

Student Learning Outcomes for Courses and Programs

In order to write an effective learning outcome for any course or program, we must distinguish the difference between the following terminologies:

Goals

Objectives

Outcomes

Goals are *broad* statements about general purposes for designing a program, or a course.

Ex. The goal of this general education biology course is to help students acquire and retain relevant biologic knowledge/information, teach them to think/apply this knowledge, and stimulate them to continue learning in the field.

Objectives are about the *intended* results and describe the behavior that students will be able to perform at the end of the instruction, or upon the completion of a program. Objectives are usually written in terms of teaching intention and often indicate the content that the teacher intends to cover. Review nutritional recommendations and components.

Ex. Discuss differences in nutritional requirements associated with sex, age, and activity.
Describe causes and consequences of nutritional problems.
Explain complications of underlying physiologic conditions.
Identify key factors involved in correcting nutritional behaviors.
Describe resources and strategies to treat nutritional disorders.

Student Learning Outcomes (or outcomes) are about the *achieved* results. **Outcomes** are more student-centered and describe what it is that the learner should learn. **Outcomes** are more specific and measurable, and there could be more than one of them related to each goal and vice versa. An assessable outcome is an end product that can be displayed or observed and evaluated against criteria.

Ex. At the end of this nutrition course, a student will be able to analyze a documented nutritional problem, determine a strategy to correct the problem, and write a draft nutritional policy addressing the broader scope of the problem.

When you are designing the Student learning outcomes be sure to

- Include :

Who, the target group which for educators is a given as “students”.

What: what knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions should the ideal student completing this course or program demonstrates? The learning statement that specifies what action or behavior will follow the instruction.

When, the time of expected action or behavior, which for educators is usually after the instruction.

How, the way by which the behavior or skill is delivered. This will be the assessment methods that we use to demonstrate the learning of the students outcomes. Remember, when in doubt, error on the side of specificity.

- Choose an *action verb* from the Bloom's Taxonomy which indicates the level of performance based on what your course or program requires. Bloom's Taxonomy organizes and classifies the levels of learning through his hierarchal verb list is a way to organize the instructional activities or questions as they progress in difficulty. As one moves up the hierarchy, the activities require higher level thinking skills. When we use higher levels of the verbs, we claim that achieved outcomes of our students are at that level. Stating outcomes by using lower level verb does not mean a lower importance for that outcome.
- The verb you choose can help you focus on what you assess and how you assess it. Consider the following:

“Students will be able to do research.”

The verb here is vague and not specific enough. Do we mean the student should identify a research topic, review the literature, compose hypotheses, collect data, analyze data, interpret data, or all of the above? Each of those verbs is fine to be used for our outcome, but not specifying it will leave our statement up to interpretation.

A more specific statement could take care of the confusion and help us determine our method. This is an example of a measurable and distinctive outcome:

“Students will be able to write a research paper.”

- Do not join elements in one outcome that cannot be assessed by your stated assessment method. For example:

“Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of basic chemistry and interest in college by completing the assigned lab exercise”.

Here we need to measure “interest” separately from the “knowledge of basic chemistry”.

Keep in mind that it is the recommendation from HLC to have fewer numbers of outcomes. However, ultimately this is the faculty's decision. Fewer outcomes are easier to address and assess.

Non Sequitur By Wiley Miller

