

Learning Objectives

What is a learning objective?

A learning objective:

- Is a specific, measurable, short-term, observable statement
- Indicates desirable knowledge, skills, or attitudes expected of students as a result of instructional activities
- Outlines standards and expectations in a course
- Is connected to course objectives, which are broader statements reflecting general course goals
- Is a framework for evaluating student understanding and progress

A learning objective is not:

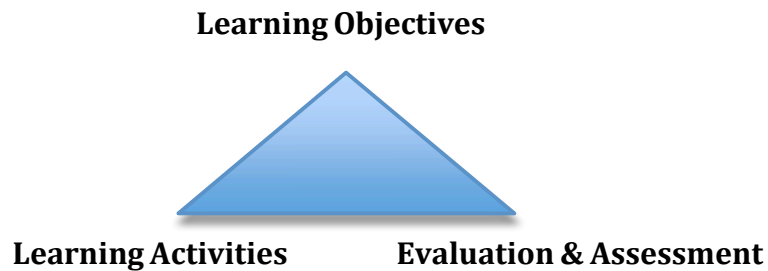
- A vague non-measurable statement

How do students benefit from learning objectives?

Students benefit from learning objectives because they are able to easily understand what is asked of them. Clear learning expectations help students identify and organize critical concepts and objectives required to be successful in a course.

How do learning objectives fit within course development?

Consider the following diagram for context on how learning objectives fit within broader coursework (Fink, 2003).



This diagram helps demonstrate the extent to which learning objectives, learning activities and evaluation and assessment depend on one another in the creation of an effective course. Focusing on only one or two of these elements could create imbalance in a course and diminish student learning. A balanced approach can help to produce stronger, more dynamic course material that focuses on desired student behaviors.

What are the different types of learning objectives?

Bloom's Taxonomy ("Bloom's Taxonomy," 2012) can also be applied to learning objectives through Bloom's three "domains" of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. These three types of learning include:

- Creating new knowledge (Cognitive)
- Developing feelings and emotions (Affective)
- Enhancing physical and manual skills (Psychomotor)

Learning objectives can also be scaffolded so that they continue to push student learning to new levels in any of these three categories.

For example:

	Level One	Level Two
Cognitive objective	...list three characteristics associated with...	...list six characteristics associated with...
Affective objective	...identify your personal view of XYZ issue...	...empathize with the view of another person culturally on XYZ issue...
Psychomotor objective	...walk length of balance beam...	...walk length of balance beam in six seconds...

What are the components of a learning objective?

The ABCD (audience, behavior, condition, and degree) method can be used to identify all core components of a learning objective.

1. **Audience** (the learners) - Who will be doing the behavior?
2. **Behavior** (performance) - What should the learner be able to do? It is important to make sure the behavior is seen or heard.
3. **Condition** - Under what conditions do learners demonstrate their mastery of the objective?
4. **Degree** (or criterion) - How well must the learned behavior be done? Common degrees include: speed, accuracy, quality, and quantity.

Example: Each [**course participant**] should be able to [**list**] [**three characteristics**] that make the family medicine physician distinctive from other specialists in the health care system.

In this example the primary parts are:

Audience	"... course participant ..."
Behavior	"... list ..."
Condition	Through an exam
Degree	"... three characteristics ..."

How are learning objectives assessed?

It is important to assess objectives continually. Each semester/year objectives can be further refined to define desired learning.

1. Apply the following questions based upon the ABCD model to test objectives.
 - a. Does the **audience** need to be changed? To modify the above objective, consider changing audience to pairs, groups, or a whole course of students.
 - b. Does the **behavior** being required of students most effectively practice the desired learning material? To modify the above objective, consider changing behavior from listing components of a topic to writing in detail about one component of a topic.
 - c. Is the **condition** chosen appropriate to document learning? To modify the above objective, consider changing the condition from an examination to an in-class assignment.
 - d. Is the **degree** of learning required appropriate? To modify the above objective, consider changing the requirements from three thoughts to one or five.

References

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