

WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Types of Objectives

Learner objectives state what the learner should know or be able to do at the end of a learning activity. This type of objective emphasizes learning outcomes.

Instructional (teaching) objectives state what the instructor intends to accomplish during a learning activity. This type of objective describes a process, not an outcome.

Behavioral objectives state what the learner might be able to do differently (behavioral change) as a result of what has been learned.

How Should Behavioral Learning Objectives Be Written?

Start with the phrase: “At the conclusion of this activity, participants should be able to:” and then state the things participants will be able to do. Be sure to use specific action verbs (behavioral terms) in these statements -- verbs such as “identify,” “cite,” “describe,” or “assess.” A list of the verbs is provided at below. If you follow this simple format and keep the list of verbs by your side, it is almost impossible to write a bad set of objectives!

Common Mistakes

Verbs such as “know” and “understand” are vague. Avoid these words and use action verbs from the list provided. “Understanding” can have a myriad of meanings and it can be difficult to evaluate whether a learner “understands” a concept. However, a learning objective that states that a physician “will be able to cite the risk factors for breast cancer” can be evaluated consistently by both the CME Committee and the participants as to whether it has been achieved.

Often meeting announcements list teaching objectives rather than learning objectives. Examples: “To acquaint the clinician with the key clinical features necessary for the diagnosis of common rheumatic diseases.” “To update, reinforce, and provide new information regarding the etiology, pathogenesis, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of herniated thoracic disc.” These objectives focus on what the instructor plans to do, rather than what the learner outcome will be.

Announcements sometimes give objectives which are just a list of topics. Examples: “1. Principles of laser mechanics; 2. Laser uses in the cardiovascular system; 3. Efficacy of lasers in cardiovascular disease.” This focuses on what the instructor will do rather on what the learner will achieve.

When writing learning objectives, focus on the learner!

List of Verbs for Formulating Educational Objectives

1. These verbs communicate knowledge

Information

Cite	Identify	Quote	Relate	Tell
Count	Indicate	Read	Repeat	Trace
Define	List	Recite	Select	Write
Describe	Name	Recognize	State	
Draw	Point	Record	Tabulate	

Comprehension

Associate	Describe	Explain	Locate	Translate
Classify	Differentiate	Express	Predict	
Compare	Discuss	Extrapolate	Report	
Compute	Distinguish	Interpolate	Restate	
Contrast	Estimate	Interpret	Review	

Application

Apply	Employ	Locate	Relate	Sketch
Calculate	Examine	Operate	Report	Solve
Complete	Illustrate	Order	Restate	Translate
Demonstrate	Interpolate	Practice	Review	Use
Dramatize	Interpret	Predict	Schedule	Utilize

Analysis

Analyze	Debate	Distinguish	Inventory	
Appraise	Detect	Experiment	Question	
Contract	Diagram	Infer	Separate	
Criticize	Differentiate	Inspect	Summarize	

Synthesis

Arrange	Construct	Formulate	Organize	Produce
Assemble	Create	Generalize	Plan	Propose
Collect	Design	Integrate	Prepare	Specify
Compose	Detect	Manage	Prescribe	

Evaluation

Appraise	Determine	Judge	Recommend	Test
Assess	Estimate	Measure	Revise	
Choose	Evaluate	Rank	Score	
Critique	Grade	Rate	Select	

2. These verbs impact skills

Diagnose	Integrate	Measure	Project
Empathize	Internalize	Palpate	Visualize
Hold	Massage	Pass	

3. These verbs convey attitudes

Acquire

Exemplify

Realize

Reflect

THESE VERBS ARE BETTER AVOIDED:

1. Those that are often used but are open to many interpretations

Appreciate

Have faith in

Know

Learn

Understand

Believe