

Learning Objectives

Why are Learning Objectives Important?

Learning objectives are a key element in educational activities because they inform the audience of what they should be able to do after participating in the activity. These objectives also serve as a basis for measuring the activity's effectiveness. By asking the audience if they can or cannot do what the learning objectives stated, the activity planners can assess if the activity's educational goals were met.

Getting Started on Writing Learning Objectives:

- When we first decide to teach a topic, we're usually caught up in what we want to tell students about the subject.
- For learning to occur, however, it's more useful to think about the concepts an audience already brings to the program and what new knowledge we want them to add, i.e., the cognitive or behavioral changes they should demonstrate after the program.

Each learning level can be reflected by certain actions as shown below:

Level	Related Learning Actions
1. Recognition	List, state, identify
2. Understanding	Describe, diagram the components of, show, give an example of
3. Explanation	Explain, define, interpret, demonstrate the relationship between
4. Analysis	Compare, contrast, differentiate, analyze, determine, discern
5. Synthesis	Create, set up, summarize
6. Evaluation	Choose, evaluate, rank order, show the significance of, justify

Note: Verbs such as “learn,” “know,” and “understand” should not be used in learning objectives.

How to Structure Learning Objectives

- A learning objective ideally contains three components: a *condition* under which learning is to occur, an **action** that will demonstrate learning (or lack of it), and a performance *criterion*.

Some examples—

*Given a table of ratios, the student can **convert the ratios to percents** with **85% accuracy**.*

*Given an explanation of autoimmune disease, the student can **define the conditions** under which it may occur and **determine appropriate diagnostic** in **nine out of ten** case histories.*

*After hearing a presentation on factors responsible for preanalytic variation, the student can **create a policy** for lab handling of test samples that will **minimize error in test results to less than 3%**.*

- When writing learning objectives, think of what **action** you want the audience members to be able to do as a result of your instruction. Then write them in terms of conditions, actions, and performance criteria (when appropriate).

Remember: Learning objectives are the link between the needs identified (purpose of the educational activity) and the desired results (changes in the learner's knowledge and behavior).