

WRITING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Rules in writing student learning outcomes:

- Outcomes must:
 - Contain an active verb that describes an observable or identifiable action
 - Focus on the student as the performer
 - What is the student expected to be able to know?
 - What is a student expected to be able to do?
 - How is a student expected to be able to think?
 - Include a timeframe in which the outcomes can be measured.

Steps for Developing/Writing Learning Outcomes

1. Define the program/event/service you will be assessing with your Student Learning Outcome.
 - a. *Focus on one program/event/service. This narrows the potential learning outcome(s).*
2. Think about what students can/should learn from the program/event/service.
 - a. *When we organize programs/events as well as provide services, we try to educate students about something. What is that something? What is the purpose of the program?*
3. Draft a few learning outcomes.
 - a. *Keep the outcomes to a simple sentence with outcome. Use an action verb.*
4. Review the learning outcomes with colleagues. (Two heads are better than one).
 - a. *Make sure you choose a colleague who understands learning outcomes. Ask if it relates and complements your program/event/service. Remember, others who know nothing about your area may read your outcome so direct, concise outcomes are best.*
5. Make a second draft of the learning outcome.
 - a. *Use the feedback and adjust the outcome, if necessary.*
6. Think about how you will measure the outcome(s). Choose a method to do so.
 - a. *What instruments will you use? Quantitative or qualitative methods? Survey, interviews, observations, focus groups, etc.? Be sure that the student learning outcomes can be measured appropriately and adequately.*
7. Determine if your instrument tools will help you to thoroughly determine whether or not the learning outcomes have been accomplished.
 - a. *Be sure the tools actually measure the student learning outcomes. If the methods don't do this, your work is wasted. You are trying to determine whether or not students are achieving the learning outcomes. If the tools don't measure the outcomes, then you won't know if the students are learning.*
8. Consult with colleagues about the connection between the measurement tool and the learning outcomes.
 - a. *As you did when consulting colleagues about your learning outcomes, consult them to determine if they see the clear link between your methods and the student learning outcomes. This will help you to be sure that your work will provide meaningful results in the end.*
9. Finalize your learning outcomes and methods.
 - a. *Make changes based on feedback or other resources. This is the last step before going forth with your assessment project.*

DECIDE WHAT STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME YOU WANT TO MEASURE.

To write a student learning outcome, there are various formats you can use.

1. **SWiBAT** (Student **Will Be Able To**) + **Active verb** (from Bloom's taxonomy) + **Condition** (as a result of) + **Measurement** (as measured by or as demonstrated by ...) + **When** (at what timeline).
2. Powerpoint on Writing Learning Outcomes includes Keeling's guidelines, format, 10-points for writing outcomes, examples and more.
3. Keeling format → see graphic
4. Article by Marilee Bresciani
5. **Condition** (As a result; from participating in ...) + **Audience** (selected population being assessed) + **Behavior** (active verb) + **Degree of Achievement**

**Verbs to avoid when writing learning outcomes –
these are not action verbs (use specific action verbs):**

- Appreciate
- Become aware of
- Become familiar with
- Know
- Learn
- Understand
- Value

Use verbs such as Tell, Articulate, Define, Demonstrate.

To find appropriate verbs to use, see the information on Bloom's Taxonomy on our website and the lists of active verbs.

EXAMPLES OF NON-SPECIFIC AND MORE SPECIFIC STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Examples – Too General and very hard to measure:

1. Will appreciate the benefits of exercise.
2. Will be able to access resources at UWL.
3. Will develop problem-solving skills and conflict resolution.
4. Will be able to have more confidence in their abilities.

Examples – Still general and hard to measure:

1. will value exercise as a stress reduction tool.
2. will be able to develop and apply effective problem solving skills that would enable on to adequately navigate through the proper resources at the university.
3. will demonstrate the ability to resolve personal conflicts and assist others in resolving conflicts.
4. will demonstrate critical thinking skills, such as problem solving as it relates to social issues.

Examples – Specific and Measurable

1.will be able to articulate three health-related stress impacts on the body when interviewed two weeks after taking a wellness course.
2. will be able to identify the most appropriate resource that is pertinent to their #1 concern at the university on portfolio review at mid-term..
3. will be able to assist roommates in resolving conflicts by helping them negotiate agreements when observed by RA during event.
4. will be able to identify three similarities and three differences they have with someone of a different background on electronic survey their first semester at UWL.

Fixing a Student Learning Outcome

Sometimes shortcomings in Student Learning Outcomes can be identified by asking two simple questions: [1] **“CAN IT BE MEASURED?”** and [2] **“IS LEARNING BEING DEMONSTRATED?”** If both of these questions cannot be answered “yes”, then the student learning outcome is not acceptable. Sometimes you can “fix” the learning outcome which is shown on the following page. Keep in mind these examples do not include all the components necessary in a Student Learning Outcome. They are to demonstrate a point.

Example of Student Learning Outcomes

- Participants will understand the nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.
 - Learning is demonstrated, however this would be difficult to measure.
- Student will arrive on time daily.
 - This can be measured, however learning is not being demonstrated.

Re-Written Student Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to list nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.
- Student will be able to articulate the necessity of maintaining office hours as published.

- Both of these re-written student learning outcomes answer the two questions. They can be measured and they demonstrate that they student has learned.

After you have written a learning outcome, check every learning outcome by asking:

- Does the learning outcome describe what your program intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective) or do (behavioral)?
- Is the outcome detailed and specific?
- Is it measurable?
 - Can you count it, observe it, or identify it?
- Is it meaningful?
- Is it manageable?
- Can you create an activity to enable students to learn the desired outcome?
- Who will be gathering evidence to know the outcome has been met?
- Who would know if my outcome has been met?
- How will I know if it has been met?
- Will it provide me with evidence that will lead me to make a decision for continuous improvement?

(See Checklist on Page 6 to use as resource with these questions)

MISTAKES IN WRITING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- The learning outcomes don't follow department, division or university goals.
 - *All learning outcomes should have meaning for you, your department and the students participating in your programs or receiving your services. This meaning should be derived from the specific goals of your department.*
- The learning outcomes include words that are hard or impossible to measure.
 - *Avoid terms such as show understanding, develop awareness, possess a level of comfort, appreciate, become aware of, become familiar with, know, learn. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to find good verbs for writing learning outcomes.*
- The learning outcomes include too many skills in one statement.
 - *Have only one skill per statement. If multiple skills are included, the outcome becomes complex and difficult to measure. If you have more than one outcome per statement, divide them into separate statements.*
- The learning outcomes are written to include everything possible a student could learn by participating in the activity.
 - *Focus only on the key things the student should learn as a result of the activity.*
- The learning outcome statement is actually not a learning outcome.
 - *For example: The student will complete a self-assessment survey; the student will utilize the services of [x] office.*
- The learning outcomes are not written in the appropriate format.
 - *There are several standard formats for writing student learning outcomes, each of which contains the appropriate components for a learning outcome.*
- The learning outcomes attempt to focus on every domain/sub-domain.
 - *Focus on what is most applicable to your department.*
- The learning outcomes measure satisfaction or performance evaluation rather than the learning of the student.
 - *Measuring whether someone liked something or not; whether the person would recommend the program or not; how many used it; or how well someone did something is not measuring the learning that occurred. Make sure you can ask the question, "Is learning being demonstrated?"*

MISTAKES IN WRITING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES – CONTINUED:

- There are too many learning outcomes.
 - *No one, no department can assess 30 outcomes in a year. Focus on the priority areas for your department/programs. Identify a few key learning outcomes that are important and that can be easily assessed.*
- Only one person wrote, reviewed, edited and implemented the learning outcomes.
 - *Even if you are a one person office, make sure you have other people review your outcomes and help ask questions to make sure you are assessing what you need to be for your students to learn.*

(University of Rhode Island)

Student Learning Outcome Process:

1. Identify the desired learning result – **Write your Student Learning Outcome.**
2. Relate the Student Learning Outcome to the departmental and organizational mission
3. Develop a sequence or combination of actions for achieving the desired result.
4. Identify methods for measuring key performance indicators.
5. Set acceptable, achievable performance targets.
6. Collect and analyze data to show progress in achieving the intended performance targets.
7. Use the data to adjust the student Learning Outcome plan to improve future outcome achievement.
8. Throughout the process involve pertinent stakeholders to broaden support, share expertise, coordinate resources, maximize the use of data and celebrate success.

(ACHA-NIU handout)

References:

American College Health Association Presentations and Hand-outs by Glenn Egelman, M.D., Director, Bowling Green State University Student Health Center and Donna Schoenfeld, M.S., Director of Health Enhancement, Northern Illinois University

Bresciani, M.J., Zelna, C.L., Anderson, J.A. (2004) Assessing Student Learning and Development: A handbook for practitioners. NASPA.

Donna Schoenfeld, M.S., Director of Health Enhancement, Northern Illinois University
Glenn Egelman, M.D., Director, Bowling Green State University Student Health Center
American College Health Association Presentation

Learning Outcomes 101 & Student Learning Outcomes 201
Office of Student Learning & Outcomes Assessment
University of Rhode Island – Student

Presentations and Handouts by Student Affairs Conference by Gavin Henning, Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation, and Research, Dartmouth College

Numerous other presentations, handouts, readings and conversations

WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES WORKSHEET

Step 1: DECIDE WHAT STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME YOU WANT TO MEASURE.

STEP 2: THINK THROUGH YOUR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME. INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- A. WHO WILL BE ASSESSED**
- B. ACTIVE VERB**
- C. PROGRAM/PROJECT/SERVICE BEING ASSESSED**
- D. HOW BEING MEASURED**
- E. TIMELINE FOR MEASUREMENT**

STEP 3: WRITE YOUR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME:

STEP 4. AFTER WRITING YOUR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME, EVALUATE THE LEARNING OUTCOME BY ASKING THESE QUESTIONS:

	YES/NO	
1. Does the outcome support the program objective?	Y	N
2. Does the outcome describe what the program intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective, attitudinal), or do (behavioral, performance)?	Y	N
3. Is the outcome important/worthwhile?	Y	N
4. Is the outcome:		
a. Detailed & specific?	Y	N
b. Measurable/identifiable?	Y	N
5. Can you create an activity to enable students to learn the desired outcome?	Y	N
6. Can the outcome be used to make decisions on how to improve the program?	Y	N