Writing Learning Outcomes

What are Learning Outcomes
Learning outcomes (LO) are statements that describe the knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes students should work to develop in a course or module. They say to students, “I designed the following lessons and activities to help you develop these skills or bodies of knowledge. If you do the work and take the feedback into account, you will become more practiced at these things. To pass this class, you have to demonstrate that you have developed these skills.” For each course you teach, you will want to come up with 4-6 learning outcomes that summarize the overarching expectations you have of students (that we will define as general learning outcomes – GLO). For each of the modules that make up a face-to-face, blended, or online course, you should have 3-4 learning outcomes and they should relate (or lead up) to the overall course-level learning outcomes (those will be define as specific learning outcomes – SLO).

It is a good idea to share learning outcomes with students. First, explicitly articulated learning outcomes give you and your students a clear, shared sense of what holds the course together. Second, communicating expectations with students is fair, helps avoid misunderstandings, and gives a reference point should grading issues arise. Third, learning outcomes set a (high) minimum standard for students to meet or exceed. Finally, learning outcomes provide a good blueprint for a module or course because they allow you to ensure course activities, assessments, and content are aligned in a coherent way. In a sense, learning outcomes are like thesis statements for course design!

What are the main advantage of designing a course based on learning outcomes?
According to Prégent (1994), from a pedagogical standpoint, writing learning outcomes enables a professor to:

- create a student-centred course design;
- clarify their outcomes;
- align their learning outcomes with evaluation and learning activities;
- develop teaching and learning strategies and activities that with help reach the desired outcomes.

General Learning Outcomes
General Learning Outcomes identify the broad categories of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners will be able to demonstrate after instruction?

Specific Learning Outcomes
Specific Learning Outcomes identify the actual knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to the general learning outcomes.

Specific Learning Outcomes (SLO) are more specific General Learning Outcome statements that are broken down into smaller components and formulated in terms of observable behaviour.

A Specific Learning Outcome will describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected of the students by the end of the course or teaching and learning activity.
How do I define learning outcomes for my module or course?

You can begin by asking yourself the following sets of questions:

• What is the purpose of this module within the course? Or what is the purpose of this course within students’ larger program of study? Are there prerequisite modules or courses? Is this module or course a prerequisite for something else?
• What skills, knowledge, or values/attitudes should students be cultivating through participating in this module or course?
• Can I expect this outcome of all students who are allowed to register for this class regardless of background knowledge, cultural background, or other characteristics and abilities?
• Which domains of learning does this module or course engage? How deep should students’ learning be at this point in the course or program?
• How much and what can I expect students to learn in one module or in one course?
• What are the most important things students must demonstrate to get at least a passing grade for this module (for module-level outcomes) or course (for course-level outcomes)?

Steps to writing learning outcomes

You can follow these steps to write a learning outcome:

1. Start with one stem to introduce the outcomes (see the list of possible stems below).
2. Start with your action word and add specific content/attitude/behavior (learning statement)
3. Evaluate learning outcome.
4. Revise as necessary.

LO Formula

LO = stem + action word + learning statement

Stem Options

• By the end of this course, students will be able to
• By the end of this module, students should be able to
• By the end of this class, successful students will be able to
• In order to pass this course, students must demonstrate the ability to

Example

By the end of this module, students should be able to:

• distinguish between Bloom's domains of learning;
• construct course level learning outcomes using Bloom's taxonomy;
• assess course learning outcomes against degree level expectations;
• develop method to evaluate student achievement of learning outcomes.

Interactive Tools for Writing Learning Outcomes

We have provided an interactive tool to help you construct your learning outcomes, to access the tool click here.
Evaluating your Written Learning Outcomes
You can use the checklist below to evaluate your learning outcomes for clarity and specificity:

- **Specific** skill/value/content
- **M**easurable and demonstrable
- **Attainable** by students at current level and matched to purpose of course
- **Relevant** for students, course, program, degree
- **Timed** appropriately for class length

Resources


This document was developed using a resource produced by Carleton University.