

Tips for Writing Learning Objectives

A learning objective is a statement that describes the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes that participants will gain by participating in the educational activity.

Why develop learning objectives?

The National Commission on Correctional Health Care is an approved provider of continuing education by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, the American Nurses Association and the American Psychological Association. In order to offer valuable CE to readers, each *Journal* article must be accompanied by learning objectives developed to guide the educational activity. Learning objectives:

1. Help prospective participants determine whether this educational activity meets their needs or interests.
2. Guide learning as participants engage in the educational activity, i.e., read your article.
3. Guide the development of self-study questions that will evaluate whether learning has taken place.
4. Help us gauge the success of the educational activity by asking participants to evaluate how well the learning objectives were met.

When developing objectives, ask these questions.

1. What should the result of the educational activity be for participants?
2. What should the participant be able to do?
3. What should the participant know?

How to write a learning objective

Most books that provide instruction on the writing of learning objectives (sometimes referred to as behavioral objectives) state that an objective needs to have three components:

- A measurable action verb (also known as performance)
- The important conditions (if any) under which the performance is to occur
- The criterion of acceptable performance

However, many objectives are written in a manner in which the important conditions and criterion are implicit and are therefore unnecessary. For example, an objective might be stated as follows:

“The learner will be able to name five barriers to screening all jail inmates for tuberculosis.”

There would be no point in stating the objective to include a criterion:

“The learner will correctly (criterion) name five barriers to screening all jail inmates for tuberculosis within 30 seconds (criterion).”

For the purposes of the *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, objectives will be stated as follows:

Upon completion of reading this article, participants should be able to:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Effective verbs for formulating learning objectives

The following verbs have been found to be effective in formulating learning objectives:

1. Those that communicate knowledge:

Information

cite	indicate	recite	tabulate
count	list	recognize	tell
define	name	record	trace
describe	point	relate	write
draw	quote	repeat	
identify	read	state	

Comprehension

associate	differentiate	extrapolate	restate
classify	discuss	interpolate	review
compare	distinguish	interpret	translate
compute	estimate	locate	
contrast	explain	predict	
describe	express	report	

Application

apply	examine	order	review
calculate	illustrate	practice	schedule
complete	interpolate	predict	sketch
demonstrate	interpret	relate	solve
dramatize	locate	report	translate
employ	operate	restate	use

Analysis

analyze	debate	distinguish	inventory
appraise	detect	experiment	question
contract	diagram	infer	separate
criticize	differentiate	inspect	summarize

Synthesis

arrange	create	integrate	prescribe
assemble	design	manage	produce
collect	detect	organize	propose
compose	formulate	plan	specify
construct	generalize	prepare	

Evaluation

appraise	estimate	measure	revise
assess	evaluate	prepare	score
choose	generalize	rank	select
compose	grade	rate	test
construct	judge	recommend	

2. Those that impart skills:

diagnose	integrate	measure	percuss
empathize	internalize	palpate	project
hold	massage	pass	visualize

3. Those that convey attitudes:

acquire	exemplify	realize	reflect
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Verbs to avoid include those that are used often but are open to many interpretations:

appreciate	have faith in	know
believe	learn	understand