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.”