

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Learning objectives serve important functions for both you and your students.

- For you, they provide guidance on the selection and development of learning activities and assessments.
- For your students, they focus expectations in terms of content and the level of activity required.

Learning objectives state what the student will be able to *do* or *know* at the end of the unit (unit objectives) or at the end of the course (course objectives).

A CLOSER LOOK

How to Write Learning Objectives

It is essential that a learning objective state a student behavior that is specific, observable, and measurable. The objective must be able to be assessed.

- *Note:* It is helpful but not essential to specify the conditions under which the performance occurs. For more information, see:
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/Objectives/ActionVerbsforObjectives.pdf>

To write an objective that is specific and measurable—an objective that can be assessed, use a strong action verb. Avoid verbs like the following: *learn, know, understand, or appreciate*. Consider the following two objectives:

- **Understand** the views of Piaget and Vygotsky on issues of cognitive development. This objective is **not** measurable. How would this objective be assessed?
- **Compare and contrast** the views of Piaget and Vygotsky on issues of cognitive development. This objective **is** measurable. It can be assessed.

Choose verbs that use/reflect Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's revised taxonomy identifies six increasingly more complex cognitive levels of learning:

- Level 1: Knowing
- Level 2: Comprehending
- Level 3: Applying
- Level 4: Analyzing
- Level 5: Evaluating
- Level 6: Creating

Explanations of these six levels and lists of the verbs associated with each can be found through the following links:

- <http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/Objectives/ActionVerbsforObjectives.pdf>
- <http://www.clemson.edu/assessment/assessmentpractices/referencematerials/documents/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20Action%20Verbs.pdf> (While this references the original Bloom's taxonomy, it may still be a helpful reference.)

Course Objectives	
<i>General and broad for the entire course</i>	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____
Unit 1 Objectives	
<i>Unit-specific; relate to larger course objectives</i>	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____
Unit 2 Objectives	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____
Unit 3 Objectives	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____

Examples

Here are sample learning objectives from existing courses. Note how these reflect Bloom’s taxonomy and the verbs associated with it.

Level 1	Knowing	Identify the different types of bacterial cell walls (gram positive, gram negative, S-layers, etc.) and list their properties.
Level 2	Comprehending	Describe the goals, strengths, and weaknesses of psychological and neurobiological approaches to assessment.
Level 3	Applying	Solve a quadratic equation with complex roots.
Level 4	Analyzing	Compare and contrast both sacred and secular listening selections from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.
Level 5	Evaluating	Evaluate theories of human social, emotional, and moral development by providing examples and contexts to support your position.
Level 6	Creating	Create a plan for classroom approaches to mitigate mild, moderate, and severe misbehaviors.

Alignment with Learning Activities/Assessments

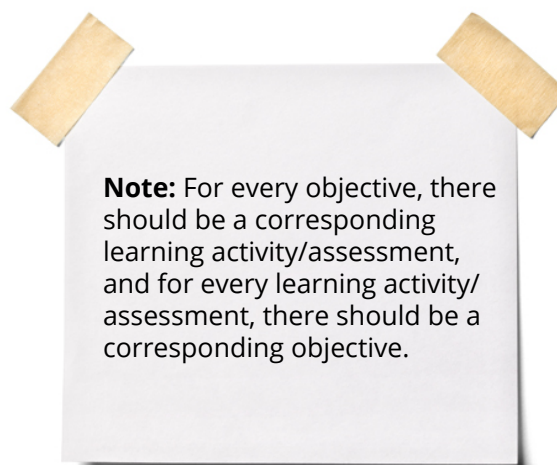
Course and unit objectives should clearly *align* with (1) the learning activities (these activities enable the student to achieve the objectives) and (2) the course assessments (these assessments measure the student’s performance).

It is best if learning activities/assessments and corresponding objectives are at the same level in Bloom’s taxonomy. In other words, avoid having a Level 2 objective (e.g., *describe*) assessed with a Level 4 task (e.g., a request to *compare and contrast*).

Strategy/Approach

The process for writing learning objectives varies depending on whether the course is new or already exists.

- **Creating a new course:** Before doing anything else, concentrate on creating objectives. They should guide the development of the rest of the course.
- **Revising an existing course:** Analyze the learning activities and assessments that are already in the course and then write objectives based on that analysis.



Note: For every objective, there should be a corresponding learning activity/assessment, and for every learning activity/assessment, there should be a corresponding objective.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/Objectives/ActionVerbsforObjectives.pdf>
- <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>
- http://epltt.coe.uga.edu/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy