

# Ways To Improve Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are often overlooked because they aren't well-written. Selecting active words to describe your expectations can help students succeed and help you plan activities and assessments to fulfill those objectives.

Learning Objectives. Learning Outcomes. Course Goals. Do I have your attention or have you just skipped over it like most students tend to do? Why is that? What can you do to write objectives that might grab students attention? What questions might you use to self-assess the validity of your objectives and how they align to your activities, the content you present, the assessments and your discussion prompts?

When you're preparing your course, how much time do you spend writing objectives for individual sections of the course? Are you using your textbook's objectives? How do those objectives relate to your course intentions? To your program goals?

How often have you seen (or have written) "The student will understand 'x.'" Now be honest, are you able to assess this objective? What is understanding? Have you defined "understanding" to your students? How can you tell if a student 'understands' something? What is the proof? How does a student know how far to take "understanding" to fulfill your expectation? Learning objectives should be written so that they are measurable. Using descriptive words, reflect how you want students to respond and what your expectations are for student success. Active words take the ambiguity out of your directive.

When writing objectives, it is helpful to use a taxonomy to more clearly define your objectives. Most of us are familiar with the cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy, around since the 50s and revised in the early 2000s. This taxonomy has six categories: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating and Creating. Each of these categories build upon each other with increased complexity requiring a more knowledgeable and advanced level of thinking and interaction.

The Emergency Nurses Association has put together a list of words and phrases that should be avoided due to being unclear and obscure. Phrases such as, "Acquainted with...", "Capable of...", "Familiar with..." "Understanding of..." should be replaced with more active and tangible phrases such as "Record," "Identify," "Diagram," or "Construct."

Another good resource is this [verb list](#) prepared by Cornell University's Center for Teaching Excellence, which lists action verbs to be used with the word Revised Bloom's Taxonomy.

Bloom's isn't the only taxonomy to use for writing learning objectives. There are other taxonomies that might resonate with you or your discipline. Refer to these resources for other models.



- Fink's Significant Learning Taxonomy
- Krathwohl's Affective Domain
- Bigg's Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO)

An [Objective Builder](#), created by the University of Central Florida, might be a good place to get started on reviewing your current objectives. It is based mainly on Bloom's and Revised Bloom's taxonomy. It takes you step-by-step through the process of identifying the condition (what the ending artifact will be, a thesis statement, for example), the audience (usually the student), the behavior (this is where you select a domain, a level and a verb) and the degree (what you deem proficient, a number of words, for example) for writing good, measurable objectives.

Find it at <https://online.ucf.edu/teach-online/resources/objective-builder/>

Take a moment to review your learning objectives. Compare your selected wording against one of the taxonomies and lists of action words. How do they measure up?

## REFERENCE

- <http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/Bloom%27s+Digital+Taxonomy>
- <https://www.ena.org/education/CNE/Documents/BloomsTaxonomy.pdf>