

Guidelines for Writing Learning Objectives

Introduction: The purpose of this document is to better assist you as faculty in writing performance-based learning objectives. Learning objectives must be observable, measurable, and focused on the learner. Learning objectives are important in that they clearly communicate the direction of the curricular content, define faculty and learner responsibilities, and enable the evaluation of the learners and the curriculum. Please follow the provided guidelines in the development of performance-based learning objectives for your presentations.

Goal of a performance-based Learning Objective:

Describe the behavior in measurable terms that you, a faculty member, would expect to observe of the learner upon completion of this learning activity.

Do's and Don'ts

- Do:** Describe the observable action that you would expect to see the learner “doing” upon completion of the learning activity.
- Don't:** Do not describe the instruction that you, the faculty member, will perform in order to teach the learner.
- Do:** Use measurable terms to describe the actions of the learner.
- Don't:** Do not use unmeasurable terms such as understand, know, be familiar with, comprehend, learn, or appreciate.
- Do:** Describe only one action in each objective.
- Don't:** Combine more than one action using “and.”
- Do:** Write learning objectives that are supported by the content of the learning activity.
- Don't:** Do not write a learning objective based on content that is insufficiently addressed.

Tips (see Suggested Verbs list)

1. Start with a measurable verb followed by a description of the action that the learner will take.
2. When necessary, for the sake of clarity, a learning objective may also need to specify the conditions in which the action will occur (e.g., specific information to clarify clinical focus and/or patient characteristics).
3. Use either the top four levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy or the top three levels of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Levels (DOK) to aid in the selection of appropriate verbiage.
4. Imagine you are standing outside the room where you have just given your CE presentation. As participants are leaving the room, you stop a participant and verbally ask them the learning objective in the form of a “demand” or request. Does your request make sense?

For instance, if you stopped a participant and said “describe the mechanism of action of drug x.” This would make sense. But if you said, “understand the mechanism of action of drug x,” then the request doesn’t make sense.

Examples

Poor Wording

Understand how to modulate pain therapy by addressing psychological and personality issues.

Why?

The term “understand” is not measurable

Better Wording

Identify strategies to modulate pain therapy by addressing psychological and personality issues in patients with chronic pain.

Poor Wording

Become familiar with stage 1 therapies for hypertension.

Why? The objective is unmeasurable and does not describe the action that the learner should be able to take.

Better Wording

Describe the therapies within ASH guidelines for stage 1 hypertension.

Poor Wording

Implement the patient counseling in your practice.

Why? While implementation is always a goal of a CE activity, it is not something we can measure via a typical CE activity.

Better Wording

List strategies for implementing patient counseling at a practice site.

Suggested Verbs for Continuing Activities by Domain

Cognitive Domain (Bloom)	
Knowledge	To arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
Comprehension	To classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, outline, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate
Application	To apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write
Analysis	To analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, investigate, question, research, test
Synthesis	To arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, setup, write
Evaluation	To appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, defend estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate