How to Write Learning Outcomes

Activity #1: Distinguishing Between Program and Learning Outcomes

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How to Write Learning Outcomes

Program outcomes examine what a program or process is to do, achieve, or accomplish for its own improvement and/or in support of institutional or divisional goals; generally numbers, needs, or satisfaction-driven.

Learning outcomes examine cognitive skills that students develop through department interactions; related to measurable, transferable skill development. They are statements indicating what a participant (usually students) will know, think, or be able to do as a result of an event, activity, program, etc.

ABCD Structure of a Learning Outcome

Audience | Students

Behavior | will identify important muscles, viscera, blood vessels and nerves

Condition | taking Human Anatomy

Degree | accurately, at least 90%

EXAMPLE Students who attend advising sessions will choose courses that fulfill their chosen degree requirements.

Outcome Writing – The 3 Ms:

Check your outcome against these criteria:

1. **Meaningful:** How does the outcome support the departmental mission or goal?
2. **Manageable:** What is needed to foster the achievement of the outcome? Is the outcome realistic?
3. **Measurable:** How will you know if the outcome is achieved? What is the assessment method?

Common Challenges When Writing Learning Outcomes:

- Describe program outcomes, rather than learning outcomes
- People don't use Bloom's taxonomy verbs and instead use vague terms like: appreciate, become aware of/familiar with, know, learn, value, use, understand
- Too vast/complex, too wordy
- Multiple outcomes in one learning outcome statement (the word "and" is usually a clue!)
- Not specific enough (e.g., effective communication skills)
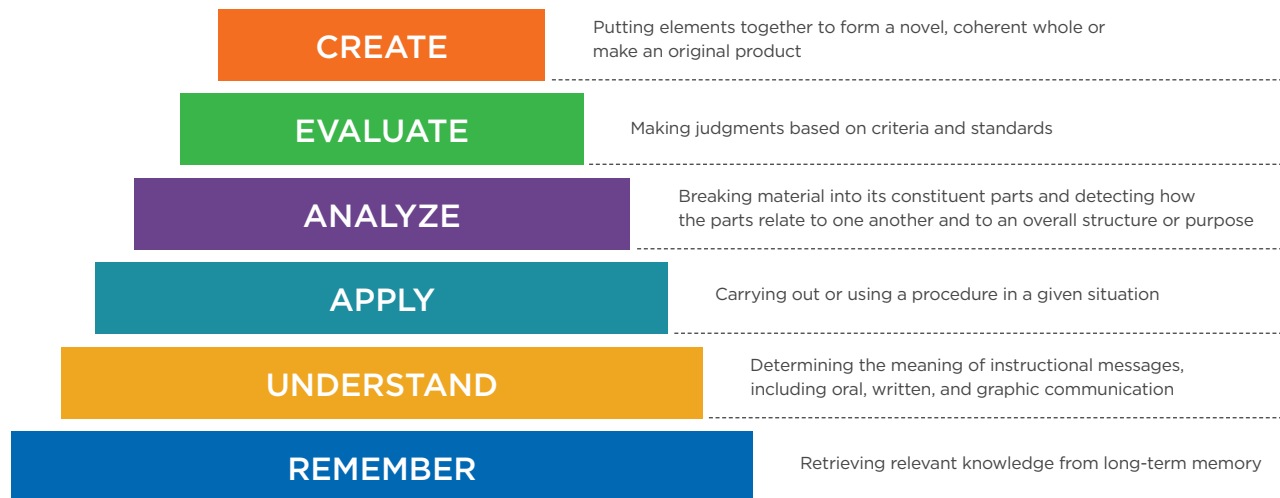
EXAMPLE To improve this learning outcome statement: "Students will gain knowledge of Human Anatomy", you could change it to:

"Students taking Human Anatomy will accurately identify at least 90% of important muscles, viscera, blood vessels and nerves in the dissected specimen."

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Bloom's Taxonomy: Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives offers a framework for classifying learning outcomes. The framework is hierarchical in nature, beginning with a foundational layer (*Remember*) and accelerating in a stepwise manner (from *Understand* to *Apply* to *Analyze* to *Evaluate* and on to *Create*). Select from this word bank when writing your learning outcome statements.

CREATE — Putting elements together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product

EVALUATE — Making judgments based on criteria and standards

ANALYZE — Breaking material into its constituent parts and detecting how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose

APPLY — Carrying out or using a procedure in a given situation

UNDERSTAND — Determining the meaning of instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication

REMEMBER — Retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory

Adapted from A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Anderson, L.W. (Ed.), et al., 2001)

REMEMBER	UNDERSTAND	APPLY	ANALYZE	EVALUATE	CREATE
Cite	Articulate	Compute	Calculate	Argue	Act
Define	Ask	Construct	Categorize	Assess	Arrange
Find	Characterize	Demonstrate	Compare	Check	Assemble
Identify	Clarify	Employ	Contrast	Convince	Build
Indicate	Classify	Exercise	Correlate	Critique	Compose
Label	Describe	Illustrate	Deconstruct	Debate	Construct
List	Discuss	Make	Detect	Decide	Create
Locate	Elaborate	Model	Diagram	Defend	Design
Match	Estimate	Operate	Differentiate	Determine	Develop
Memorize	Explain	Perform	Distinguish	Judge	Formulate
Name	Infer	Plot	Examine	Justify	Generate
Outline	Interpret	Practice	Experiment	Measure	Improve
Quote	Paraphrase	Present	Graph	Predict	Invent
Recall	Recognize	Produce	Integrate	Prioritize	Modify
Recite	Report	Provide	Order	Rank	Plan
Recognize	Restate	Show	Organize	Rate	Prepare
Repeat	Summarize	Sketch	Select	Recommend	Revise
Reproduce	Translate	Solve	Sequence	Reflect	Synthesize
State	Visualize	Use	Solve	Relate	Write

Activity #1: Distinguishing Between Program and Learning Outcomes

For each of the statements below, identify:

Is the statement a program or learning outcome statement?

What information is missing? How could the outcome be strengthened?

1. The Undergraduate Research Office will increase support for student attendance at regional, national, and international conferences.

2. Students will be able to demonstrate effective communication skills as a result of completing COM 101.

3. The Modern Languages Department will increase the number of course sections offered by 20% by hiring more faculty to teach the courses.

4. Students will identify and utilize 5 statistical tests after completing STAT 101.

5. The percentage of students passing the Praxis test will increase.

6. Students will receive more information about graduate school and the number of students applying to graduate school will increase.

Activity #2: Learning Outcome Components Exercise

For each learning outcome, try to identify the four components:

Audience/Who
Who does the outcome pertain to?

Condition/How
Under what conditions or circumstances will the learning occur?

Behavior/What
What do you expect the audience to know/be able to do?

Degree/How much
How much will be accomplished, how well will the behavior need to be performed, and to what level?

1) Given information about successful business ventures, students will identify 3 organizational factors that contributed to the ventures' success.

Audience:

Behavior:

Condition:

Degree:

2) At the conclusion of ENG 101, 80% of students will be able to write critical MLA-style essays free of grammar, usage, and mechanical errors.

Audience:

Behavior:

Condition:

Degree:

3) Faculty who attend the NSSE workshop will be able to identify three ways their work contributes to the institution scoring well on the NSSE benchmarks.

Audience:

Behavior:

Condition:

Degree:

Activity #3: Writing Outcomes - practice makes perfect!

Brainstorm...

1. Identify the overarching/broader objective or goal your outcome is going to support:

2. Identify the audience:

3. What do you want them to be able to know, think, or be able to do? (Be specific!)

4. What circumstances or context will foster the learning?

5. To what degree will the learning occur? (Be specific!)

6. How will you measure the learning?

Fill in the blanks:

Audience:
_____

Behavior:
<will learn what>
_____

Condition:
<under these circumstances / conditions>
_____

Degree:
<to this level of efficiency / effectiveness>
_____

Check yourself:

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Is the outcome measurable?	☐	☐	☐
Is the outcome meaningful?	☐	☐	☐
Is the outcome manageable?	☐	☐	☐
Would you feel comfortable/proud sharing this outcome with students, campus constituents, and external audiences?	☐	☐	☐

Rewrite the learning outcome statement to address any issues:

_____

_____