Aims and objectives for student learning serve as a means of clarifying our intent as educators. They should assist in selection of teaching strategies, design of assessment, and evaluation of the effectiveness of a teaching program. They are one starting point for effective teaching.

What are aims & objectives?
Aims and objectives both consist of two essential parts; an action verb and a subject content reference. They are written from the perspective of the learner; they are what the learner can do upon completion of the learning. A simple example would be, "Upon completion of the class the learner should be able to *repair a dripping tap*".
Examples of action verbs are provided in the table at the end of this article. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), action verbs are classified in three domains; cognitive (thinking and knowing), psychomotor (skills) and affective (attitudes).

What are the differences between aims & objectives?
Writing useful and appropriate aims and objectives isn't an easy task, made more difficult by the imprecise definition of the terms and vague distinctions between the two. We can think of **aims** as broad general statements of what students are expected to learn. Aims are often more appropriate for courses than for subjects. An aim for a course may be, "Students should acquire skills of economic analysis and reasoning" or, "Students should develop the ability to think creatively and independently about new engineering problems".

A course may have a number of broad, often esoteric, aims. Aims may include abstract concepts such as 'professional qualities' or 'appreciation of the classics', learning that may be difficult to measure but which is nevertheless important.
Objectives are usually more specific statements of the learning which will occur, generally within a subject, lecture or task. Objectives are not statements of content or topics, nor are they statements of the intended teaching strategies; rather, they are statements of what a student is expected to *know* and be able to *do* upon completion of the learning exercise. An objective for a subject may be, "The student should comprehend the relations among fundamental concepts in Newtonian mechanics" or, "The student should understand the principle of equilibrium in Keynesian macroeconomics". The best objectives will neither be
too vague nor overly precise. There is a skill in maintaining this balance.
There are a range of approaches for defining objectives.
One approach is to limit objectives to statements of *behavioural* objectives; that is, if the objective has been achieved, there must be a clearly observable outcome. Generally, however, objectives need not focus solely on observable behaviour. When we teach, we aim to develop understandings and attitudes that may be difficult to measure.
Competency based objectives represent another approach to expressing learning outcomes. This manner of stating objectives adds a further two elements to the previously mentioned essential parts of an aim or objective statement: a measurable performance standard, and the conditions under which the objective is to be achieved. To illustrate this using the introductory example, using a competency based approach the objective would become
"*repair within ten minutes using the correct tools a dripping tap which requires a new washer*".
An approach to writing learning objectives relevant to the nature of a particular subject or course should be chosen.

Aims & objectives - who benefits?
Aims and objectives are an important part of the educational process, assisting in clarifying the relationship between the learner and the educator. The writing of aims and objectives assists educators in designing course content, teaching strategies or processes, and assessment methods that are appropriate.
Clear aims and objectives benefit students in a number of ways.
A student, upon reading aims and objectives, should have a clearer understanding of what they will learn should they successfully complete the course, subject or task.

Aims and objectives are also an indication to students of what they may be expected to demonstrate in assignments and examinations.

Writing aims & objectives
The task of developing realistic and useful aims and objectives might be approached with these simple guidelines in mind:
• Remember to think from the student's perspective. What will the student be able to do at the end of the learning exercise that they possibly couldn't do at the beginning?
• Refer to the list of verbs in the table that follows. Where appropriate, draw examples from each of the three domains. Strive for higher level verbs which go beyond knowledge or comprehension and which require analysis, evaluation or synthesis. Include the easily measurable and the more subtle. Be ambitious.
• Draw on the advice of colleagues and students.
• How many aims or objectives should there be? There are no fixed rules; it will depend on whether you are considering the outcomes of a course, subject, or particular lesson or task.
There is no perfect formula for developing aims and objectives, and the approach to be taken needs to be subject specific. Writing aims and objectives is the start of the teaching and learning process. When you have prepared appropriate aims and objectives, the next task is to consider teaching strategies relevant to the nature of the learning expected and to choose assessment methods that reflect the action verbs you have used.

Aims and objectives should be reviewed regularly in the light of personal experiences with teaching and information collected from students, either informally or via written evaluations. Although aims and objectives are a useful articulation of our intent as educators, they should not drive the entire educational agenda. Good teaching and learning often occurs informally and unplanned through the interaction of teachers and their students. Learning will and should occur that has not been documented in course and subject objectives.

Examples of Action Verbs according to Bloom's Taxonomy
Cognitive Domain Psychomotor Domain Affective Domain
write
state
define
list
predict
name
identify
contrast
recall
describe
classify
recognise
select
compare
discuss
insert load
disconnect
repair open
replace
tune
operate

assemble
disassemble
construct
measure
align
adjust
manipulate
accept
listen
receive
perceive
decide
influence
associate
derive
determine
be aware of
appreciate
judge

Recommended reading

Bloom, B.S. (ed.) *Taxonomy of educational objectives* David McKay: New York, 1956.

Ramsden, P. *Using aims and objectives* Research working paper, 89.4. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 1989.

http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/teaching_in_practice/docs/writing_aims.pdf Accessed 20/08/13