Articulating Goals and Objectives for Student Learning

Learning goals should be based on what is IMPORTANT. They may cover:

- Knowledge and conceptual understanding
- Thinking and other skills
  - Applying knowledge
  - Analysis
  - Evaluation, problem-solving, and decision-making
  - Synthesis and creativity
  - Critical thinking
  - Information literacy
  - Other (e.g. performance, interpersonal,...)
- Attitudes, values, dispositions, and habits of mind
  - Metacognition – learning about one’s own learning (style, strategies)
  - Productive dispositions, habits of mind (organization, independence, curiosity)

Good learning goal statements:

- Focus on the end (what the student will be able to do), not the means (what is taught).
- Clarify fuzzy terms
- Are neither too broad nor too specific
- Use concrete action words when possible

Objectives describe detailed aspects of goals.


*The more clearly your goals for student learning are written, the better the framework they provide for curricular planning and course design, and the more straightforward it will be when you focus on the assessment of them.*
EXAMPLES

Goal:
*Students will become aware of how research is conducted in the field of psychology.*

Clearer statement:
*Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.*
(One of the goals for a major in Psychology, APA task force)

Goal:
*Students should understand orchestral scoring.*

Clearer statement (objective):
*By the end of their senior year, all majors are expected to be able to read an orchestral score that includes c-clefs and some transposing instruments.*
(actual goal of the Swarthmore major in Music)

Goal:
*Students will learn proper style and form for scientific writing.*

Clearer statement:
*Students will be able to write laboratory reports according to the standards of professional scientific writing.*
(actual goal of the Swarthmore major in Biology)

Goal with objectives:
*Argumentation - Students should be able to effectively identify, evaluate, and formulate arguments.*

Success in achieving this goal will be assessed by a student’s ability to:
- identify the difference between a position and an argument for a position.
- extract an argument from a piece of text.
- define and identify formal and informal fallacies.
- employ elementary logic to evaluate an argument.
- formulate a strong objection to a given argument.
- formulate an effective and well-reasoned argument for and against a position.

(Goal and its objectives - Philosophy major, College of Wooster)