

Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

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Assessing & Revising Learning Objectives

Crafting Effective Learning Objectives

The purpose of this guide is to provide quick assistance in revising learning objectives for your course. It is not a detailed explanation of learning objectives. Rather, it is concise and to the point, providing practical explanations and coaching.

Why Improve Your Learning Objectives?

Well crafted learning objectives are essential because:

- They are a fundamental step in putting research about learning into practice in our course designs and pedagogical praxis
- They help students focus on the things you want them to learn
- They articulate the appropriate level of comprehension/performance/competency
- They support students' development of metacognitive skills
- They help faculty select appropriate learning activities
- They help faculty focus course assessments on things that matter

(Adapted from "[The Educational Value of Course-level Learning Objectives/Outcomes](#)", Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University, 2013)

When to Improve Learning Objectives

The most common indication a learning objective needs revision is when the "objective" is written as a "goal". That is, written in general terms, difficult to measure, not stated in terms of performance. For example, the following "objective" is written too generally and does not identify a performance that can be measured:

"Know basic spreadsheet management functions."

The above statement fails to describe what it means to "know", nor how this translates into activities that can be assessed.

The differences between goals and objectives:

Goals	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Not written in terms of performance • Does not address levels of performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific • Written in terms of performance • Identifies criteria for evaluation

- Does not identify conditions of performance

- Identifies conditions of performance

Assessing Your Learning Objectives

When assessing the effectiveness of your learning objectives, there are several important things to evaluate:

1. **Do your learning objectives employ vague terms, or terms that are hard to measure** such as *appreciate, cover, realize, be aware of, study, become acquainted with, gain knowledge of, understand, comprehend, know, or learn?*

If so, you should consider revising the objective(s) using the appropriate leveled action verbs that can be measured. Typically, collections of these verbs, associated with Bloom's Taxonomy, can be easily found on the Web, or obtained from FCTL.

2. **Is the learning objective appropriate for the level of learning expected in the course?**

We do not expect novice learners to have the same comprehension as expert learners. Courses at the 100 or 200 level generally require low to mid-level thinking to achieve required learning outcomes. Courses at 300 level or higher should begin incorporating higher level learning outcomes requiring higher levels of thinking and performance. (See the Design Aid: [Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs](#)). (You need [Adobe Reader](#) to view and print this document.)

3. **Are students learning what they need to know for the next course in sequence?**

Evaluate your objectives to determine whether learning in this course adequately prepares them for the next course in sequence. If your course is not in a sequence, at least ask yourself if the objective represents meaningful learning, and will have lasting value to your students.

4. **Do your learning and assessment strategies align with your learning objectives?**

How do you know your course is preparing students for the next course in sequence? Do course learning activities and assessments match the level of thinking or performance stated in your learning objectives? Lower level objectives requiring students to "list" or "identify" may align well with multiple choice, or other recall-oriented activities and assessments. However, higher level objectives requiring analysis, relating, or comparing do not align well with multiple choice or recall-oriented activities or assessments.

Also, every learning objectives must be assessed. If your assessments and activities do not cover learning stated in some objectives, either modify your assessments or delete the objective. If students are required to know it, then their comprehension of that objective must be assessed.

5. **Are your course objectives supported by enabling objectives in each unit/chapter/module?**

Each unit/chapter/module/etc. should contain enabling objectives that describe the learning that must occur. Enabling objective identify learning achievements that support step-wise growth in comprehension and skills, which ultimately lead to successful achievement of the course learning objectives.

Learn more about [How to Improve Learning Objectives](#)

[Download Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs PDF](#)



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