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.”

TIPS

(action verb samples on following page)

1. Start with a measurable verb followed by a description of the action that the learner will take.
2. Select the CAtegory to aid in the selection of appropriate verbiage.
3. When necessary for the sake of clarity, a learning objective may also need to specify the conditions in which the action will occur (e.g. specific information to clarify clinical focus and/or patient characteristics).

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 of 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.

† Adapted from http://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/cme/faculty_development/LearningObjectivesGuidelines.pdf
Verb Selection Guide to Writing Learning Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Action Verbs to Use in Your Objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Remembering</td>
<td>State a procedure, identify an organ, recognize a disease, select an instrument.</td>
<td>Define, Describe, Identify, Label, List</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Understanding</td>
<td>Summarize medical condition, interpret x-ray film, paraphrase medical text, explain contributing factors.</td>
<td>Convert, Defend, Distinguish, Estimate, Explain</td>
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<tr>
<td>3: Applying</td>
<td>Predict probability that patient will present given disease, operate an ultrasound machine, relate the various factors in a differential diagnosis.</td>
<td>Apply, Change, Compute, Construct, Demonstrate, Discover, Manipulate, Modify, Operate, Predict, Prepare, Produce</td>
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<td>4: Analyzing</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Analyze, Appraise, Break down, Compare, Contrast, Diagram, Deconstruct, Differentiate, Distinguish, Identify, Illustrate, Infer</td>
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<tr>
<td>5: Evaluating</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Conclude, Criticize, Critique, Defend, Discriminate, Evaluate, Justify, Rank, Rate, Recommend</td>
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<td>6: Creating</td>
<td>Design a process for effectively screening for this disease, Summarize the key factors leading to Alzheimers 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.</td>
<td>Combine, Compile, Compose, Create, Devise, Design, Formulate, Generate, Manage, Modify, Plan, Produce</td>
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