Writing learning outcomes and objectives

Creating effective learning outcomes is essential for designing courses that meet educational standards and effectively guide both instruction and assessment. Here’s a detailed guide to help you write clear and impactful learning outcomes:

Steps to write learning outcomes

1. Choose an action verb

Begin with an action verb that specifies the performance you expect from learners. This verb should align with the cognitive level you are targeting, using Bloom’s taxonomy as a reference. For example:

- **Knowledge**: Describe, list, identify
- **Comprehension**: Explain, summarise, paraphrase
- **Application**: Apply, demonstrate, use
- **Analysis**: Analyse, compare, contrast
- **Synthesis**: Design, construct, create
- **Evaluation**: Evaluate, justify, critique

> Avoid verbs that are vague and non-measurable like "**understand**" or "**learn**."

2. Define the content

Specify the content knowledge or skill area that the learner will demonstrate. This should be directly related to the course material and clearly define what aspect of the content the outcome addresses.

3. Set the context

Clearly state the context or conditions under which the learner will perform the task. This helps clarify where or how the learning can be applied in real-world settings.

4. Ensure alignment with course standards

Ensure that the learning outcome aligns with overall course goals, relevant standards, and industry requirements if applicable.

5. Write concisely

Keep the learning outcome concise and focused. A good learning outcome should be a single sentence, straightforward, and not overloaded with concepts.

Examples

Well-written learning outcomes

Evaluate the implications of multiculturalism in New Zealand’s healthcare system.
This outcome uses the verb "Evaluate," which is appropriate for higher cognitive levels of learning, specifically under the "Evaluation" category in Bloom's taxonomy. This category involves making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.

Apply advanced calculus techniques to solve real-world engineering problems.
The verb "Apply" fits well into the "Application" category of Bloom's taxonomy, where the learner is expected to use learned material in new and concrete situations. This might include applying rules, methods, concepts, principles, laws, and theories.

~~**Design a marketing campaign for a start-up using digital tools and social media platforms.**~~
~~The verb "Design" is associated with the "Synthesis" category, indicating a high level of cognitive process. It typically involves putting together elements and parts to form a whole, which is consistent with creating a marketing campaign.~~

> Just realised this is too task related

Poorly-written learning outcomes

Engage in a comprehensive exploration and critical evaluation of the diverse cultural dynamics that permeate the fabric of New Zealand’s healthcare system, aiming to establish a nuanced understanding of multicultural influences.
This outcome is verbose and includes complex language that might confuse learners and educators about the precise skills and knowledge to be assessed.

Understand, apply, and integrate advanced calculus techniques to address and solve real-world engineering problems.
The use of "understand," "apply," and "integrate" makes the outcome unclear because each verb

suggests a different level of cognitive engagement and assessment criteria, making it hard to measure effectively.

Using digital tools and social media platforms, a marketing campaign for a start-up will be designed by students.
Using passive voice and starting with tools rather than the learning action ("will be designed") places the emphasis incorrectly and obscures who is responsible for the action, reducing clarity and effectiveness.

Complete a set of calculus problems to demonstrate the application of advanced techniques in solving real-world engineering issues.
By focusing on completing a set of problems, this version is more about the task itself rather than the underlying learning that should be evident from such activities.

Know advanced calculus techniques to address real-world engineering problems.
"Know" is too broad and passive for an outcome that requires applying knowledge to solve problems. It does not communicate the need for active engagement and application of calculus techniques.

Considerations

- **Specificity**: Be specific enough to guide learning but broad enough to allow for the application of knowledge.
- **Measurability**: Use verbs that allow you to measure whether the outcome has been achieved.
- **Relevance**: Ensure outcomes are relevant to the course and beneficial for the learner's educational and career goals.
- **Feasibility**: Consider whether the outcomes are achievable within the constraints of the course duration and resources.

By following these steps, you can ensure that your learning outcomes not only guide educational activities and assessments effectively but also align with educational standards and the needs of the learners.

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