

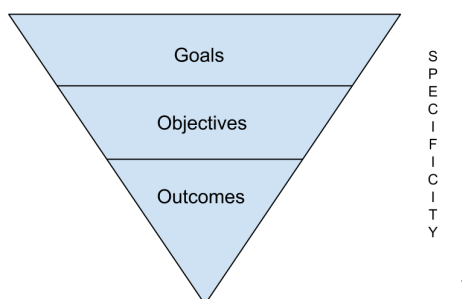
## Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

### What are learning outcomes?

Learning outcomes describe the learning that will take place across the curriculum through concise statements, made in specific and measurable terms, of what students will know and/or be able to do as the result of having successfully completed a course.

### How are learning outcomes different from learning goals or learning objectives?

These terms are often used interchangeably and they are all related to the teaching and learning that is expected to take place in the classroom. However, the difference between goals or objectives and outcomes lies in the emphasis on who will be performing the activities. Learning goals and objectives generally describe what an instructor or program aims to do; i.e., “This course will expose students to the major research methods of the discipline.” Whereas, a learning outcome describes in observable and measurable terms what a student is able to do as a result of completing a course; i.e., “At the completion of this course, students will be able to explain the differences between research methods and identify strengths and limitations of various research designs.” The creation of effective learning outcomes focuses on the student and what he or she will be able to do rather than on what the instructor will teach.



### Writing Learning Outcomes

Writing learning outcomes should be a reflective process. Many departments find the following steps to be helpful as they begin the process of creating learning outcomes for their courses.

- Reflect with other faculty (and whenever possible alumni and students) on the question: What is it that graduates should know or be able to do with a degree in your discipline? It is often helpful to work with other faculty in your department/program to think about how your course is related to the other courses in your program.
- Think about how this course fits into the rest of your program(s)' curriculum(s).
- Draft statements in outcome form. In order to keep the outcomes student centered, begin each one with “Students will be able to...” and choose action verbs that can be observed and measured. CTL has handouts that can assist you in choosing action verbs (short list here and longer list here) and evaluating learning outcomes.
- Group outcomes in broad categories based on similarity to determine if one outcome can take the place of several:
  - “Students will be able to design and conduct experiments to address questions germane to the discipline.”
  - “Students will be able to design and administer surveys that address questions appropriate to the discipline.”
  - “Students will be able to conduct interviews and focus groups that address questions relevant to the discipline.”

In this case if the ability to design and execute research within the discipline is a valued skill for students to have, it may be more appropriate to rephrase the outcome as:

- “Students will be able to design and execute research plans using the major methodologies of the discipline (experiments, surveys, qualitative techniques, etc.) to answer disciplinary specific questions.”
- Share the draft outcomes with others to be certain that the most significant learning is captured in the outcomes and that the language is written in such a way that it is understandable to those who do not have a background in the field (advisors, potential students and their parents, employers).

### Characteristics of Good Learning Outcomes

If your department already has learning goals that it would like to develop into outcomes or is examining its current learning outcomes there are several characteristics to look for:

1. Learning outcomes are *student-centered* in that they focus on the knowledge and skills that students can demonstrate (not on what instructors or curriculum aim to teach students).
2. The learning described in outcomes should encompass the *essential and significant* knowledge and skills students should develop in your course.
3. Generally outcomes are *short*; usually one sentence in length that clearly states the behaviors that students should be able to demonstrate.
4. Outcomes focus on the action that signifies student learning by using concrete, measurable verbs: *action verbs*. First drafts of outcomes often contain verbs like understand, be aware of or appreciate that are difficult to observe and measure. Actionable verbs such as interpret, compare, design, and evaluate are far more concrete and less complicated to observe and evaluate.
5. The number of outcomes will vary from course to course, usually between 5 and 7, and generally not more than ten. The focus should be on creating a *manageable number* of significant learning outcomes, it is better to work with six focused outcomes of significant learning than a dozen scattered ones.

The [Center for Teaching & Learning](#) is available to consult with departments and individual faculty members on developing learning outcomes.

### Why Write Student Learning Outcomes?

As mentioned, identifying the most important things students should learn within your course is the first step in deciding what should be assessed, but learning outcomes have other uses as well; they:

- Can assist departments and program to think about their curriculums. When outcomes are defined, departments can map the outcomes onto the courses that they teach to identify areas within the program where outcomes may overlap (or otherwise be redundant) or where gaps may exist.
- Allow instructors to indicate what knowledge, skills and abilities students are expected to have mastered at the end of their course allow them to communicate expectations to students.
- Provide students with a way to articulate the knowledge and abilities that they have gained and to express what they know to others.

- Assist faculty in determining appropriate assessment strategies.

## Read more online

- [Learning outcomes resources](#) from DePaul's Center for Teaching and Learning
  - Includes a guide, checklist and list of helpful action verbs for describing learning
  - CTL supports the [Assessment Certificate Program](#)—a unique collaboration between DePaul and Loyola universities— providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff in the field of assessment
- [A model of learning objectives](#) – Excellent visualization incorporating action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy by Iowa State University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
- [Sample learning objectives](#) from multiple disciplines at Carnegie Mellon University
- [Articulate your learning objectives](#), also from Carnegie Mellon, explains the importance of aligning learning objectives with instructional strategies and assessment techniques

## Further Reading


Diamond, R. (1998). "Clarifying Instructional Goals and Objectives." In *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide* (Revised ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### More on Learning Outcomes

The Center for Teaching and Learning has a number of resources related to learning outcomes, including information on creating and mapping them.

[Learn More](#)

### Teaching Commons

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