

## Learning Outcomes and Objectives,

### Developing Course Learning Outcomes

Outcomes describe the **essential and significant learning that the learner will have achieved at the end of a course or program**. Your course student learning outcomes define the big picture for the course and should align with the department's goals and outcomes. You may want to think in terms of the big concepts that define your course in order to write your course outcomes.

### Developing Course Learning Objectives

Objectives describe **the intended results or consequences of instruction**. The course learning objectives will be a more **detailed description of how each learning outcome will be achieved**. There may be one, but more likely more than one, learning objective per each course outcome.

### Learning Outcomes ARE NOT Learning Objectives

The differences lie in the level of specificity each provides and the relationship of each to assessment methods and instructional activities. The learning outcome provides a high level view of what a student will be able to accomplish by the end of the course. Let's look at an example:

#### OUTCOME

Students will create documents that demonstrate proficiency in the use of word processing, spreadsheet, database, and presentation applications.

#### OBJECTIVE

Given plain text of an existing research paper with 3-5 references cited in the bibliography, students will be able to format with 80% accuracy a MS Word document according to MLA guidelines including all document specifications (margins, headers, footers, use of styles, tab stops etc.) and use of the reference manager to manage the formatting of the bibliography.

### Developing Student Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or attitudes.

Learning outcomes have three distinguishing characteristics.

- (1) The specified action by the learners must be **observable**.
- (2) The specified action by the learners must be **measurable**.
- (3) The specified action must be **done by the learners**.

The ultimate test when writing a learning outcome is whether or not the action taken by the participants can be assessed. If not, the outcome probably does not meet all three of the characteristics.

Simple learning outcomes contain three elements:

- (1) **who** is to perform;
- (2) **what action** they are to take; and
- (3) some **result** that must come **from their action**.

Since the learner's performance should be **observable and measurable**, the verb chosen for each outcome statement should be an **action verb** which results in **overt behavior that can be observed and measured**. This can be of the form: Students will demonstrate the ability to (action verb x) by (related performance y).

**Sample action verbs are:**

list, describe, recite, write

compile, create, plan, revise

analyze, design, select, utilize

apply, demonstrate, prepare, use

Certain verbs are **unclear** and subject to different interpretations in terms of what action they are specifying. Such verbs call for covert behavior which **cannot be observed or measured**. These types of verbs should be **avoided**:

know

become aware of

appreciate

learn

understand

become familiar with

Source: American Association of Law Libraries <http://www.aallnet.org/Archived/Education-and-Events/cpe/outcomes.html> (with minor edits) [View additional examples \(University of Toronto\)](#)

## Examples of Learning Outcomes

***Good learning outcomes are focused on what the learner will know or be able to do by the end of a defined period of time and indicate how that knowledge or skill will be demonstrated.***

- Upon completing this assignment, students will be able to provide accurate diagrams of cells and be able to classify cells from microscopic images.
- By the end of this course, students will be able to identify and develop data collection instruments and measures for planning and conducting sociological research.
- By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to identify and classify their spending habits and prepare a personal budget.

***Learning outcomes should use specific language, and should clearly indicate expectations for student performance.***

Vague outcome	More precise outcome
By the end of this course, students will have added to their understanding of the complete research process.	<p>By the end of this course, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe the research process in social interventions</li> <li>• evaluate critically the quality of research by others</li> <li>• formulate research questions designed to test, refine, and build theories</li> <li>• identify and demonstrate facility in research designs and data collection strategies that are most appropriate to a particular research project</li> <li>• formulate a complete and logical plan for data analysis that will adequately answer the research questions and probe alternative explanations</li> <li>• interpret research findings and draw appropriate conclusions</li> </ul> <p>[Adapted from <a href="http://ssw.unc.edu/doctoral/curriculum/descriptions.html">http://ssw.unc.edu/doctoral/curriculum/descriptions.html</a>]</p>
By the end of this course, students will have a deeper appreciation of literature and literary movements in general.	<p>By the end of this course, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and describe the major literary movements of the 20th century</li> <li>• perform close readings of literary texts</li> <li>• evaluate a literary work based on selected and articulated standards</li> </ul>