

Setting SMART Goals

Successful students should build the skill of setting long-term academic goals, and learn how to break those goals into smaller, “bite-size” short-term goals, both of which are stated in specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-sensitive (SMART) terms. Students’ ability to determine long-term academic goals is an important component of deciphering why they are in college. And students’ ability to break their long-term goals into manageable short-term goals provides them not only with a game plan for achieving their long-term goals, but also powerful motivation for persisting.

Specific

This is usually expressed as a task, using an action verb, such as “read” or “save” or “write”

Measurable

This indicates a quantity, such as “6 hours per week,” that you can use to measure progress

Achievable and Realistic

Goals should be possible to attain given your resources, and set at the right difficulty level, one that is challenging but not overwhelming. If Sean has taken three years of a foreign language in high school, it’s an achievable and realistic goal to read a novel in that language during his first term in college.

Time Frame

Your goal has a clear time frame (“by the end of the term,” “within six weeks”).

Example

Celeste wants to lose 10 pounds for her sister’s wedding in 6 months. Rather than stating a vague short-term goal of “eat less” and “exercise more,” she should say, “For the next 6 months, I will eat fewer than 1200 calories per day, comprised of nutritious foods from the food pyramid” and “For the next 6 months, I will exercise aerobically for at least 30 minutes per day, at least 4 days per week.”