Writing Effective Learning Goals and Objectives

Office of Medical Education
Creighton University School of Medicine

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Session objectives

After completing this session the learner should be able to:

• Differentiate between learning goals and objectives
• List reasons for using learning goals and objectives
• List the three components of an effective learning objective
• Construct an effective learning objective
A common approach to teaching

After being invited to teach, you

1. Wait until the week/day/night before the event
2. Flip through your old notes and books from college/graduate/medical school
3. Frantically search Google Scholar and Medline to make sure there have not been any major advances in the field
4. Write three or four test questions to give to the course director
5. Create a PowerPoint presentation covering all the topics you feel are most interesting and relevant
6. Show up 10 minutes early and hope for the best!
Does this sound like you?
Successful educators create a plan for teaching, learning, and assessment

To begin, answer these questions:

1. Who are your learners?
2. What do you want them to learn?
3. Does this align with school/licensure needs?
4. What do they already know?
5. How do the learners prefer to learn?
6. How do you prefer to teach?
7. How much time do you have?
8. Who else teaches in this area and how does this impact your teaching?
9. How will you know if they have learned?
10. How will you know if you taught effectively?
Teaching and Learning

- What do you want your learners to learn?
- Have you communicated this clearly?
- Will other instructors in the course be able to follow your teaching plan?
- Use course goals and objectives to answer these questions and accomplish these key teaching tasks

What is the difference between a goal and an objective?
Goals vs. Objectives

Goals
- Broad
- Intangible
- Statements of being

SMART Objectives
- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Results-focused
- Time-focused
**EXAMPLE**

**Goal: Create Effective Communicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives:</th>
<th>Skills Required:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide information in a way that it will be understood</td>
<td>Preview information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respond empathically to emotion</td>
<td>Encourage expression of feelings</td>
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Anatomy of Learning Objectives

Three components:

• timeframe for learning the skill or content
• action verb
• single content area
Objectives: Timeframe

“At the conclusion of this course the learner will...”
“At the conclusion of this course, the learner will be able to differentiate between...”
Why the emphasis on action verbs?

Action verbs are more likely to be specific, measurable or observable.
Objectives: Content area

Objectives must be linked to the design, purpose, and content of the course.
Objectives: A bad example

“The focus is on the content, not the learner.”
Objectives: A good example

Instead of : Basic strategies for assessing environmental health hazards.

Use: List, describe, and compare the advantages and disadvantages of the basic strategies for assessing environmental health hazards.
Types of Learning Objectives

Learning objectives can be categorized by the level of skill required. Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) is the most frequently cited model, but there are others.
Anderson and Krathwohl’s Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy (2001)

Lower-order skills: Understand
                Apply
                Analyze
                Evaluate

Higher-order skills: Create
Clark’s Content Performance Matrix

Two performance levels: Remember & Apply

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Apply</th>
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<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
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<td>Application</td>
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<td>Comprehension</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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- Evaluate options for therapy for depression in an adult patient.
- List 5 of the 9 common symptoms of depression.
Avoid Vague Verbs!

Vague/Unobservable
- Appreciate
- Understand
- Know
- Be able to

Specific/Observable
- Critique
- Categorize
- Identify
- Perform
Summary

• Instructors use learning objectives to communicate expectations to learners and colleagues
• Effective learning objectives focus on the learner, not the content
• Specific and measurable learning objectives take time to develop, but are ultimately easier to assess and measure
References and Resources


For further reading