The course design process begins by identifying course goals and learning objectives. These are statements that describe what you expect students to be able to accomplish.

Why write course goals and learning objectives?

To devise an instructional strategy, we must first know what we hope to accomplish. Defining course goals and learning objectives at the outset helps us ensure that there is alignment throughout the course—that the assessments measure what is important and the instructional content supports the students in performing well on the assessments. Goals and objectives—as well as alignment—are required by the Quality Matters standards.

What is the difference between course goals and learning objectives?

The primary difference between course goals and learning objectives is scope. Course goals state what learners will be able to do by the end of the course. Learning objectives are detailed subsets of your course goals. For example, an instructor might have a course goal such as:

   By the end of this course, you will be able to critically read, interpret, and analyze public opinion research.

Examples of learning objectives that support that goal include:

   By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

   - Describe the principles behind and methods for random sampling, questionnaire construction, and administration of survey research.
   - Identify the weaknesses of survey research and pitfalls survey researchers face.

What are the characteristics of a course goal or learning objective?

Course goals and learning objectives share the same basic characteristics, which are that they are:

- Written from the student’s perspective. Notice that the examples above both said “you,” meaning the student.
- Specific, observable, and measurable. Choose verbs that do not leave room for ambiguity.