

# Goal Setting and Reflections on Learning with the OLP

## For Registered Dental Hygienists

Category: Quality Assurance

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## Goal Setting and Reflection on Learning within the OLP (2.0)

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With the launch of the new Online Learning Plan (OLP) and the start of another school year upon us, the College felt it was timely to freshen up a previously published article titled *Goal Setting and Reflecting on Learning within the OLP - Access, January 2016*. Even if you have recently graduated, as a self-regulated professional, life-long learning to remain current in the field of dental hygiene is an ethical obligation. With this said, anytime is a great time for registrants to log onto their Online Learning Plan and start to **reflect, learn** and **grow**:

- **Reflect** on your dental hygiene practice and take inventory of areas you may not feel confident, competent and/or just have an interest in.
- **Learn** something new and/or update your knowledge related to something that has changed in dental hygiene practice.
- **Grow** your knowledge and/or skill and apply decisions for client care based on the best practice standards and credible evidence.

At the College we are often asked, “Why do I need to write a learning plan?”. Our response is that developing a learning plan with goals and actions organizes one’s learning while providing more meaning and a focused direction for professional growth.

Registrants will automatically be assigned one or more Required Learning Plan(s) within their individual OLP upon based on the low scoring QAP content categories\* from the QAP Assessment Tool. We advise registrants to develop their Required Learning Plan(s) as soon as possible after completing the Assessment Tool while the content areas are still fresh in one’s mind. This allows for learning plan development that specifically addresses the identified topic, while providing a more meaningful learning experience that will have a positive impact on one’s practice.

Most registrants have had the opportunity to develop a learning plan, whether in a previous or current QAP cycle. However, with endeavors that are new or less frequently undertaken, this may have felt a little strange. This is perfectly normal. Developing a plan and reflecting on learning improves the more time one spends with the process.

This article provides some great tips that will help in setting specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic, and timely (SMART) learning goals and action plans. The following is a resource table defining the components of a SMART learning plan with some examples of what the SMART components would look like if they were: 1) poorly written, or 2) well developed. The goal of the College is that with practice, CDHBC registrants will be able to write well developed learning goals and action plans in order to make meaningful change in their dental hygiene practice.

*“We do not learn from experience..... we learn from reflecting on experience.” - John Dewey*

**SETTING SMART LEARNING GOALS AND ACTION PLANS**

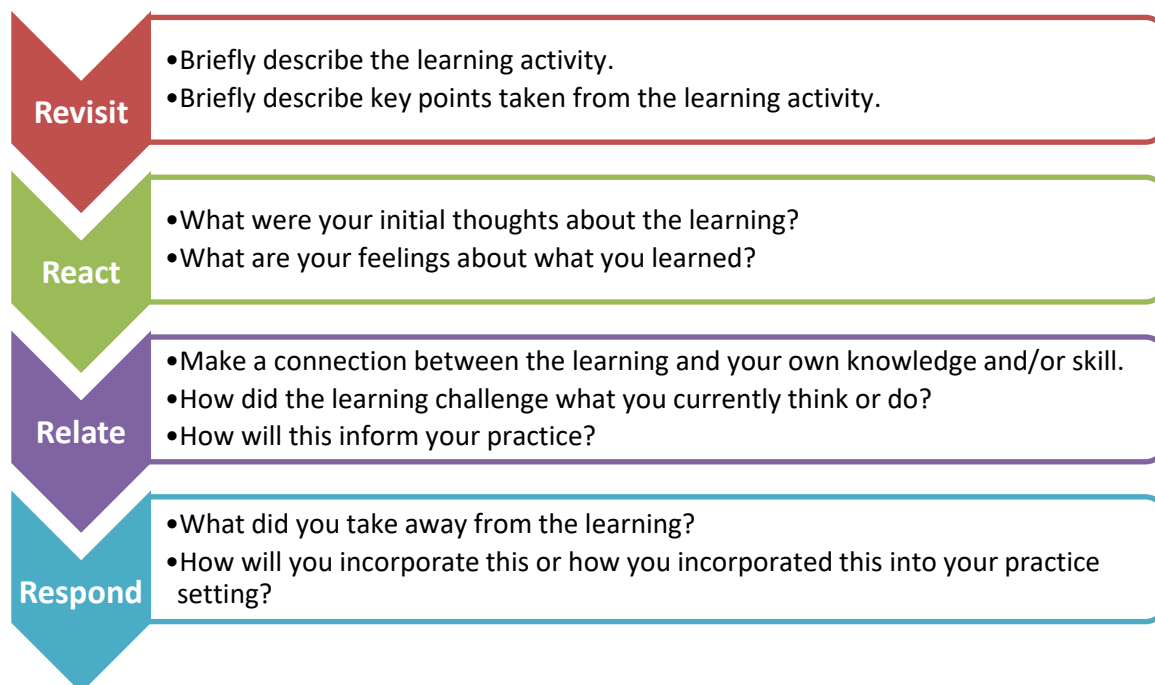
**Identified Content Category: D. Dental Hygiene Clinical Practice 1. Health Assessment/Pharmacology**

<b>SMART</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>POOR EXAMPLE</b>	<b>WELL DEVELOPED EXAMPLE</b>
<b>Specific</b>	An ambiguous goal is hard to achieve, make sure the goal is detailed	Know all medications	I will know the most common prescribed medications for hypertension, heart failure and diabetes, and any considerations for care associated with these. I will look up medications I am not familiar with in a drug reference guide.
<b>Measurable</b>	Include tangible criteria to know when the goal is completed	Have a drug reference book	I will purchase the text <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry (25<sup>th</sup> Ed.)</i> to reference in my operatory.
<b>Action Oriented</b>	Include an action verb to provide a greater understanding along with providing an observable product	I will look up medications	I will purchase the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry (25<sup>th</sup> Ed.)</i> to keep in my operatory in order to review any medications clients are taking that I am not familiar with. This will ensure that I understand any considerations or contraindications associated with dental hygiene care
<b>Realistic</b>	Is the goal realistic? Can it truly be achieved? Is it reasonable? The goal should be attainable and challenging	I will memorize all drugs associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes and any side effects they may have that could interfere with dental hygiene care	I will have the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry (25<sup>th</sup> ed.)</i> in my operatory and ensure I reference any medications I am not familiar with that clients are taking, so that I can identify any considerations or contraindications for dental hygiene care
<b>Timely</b>	Set a due date for when the goal will be accomplished	I will purchase a new edition of a drug information guide	By the end of January 2020, I will purchase the 25 <sup>th</sup> edition of the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry</i>
<b>Final SMART Learning Goal and Action Plan</b>	By January 15, 2020, I will look up medications I am not familiar with that are associated with diabetes, hypertension and heart failure to be aware of any considerations or contraindications to dental hygiene care, so I ultimately provide safe care for my clients. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I will purchase the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the <i>Drug Information Handbook for Dentistry</i> and keep this in my operatory for reference.</li> <li>2. I will develop a reference list of the most common medications prescribed for HBP, heart failure and diabetes. I will use this to become familiar with these common medications.</li> </ol>		

Learning is not complete when a specific action plan has been satisfied. Reflection on the learning needs to occur, otherwise the activity was just an experience as opposed to meaningful learning. Some registrants may be thinking; “What is expected when writing a reflection on learning”? Before answering this question, let’s take a closer look at the term “reflection” in the parameters of the OLP.

Reflection within the OLP focuses on the learning that has occurred and sets the stage to improve one’s dental hygiene practice. Registrants will be required to complete an overall reflection on learning for each Learning Plan. Reflecting on learning activities/experiences may be challenging to begin with as it is often complicated to put personal thoughts and feelings of growth on paper if this is not already a practiced habit. It is more common to write a description of the learning activity in a factual format. However, writing a reflection involves not just the facts but the thoughts, values, and feelings on how the learning provided a better understanding of one’s abilities, skills and knowledge in a specific dental hygiene related situation.<sup>2</sup> Reflection on learning should connect the learning to current or future situations within one’s dental hygiene practice.

It is important to remember that reflection related to professional learning should be in one’s own words. When writing a reflection, discuss the specifics of what you have taken away from the learning activity and how a specific component of the learning has been incorporated into your practice setting. There are several ways to develop a reflective statement; the *5<sup>th</sup> Edition of Dental Hygiene Theory and Practice* identifies one model titled “The Four R’s of Reflection”. These include revisit, react, relate, and respond.<sup>2</sup> This Four R formula is one of several methods to start building the skill of developing and writing meaningful reflections on learning within one’s OLP. The following chart summarizes these 4 reflective points.<sup>2</sup>



Think of the new OLP as a new beginning to start working towards creating meaningful SMART goals and action plans using the tools provided in this article. With practice will come confidence, and with confidence reflections will improve and make a positive impact on practice. Remember that reflection is a critical component of ongoing learning, and in combination with well-developed learning plans, will provide continued professional growth that will benefit one's practice.

To further assist CDHBC registrants, a section of the [QAP Information Guide](#) has been dedicated to tools and examples for developing learning plans, including how to write a reflection based on a learning activity. Refer to Part 4: Online Learning Plan (OLP) Guide and review the following sections:

- Section 3 Helpful Resources:
  - a. Tips for Setting SMART Learning Goals and Action Plans
  - b. Learning Goal and Action Plan Examples
  - c. OLP Sample Learning Plan & Activity Entries

Along with the above QAP Information Guide, the College has two additional resources that registrants may find useful as they work towards developing SMART learning goals and action plans:

1. [SMART Learning Goal Worksheet](#)
2. [QAP Online Learning Plan: Overview of Plans & How to Develop SMART Learning Plans](#) (Power Point)

\*QAP Content Categories for professional learning may be referenced on page 11 of the [QAP Information Guide](#).

#### References:

1. College of Dental Hygienists of BC (2019). *Quality assurance program information guide*. Available from: <https://oralhealthbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/02.01.01-QAP-Info-Guide.pdf>
2. Bowen, Denise M. and Pieren, Jennifer A. *Darby and Walsh Dental Hygiene Theory and Practice*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2020.