Writing the Statement

A learning outcome is a statement that indicates what knowledge, skills, or attitudes students should acquire by the end of an activity, unit, course, or program. Good learning outcomes are clear, realistic, measurable, and observable. Writing good learning outcomes is not always easy and can be more complex in certain contexts (e.g., in programs that are accredited). For more support with writing learning outcomes, email teaching@macewan.ca to make an appointment.

Step 1: Start with When and Who

Start with a statement about when you expect your learner to demonstrate the desired outcome. One of the most commonly used statements is:

• By the end of the course/unit/activity, students will be able to:

Step 2: Add an Appropriate Action Verb

Next, add an action verb. The verb should indicate what you expect students to do as precisely as possible. Many people find it useful to consider action verbs in the context of Bloom’s Taxonomy. For examples of action verbs, see the reverse side of this page. Note also the verbs to avoid in the box to the right.

Step 3: Finish with What (and How or Why if appropriate)

After the action verb, indicate what students are expected to do. In some contexts, you may want to add other constraints such as how often (x out of y times) or a time deadline.

• Poor/vague outcome: By the end of the course, students will understand the impact of WWII on the economy.
• Better outcome: By the end of the course, students will be able to critically analyze the impact of specific WWII events on current global economic policies.

Tip: Each outcome should reflect ONE knowledge, skill, or attitude. Don’t use more than one action verb and avoid using the word “and” when describing what you expect students to do.

Verbs to Avoid

When you’re writing learning outcomes, avoid using verbs that are difficult to observe, difficult to measure, or that are highly subjective or relative. These verbs include:

• Understand
• Know
• Learn
• Think critically
• Improve
• Increase
• Believe
• Grasp
• Grow
• Appreciate
• Approach
• Become

Even terms like “demonstrate” or “discuss” can be problematic in some contexts because they can be interpreted in different ways.

Use specific, active language to make sure that your expectations for students are as clear and realistic as possible.
Writing Student Learning Outcomes
Sample Verbs Mapped to Bloom’s Taxonomy

Evaluation
Make and defend judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria.

Synthesis
Compile component ideas into a new whole or propose alternative solutions.

Analysis
Break down objects or ideas into simpler parts and find evidence to support generalizations.

Application
Apply knowledge to actual situations.

Comprehension
Demonstrate an understanding of the facts.

Knowledge
Remember previously learned information.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bloom%E2%80%99s_Taxonomy_Verbs.png