



Teaching Strategies: Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes

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Overview

Learning objectives are clear, concise statements that describe what students will know or be able to do by the end of the course or module. Learning objectives usually begin with an action verb and they define something that is measurable (something that can be assessed). Learning objectives are often used interchangeably with the terms outcomes or learning goals.

Effective learning outcomes are beneficial because they:

- Provide learners with a clear target/goal for the course
- Direct selection of appropriate assessment strategies
- Guide selection of effective learning activities

Every course should have a set of approved learning objectives filed in the Curriculum Development System (CDS); ask your department chair for a copy of the learning objectives for your course. Module/unit/section learning objectives are written by the instructor.

Writing Effective Learning Objectives

Effective learning outcomes create the foundation for alignment in your course. Alignment is the idea that all components of a course work together to help the student master the concepts and skills of the course. A well written learning objective will define exactly what you expect the audience to learn within parameters (such as length of course/unit/lesson) and how you will measure this.

An effective learning outcome is:

- Measurable/Observable
- Specific/Relevant
- Succinct

There are several additional considerations for writing effective learning outcomes:

- Audience: Who will be doing the behavior/skill?
- Degree: What is the level of acceptable performance?

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- Behavior: What will the audience be doing?
- Condition: Under what constraints will the audience be doing it?

Word selection is essential in writing effective learning objectives. Choose language that is objectively measurable and specific.

Example: Learners will be able to chronologically place major Civil War battles on a timeline.

- Measurable/Observable: Yes, you can measure placement of items on a timeline.
- Specific/Relevant: Yes, this specifies chronologically, major battles, Civil War
- Succinct: This is a concise objective.

Example: Learners will understand the geographic and chronological extent of the conflict.

- Measurable/Observable: “understand” is not measurable unless paired with a measurable method of assessment.
- Specific/Relevant: “extent” can be interpreted vaguely unless given specific parameters.
- Succinct: This is succinct but is not measurable or specific enough to be effective.

More Considerations for Writing Learning Objectives

When writing outcomes, you might also consider the appropriate level of cognition for the scope of your course and audience. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a useful tool for selecting the appropriate level of cognition when writing learning objectives.

- The lower levels of cognition in Bloom’s represent things like remembering, understanding, and applying. Introductory courses tend to have greater proportion of learning outcomes at these levels of cognition.
- The higher levels of cognition represent things like analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Upper-level and graduate courses tend to have greater proportion of objectives at these levels of cognition.

See this [visual representation of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy](#) that illustrates six levels of cognitive function with correlating verbs, activities, and assessments. Use this chart to help you write effective, measurable learning objectives at the appropriate levels of cognition for your course.

On the Web

Even more resources to that may be helpful to you in writing measurable learning objectives.

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- Check out this [open course from the University of California, Berkley Law on writing measurable learning objectives](#).
- [Learn more about Bloom's Taxonomy from EdGlossary.com](#)

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