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3-6-2016

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#### Recommended Citation

Wood, R. (2016). Tips for Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes. Retrieved from <https://fuse.franklin.edu/i4blog/3>

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# Tips for Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes

March 6, 2016 | By Rob Wood  
Instructional Design  
Teaching Effectiveness

“Upon completion of this unit, the learner will appreciate the significance of...” something, something. Or, the learner will “be able to demonstrate an understanding” of something or other. I cringe inside when I see supposed learning outcomes similar to these because they are not measurable. That is, there is no observable performance that adequately captures what a learner would actually **do** to “appreciate” or “understand.”



On the other hand, measurable learning outcomes clearly define the specific actions that a learner must perform. Measurable learning outcomes (or objectives) are the foundation of well-designed instruction because they focus on the **results** of the instruction, rather than the process.



Writing measurable learning outcomes takes time, effort, and practice. Here are some tips for writing measurable learning outcomes based on the Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Anderson et al., 2001).

1. Think of the specific skill(s) that you want your learners to be able to **perform** when they complete their learning. For example, do you want them to “apply” principles? If so, under what conditions would they apply them? What would the actual application (i.e., the product) of the application look like?
2. Ask yourself, “**Why** do I want learners to understand this?” Then consider “**how**” they can **do** something specific that is related to what you want them to understand.

If you want learners to **understand** what they are learning, ask them to **construct meaning from what they are learning**. Examples of action verbs include:

Categorize	Clarify
Compare	Explain
Extrapolate	Generalize
Illustrate	Infer
Paraphrase	Predict
Summarize	

If you want learners to **apply** what they are learning, ask them to **perform a task (or tasks) or to use a procedure**. Examples of action verbs include:

Execute  
Facilitate  
Modify  
Produce

Experiment  
Implement  
Prepare  
Report

If you want learners to **analyze** what they are learning about, ask them to **break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose**. Examples of action verbs include:

Classify  
Differentiate  
Distinguish  
Integrate  
Outline  
Select

Deconstruct  
Discriminate  
Find  
Organize  
Parse  
Structure

If you want learners to **evaluate** what they are learning about, use outcomes that ask them to **make judgments based on criteria and standards**. Examples of action verbs include:

Check  
Critique  
Judge  
Research

Coordinate  
Detect  
Monitor  
Test

If you want learners to **create** something related to what they are learning about, ask them to **put elements together to form a coherent of functional whole or reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure**. Examples of action verbs include:

Combine  
Create  
Generate  
Invent  
Plan

Construct  
Design  
Hypothesize  
Model  
Produce

Writing measurable learning outcomes is both a science and an art. And it is worth taking the time to clearly define for learners, as well as instructors/trainers, specific, achievable actions.

### Reference

Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Curikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pintrich, P. R., & Wittrock, M. C. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives* New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

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