedback from peers and mentors.*
- *Deliver a presentation to the whole department.*

Timeline:

- *Complete the workshop in 3 months.*
- *Present at a team meeting every month*

Long-term goals

Goal: *get a managerial position in the marketing department*

Action steps:

- *Develop leadership skills through training*
- *Take on more responsibilities in current projects*

Measurement:

- *Successfully lead a team project*
- *Receive positive performance reviews and feedback from superiors*

Timeline:

- *Achieve within 2–3 years.*

Without a professional development plan, you may find yourself wondering what's next in your career. It's worthwhile taking the time to make one, assessing your skills and setting [structured goals](#), where your ambitions line up with your organisation's objectives. A personalised PDP can help keep you motivated, driving you towards short-term goals and [moving you forward in your career](#).

FAQs

What do you write in a professional development plan?

In a professional development plan, you write specific, actionable goals along with strategies to achieve them, a timeline for completion and methods for measuring progress. This includes short-term and long-term goals, skills to be developed, resources needed and any potential obstacles.

What are the five steps of a professional development plan?

The five steps of a professional development plan are:

1. Perform a self-assessment
2. Establish clear, measurable goals
3. Build strategies for achieving these goals
4. Create a timeline for completing each goal
5. Regularly review and adjust the plan

What are the 4 key components of any professional development plan?

The four key components of any professional development plan are:

1. Your current skills
2. Your future goals

3. Action steps to take
4. A timeline

Why is a development plan important?

A development plan is important because it gives you something to aim for and a roadmap for getting there. It helps to bridge skill gaps and encourages continuous personal and professional growth. It can prevent you from feeling stuck or stagnant in your career, and can move you closer to any larger aspirations.

How do you format a professional development plan?

A professional development plan should be formatted with clear headings for each section: goals (short-term and long-term), action steps, measurement criteria and a timeline. It should be easy to read, with each goal and plan of action clearly outlined (see above examples).