

SMART Goals & Alternative Frameworks for E learning

There are several effective alternatives that can actually work better for online learning environments. Here's a practical guide to using SMART goals and other frameworks specifically for e-learning design.

Why Move Beyond Bloom's for E-Learning?

Traditional Bloom's taxonomy has specific limitations in digital learning contexts:

- **E-learning needs performance-based outcomes** that can be measured digitally
- **Online learners need clear, actionable goals** rather than abstract cognitive levels
- **Digital environments benefit from learner-centered objectives** rather than instructor-focused taxonomy

SMART Goals for E-Learning Design

SMART goals work exceptionally well for e-learning because they create **clear, measurable outcomes** that both learners and instructional designers can track digitally.

How to Apply SMART to E-Learning Objectives:

Specific: Define exactly what learners will accomplish

- **Poor:** "Understand social media marketing"
- **SMART:** "Create three different social media posts optimized for Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn audiences"

Measurable: Include trackable metrics for digital assessment

- Use completion rates, quiz scores, or performance benchmarks
- "Score 80% or higher on the final assessment"

Achievable: Realistic for online learning environment

- Consider learners' existing skills and available time for self-paced learning

Relevant: Connect directly to job performance or real-world application

- "Apply customer service protocols in simulated chat scenarios"

Time-bound: Set clear deadlines for modules or entire courses

- "Complete all modules within 4 weeks" or "Pass certification exam by month-end"

E-Learning SMART Goal Examples:

Software Training: "By the end of this 3-week online course, participants will demonstrate proficiency in Excel by creating a budget spreadsheet with formulas, charts, and pivot tables, scoring at least 85% on the practical assessment".

Compliance Training: "Within 30 days, all employees will complete the harassment prevention course and pass the scenario-based assessment with 100% accuracy".

Alternative Frameworks for E-Learning

1. Performance-Based Learning Objectives (Mager's Approach)

This approach is **perfect for e-learning** because it focuses on observable, measurable performance :

Components:

- **Performance:** What learners will DO after training
- **Conditions:** The environment/tools they'll use
- **Criteria:** The standard of acceptable performance

E-Learning Example: "Using the company CRM system (condition), customer service representatives will process a customer return request (performance) within 3 minutes with zero errors (criteria)".

2. Understanding by Design (UbD) - Backward Design

This framework works excellently for e-learning because it **starts with the end goal** :

Three Stages:

1. **Identify desired results:** What should learners accomplish?
2. **Determine evidence:** How will you assess success in the online environment?
3. **Plan learning experiences:** Design activities that lead to those outcomes

This approach ensures your e-learning content is **purpose-driven** rather than just information delivery.

3. Competency-Based Learning Objectives

Focus on **real-world skills and abilities** rather than cognitive levels:

- **Knowledge competencies:** "Identify five key features of effective email communication"
- **Skill competencies:** "Compose professional emails using proper tone and structure"
- **Performance competencies:** "Manage email correspondence with 95% customer satisfaction ratings"

4. SOLO Taxonomy for E-Learning

SOLO works well for online assessment because it shows **quality of understanding** :

- **Unistructural:** Learner grasps one aspect (basic online quiz)
- **Multistructural:** Knows several separate aspects (multiple choice assessment)
- **Relational:** Connects different aspects (case study analysis)
- **Extended Abstract:** Applies to new situations (scenario-based simulations)

Practical Implementation for E-Learning

Step 1: Define Performance Outcomes

Instead of "Students will understand project management," write:

"Learners will create a complete project plan including timeline, resource allocation, and risk assessment using online project management tools".

Step 2: Design Digital Assessments First

- Interactive simulations for skill demonstration
- Scenario-based assessments for decision-making
- Portfolio submissions for creative work
- Peer collaboration projects

Step 3: Create Learning Paths

Use **microlearning modules** that build toward the final performance goal:

- Module 1: Project planning basics
- Module 2: Resource allocation practice
- Module 3: Risk assessment simulation
- Final Project: Complete project plan creation

Step 4: Build in Real-World Application

Include **authentic assessment tasks** that mirror actual job responsibilities:

- Customer service chat simulations
- Sales presentation recordings
- Technical troubleshooting scenarios

E-Learning Specific Strategies

Scenario-Based Learning

Present realistic workplace situations where learners must apply knowledge and skills.

Branching Scenarios

Create interactive decision trees where learner choices lead to different outcomes and feedback.

Performance Support Tools

Integrate job aids, templates, and reference materials directly into the learning environment.

Social Learning Elements

Include discussion forums, peer review activities, and collaborative projects.

Benefits for E-Learning Design

Using these alternatives instead of Bloom's provides:

- **Clearer learner expectations** - students know exactly what they need to accomplish
- **Better digital assessment alignment** - objectives match online testing capabilities
- **Stronger job transfer** - focuses on real-world application rather than abstract cognitive levels
- **Improved learner motivation** - goals feel relevant and achievable
- **Easier progress tracking** - measurable outcomes work well with Learning Management Systems

The key is choosing the framework that best fits your **specific learning goals, audience needs, and available technology**. Many successful e-learning designers combine elements from different approaches - using SMART criteria for clarity, performance-based components for measurability, and backward design for purposeful course structure.

This approach will create more effective, engaging e-learning experiences that actually change learner behavior rather than just delivering information.