Guidelines for Writing Learning Objectives

The purpose of this guide is to better assist you in writing learning objectives for your sessions. In order to maintain AAMC accreditation, learning objectives must be measurable and focused on the learner. Well-written learning objectives clearly communicate the direction of the curricular content, define faculty and learner responsibilities, and enable the evaluation of the learners and the curriculum.

Please use the following guidelines in the development of your curricular learning objectives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

1. A learning objective is a statement in specific and measurable terms that describes what the learner will know, or be able to do, as a result of engaging in a learning activity.
2. The learning objective contributes to reaching a course/block goal and program competency.

DO’S & DON’TS

Do: Describe the observable action that you would expect to see the learner “doing” upon completion of the learning activity.

Don’t: Do not describe the instruction that you, the faculty member, will perform in order to teach the learner.

Do: Use measurable terms to describe the actions of the learner.

Don’t: Do not use unmeasurable terms such as understand, know, be familiar with, comprehend, learn, or appreciate.

Do: Describe only one action in each objective.

Don’t: Combine more than one action using “and.”

EXAMPLES

Poor Wording
Understand how to modulate pain therapy by addressing psychological and personality issues.

Why?
The term “understand” is not measurable; and context regarding the patient’s condition is absent.

Better Wording
Modulate pain therapy by addressing psychological and personality issues in patients with chronic pain.

Poor Wording
Become familiar with common eye problems.

Why?
The objective is unmeasurable, does not describe the action that the learner should be able to take, and does not describe the context regarding the patient’s condition.

Better Wording
Screen for eye conditions commonly associated with type 2 diabetes.

Poor Wording
Formulate a diagnosis and management plan for each of the above.

Why?
Assume this learning objective is the third or fourth one. It refers to previously stated objectives and combines two separate actions: diagnosis and management. Each objective must stand alone without reference to other objectives.

Better Wording
1. Formulate a sequential diagnosis procedure for the patients with medical complications of pregnancy.
2. Develop a management plan for commonly diagnosed medical complications of pregnancy.

## Verb Selection Guide to Writing Learning Objectives

### Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy

*revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Action Verbs to Use in Your Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1: Remembering**  
Recall previously learned information. | State a procedure, identify an organ, recognize a disease, select an instrument. | Define  
Describe  
Identify  
Label  
List  
Match  
Name  
Outline  
Recall  
Recognize  
Reproduce  
Select  
State  |
| **2: Understanding**  
Comprehending the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions or problems. State a problem in one's own words. | Summarize medical condition, interpret x-ray film, paraphrase medical text, explain contributing factors. | Convert  
Defend  
Distinguish  
Estimate  
Explain  
Give an example  
Infer  
Interpret  
Paraphrase  
Predict  
Rewrite  
Summarize  
Translate  |
| **3: Applying**  
Use a concept in a new situation or unprompted use of an abstraction. Applies what was learned in the classroom into novel situations in the workplace. | Predict probability that patient will present given disease, operate an ultrasound machine, relate the various factors in a differential diagnosis. | Apply  
Change  
Compute  
Construct  
Demonstrate  
Discover  
Manipulate  
Modify  
Operate  
Predict  
Prepare  
Produce  
Relate  
Show  
Solve  
Use  |
| **4: Analyzing**  
Separate material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. Distinguish between facts and inferences. | Map the key components of the patient’s health ecosystem, discriminate between three similar skin rashes, illustrate the brain stem, compare the functions of the key parts of the community health infrastructure. | Analyze  
Appraise  
Break down  
Compare  
Contrast  
Diagram  
Deconstruct  
Differentiate  
Distinguish  
Identify  
Illustrate  
Infer  |
| **5: Evaluating**  
Make judgments about the value of ideas or materials. | Assess the severity of the condition, Critique the clinical process and conclusions presented in a vignette, Interpret the various data and make a diagnosis, Support your top three diagnoses. | Conclude  
Critique  
Defend  
Discriminate  
Evaluate  
Justify  
Rank  
Recommend  |
| **6: Creating**  
Build a cohesive structure from various elements. Synthesize parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure, or adding value. | Design a process for effectively screening for this disease, Summarize the key factors leading to Alzheimer’s and explain the most effective treatments, Reconstruct a broken bone, Organize a patient's history from disjointed data and verbal accounts, Generate a 3 part differential diagnosis and a 5-part treatment plan. | Combine  
Compile  
Compose  
Create  
Devis  
Design  
Formulate  
Generate  
Manage  
Modify  
Plan  
Produce  
Propose  
Rearrange  
Rewrite  |

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Originally developed for corporate use, SMART Objectives focus on developing achievable and measurable goals and objectives. It is not necessary to use these (or all elements of S.M.A.R.T.E.R.S) in educational objective writing, but there may be circumstances where this approach has value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Major Term</th>
<th>Minor Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Significant, Stretching, Simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Measurable</td>
<td>Meaningful, Motivational, Manageable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Attainable</td>
<td>Appropriate, Achievable, Agreed, Assignable, Actionable, Adjustable, Ambitious, Aligned, Aspirational, Acceptable, Action-focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>Result-Based, Results-oriented, Resourced, Resonant, Realistic, Reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Timely</td>
<td>Time-oriented, Time framed, Timed, Time-based, <strong>Timeboxed</strong>, Time-bound, Time-Specific, Timetabled, Time limited, Trackable, Tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Ethical, Excitable, Enjoyable, Engaging, Ecological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Reevaluate</td>
<td>Rewarded, Reassess, Revisit, Recordable, Rewarding, Reaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfies Strategic Vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>