

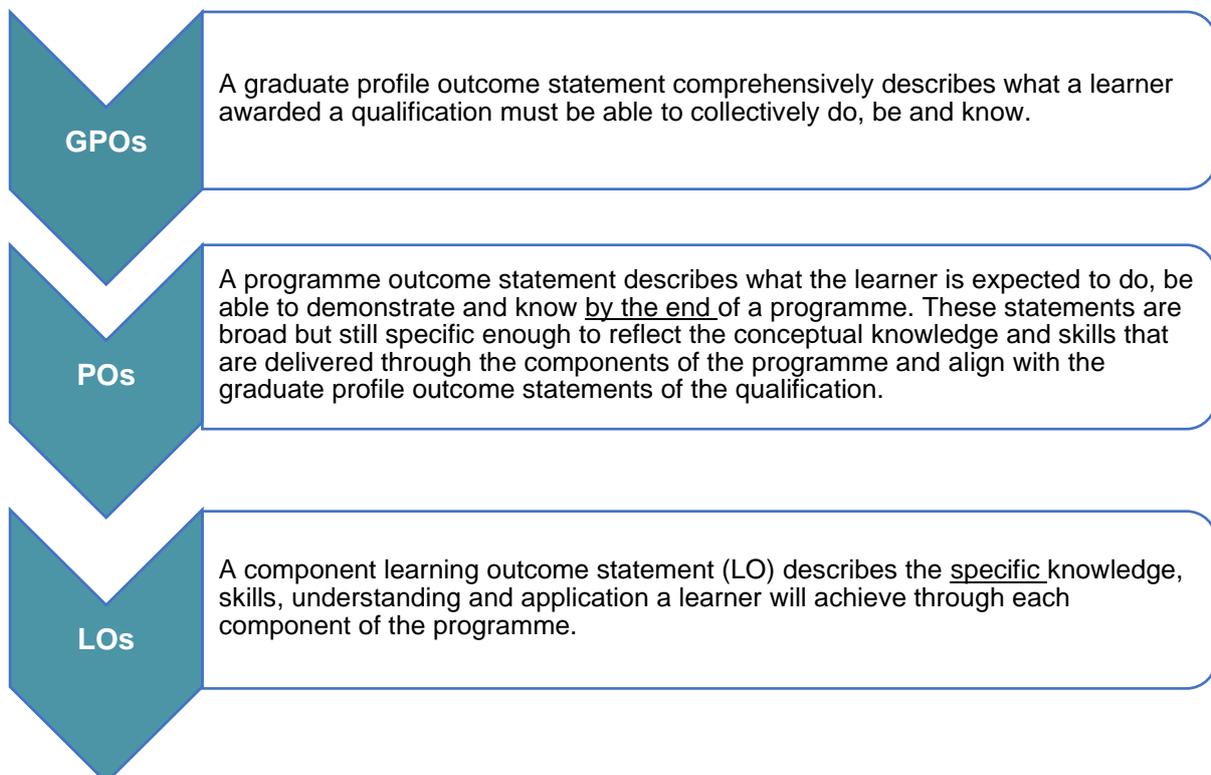
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## WRITING COMPONENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: STRUCTURE, CONSIDERATIONS, AND EXAMPLES

This document provides guidance to tertiary education providers on the structure, key considerations and common mistakes to avoid when writing component learning outcomes.

NZQCF Programme Approval, Recognition and Accreditation Rules 2022 and Micro-credential Approval and Accreditation Rules 2022 establish the requirement for programmes of study and micro-credentials to have a set of learning outcomes to demonstrate a coherent way to achieve the qualification or intended outcomes.

Learning outcomes can be at different hierarchies, depending on whether they apply to qualifications, i.e. Graduate Profile Outcomes (GPOs), programmes (programme outcomes), or component learning outcomes (LOs).



## STRUCTURE

The standard format of a learning outcome includes an *action verb*, *content* and *context*:

- \* The action verb represents the performance a learner is expected to be able to demonstrate after engaging in the process of learning.
- \* The content is the knowledge and/or skills to be demonstrated in the performance.
- \* The context is the setting or conditions within which the performance is met.

Action verb	Content	Context
Evaluate	the implications of multiculturalism	in Aotearoa New Zealand's exercise industry

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Learning outcome statements must be *SMART*:
  - a. **Specific:** unambiguous and address defined areas of competencies - short statements that enable learners to understand the learning undertaken in the respective component. Including too many concepts in a single LO would lead to difficulty in linking the learning outcome to multiple assessments, thereby lacking clarity on whether the learner has achieved the outcome or not. However, a narrow learning outcome would restrict adaptability of knowledge and skills in application.
  - b. **Measurable:** linked to observable or demonstrable knowledge, skills, and attributes. The action verb at the beginning of the learning outcome is integral in illustrating measurability and assessing ability.
  - c. **Achievable:** written for a learner to establish a clear required performance expectation.
  - d. **Relevant:** aligned to the component's aim, content, instructional method and assessment methodology.
  - e. **Time-bound:** demonstrate achievement within a specific timeframe.
2. Manageable regarding the number: a component has no specific number of learning outcomes. However, too many learning outcomes would designate too much focus on small concepts and would be unmanageable in the assessment process.
3. Demonstrate enduring understanding: important and relevant knowledge and skills should be included in the learning outcome that can be assessed directly.
4. The outcomes specified in unit standards may or may not be suitable for learning outcomes in a component. If the unit standard title is written as a task, it will most likely not follow the structure of a learning outcome and will be too specific in nature.

## EXAMPLES

The following examples are selected to demonstrate the common areas of request for information (RFI) in the evaluation of the applications:

### Inappropriate verbs

Action verbs describe knowledge and skills that learners are expected to demonstrate and that are measurable through the assessments.

- \* *Learn about Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development.*

The action verb *learn* does not express a process of learning here.

- \* *Participate in supporting students with their learning, under supervision, in the education support and care context.*

*Participate* is an action verb. However, in the same manner, it only implies an action that does not explicitly result from the learning process. Not all action verbs are suitable for describing learning outcomes, as not all action verbs can indicate an outcome or result that are measurable, e.g. undertake, conduct, complete, implement.

### Role of an action verb in determining the level of learning outcome

The action verb is crucial when determining the level of the LO, especially for higher-level cognitive activities such as synthesising or evaluating, in addition to the specific knowledge and skills (content) and the settings (context) to which they apply/relate.

An action verb may be used at different levels, e.g. with the action verb 'demonstrate' or 'apply', the level will be demonstrated by the content and context as being more advanced or specialised knowledge and skills.

- \* *Choose and organise relevant financial information in deciding the appropriate financing strategy for a business.*

*Choose and organise relevant financial information*, were this to be included as a level 8 learning outcome, is below the level 8 descriptors. The learning outcome should be focused on financial strategy decision-making rather than the approach. Therefore, the following revised learning outcome statement is better aligned to the level:

*Devise appropriate financial strategies for a business through evaluating and applying relevant financial information.*

Another example:

- \* *Calculate financial ratios to measure profitability, asset utilisation, working capital management, long-term financial stability, and financial markets.*

This learning outcome was proposed as a Level 5 outcome. A restructured statement that more accurately reflects the intention and the level of the learning outcome could be:

*Apply financial analysis techniques to assess profitability, asset utilisation, working capital management, long-term financial stability, and financial markets for an organisation.*

### **Unnecessary adverbs or modifiers**

Some learning outcomes carry unnecessary adverbs or modifiers, making the learning outcomes challenging to measure.

- \* *Accurately measure health-related parameters in healthy adult individuals.*
- \* *Correctly perform and teach the major exercises and mobility techniques required for entry into the Strength and Conditioning profession.*
- \* *Successfully communicate with clients about their needs.*

Addition of adverbs to learning outcomes means that additional clarification or definition of these adverbs is required before assessing the learning outcomes, e.g. in what sense it (the action) is systematic/accurate/correct/successful?

### **Multiple verbs**

When writing learning outcomes with two or more action verbs, the semantic and logical relationships between the verbs is critical. Unless both actions are significant and work together, it is better to use only one verb. For instance,

- \* *Plan and prepare a financial analysis report for an organisation applying ethics, professionalism and industry norms.*

Rather than use *plan and prepare*, which carry a similar meaning, it might be better to replace them with *develop*.

- \* *Conceptualise, plan, organise, design and independently conduct research to solve complex identified problems.*

This example uses five verbs to lead the learning outcome statement, suggesting the following:

- Conceptualise research;
- Plan research;
- Organise research;
- Design research;
- Conduct research.

The four preceding actions are embedded in the last action *conduct*, which, like *undertake*, is not a verb describing outcomes but a task. This statement requires a rewrite based on the component aim and content, with reference to assessment methods and tasks.

### **Writing learning outcomes as assessments task**

Learning outcomes indicate what learners can do with the knowledge and skills gained through the learning journey of a component. The achievement of the learning outcomes is judged through the successful completion of assessments. In some instances, assessment tasks are proposed as learning outcomes.

- \* *At the successful completion of this course, students will be able to complete a small research project.*

This is a task that does not indicate the knowledge, skills and application involved. As such, this is an inappropriate learning outcome statement in terms of format, action verb, content and context.

Another example:

- \* *The learners will be able to:*
  - *Implement a research proposal.*
  - *Undertake a comprehensive literature review within a chosen field of practice.*
  - *Gather, store and critically analyse data relevant to the research topic using appropriate and justifiable methods and tools.*

The first statement in this example does not express a learning outcome but a task. In addition, the statement is not in the standard learning outcome format, as suggested above.

Similarly, the verbs *undertake*, *gather* and *store* describe tasks instead of consequential learning outcomes. These three statements present a process of actions involved in a project rather than being an outcome of learning.

## **SUMMARY**

1. **Start** by reflecting on what learners are expected to learn in the component and focus on the essential and relevant knowledge and skills.
2. **Begin** with a stem statement: *On successful completion of the component, the learners will be able to.*
3. **Write** simple and concise statements using the structure specified above to demonstrate most precisely the intended outcome.

## FURTHER READING GUIDE:

Kennedy, D. 2006. *Writing and using learning outcomes: a practical guide*. Cork: University College Cork. Accessed at <https://cora.ucc.ie/bitstream/handle/10468/1613/A%20Learning%20Outcomes%20Book%20D%20Kennedy.pdf?sequence=1>

Massey University Teaching and Learning Centres. Learning Outcomes. Accessed at <https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/AVC%20Academic/Teaching%20and%20Learning%20Centres/Learning-outcomes.pdf?88EDEC1C9F92D446FEBA4903793B7080>

Newcastle University. 2018. Guidance on writing learning outcomes. Accessed at <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/res-writinglearningoutcomes.pdf>

The Learning Institute at Queen Mary, University of London. *Good practice guide on writing aims and learning outcomes*. Accessed at <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/queenmaryacademy/education-and-learning/resources--good-practice/curriculum-design/intended-learning-outcomes/>

Moon, J. 2000. Linking levels, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Accessed at [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Learning\\_Outcomes\\_Edinburgh\\_2004/77/4/040701-02Linking\\_Levels\\_plus\\_ass\\_crit-Moon\\_577774.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Learning_Outcomes_Edinburgh_2004/77/4/040701-02Linking_Levels_plus_ass_crit-Moon_577774.pdf)

CEDEFOP. 2017. *Defining, writing and applying learning outcomes: a European handbook*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/566770>