

Writing Effective Learning Objectives



Elaine Van Melle, PhD and Sheila Pinchin, MEd
Office of Health Sciences Education

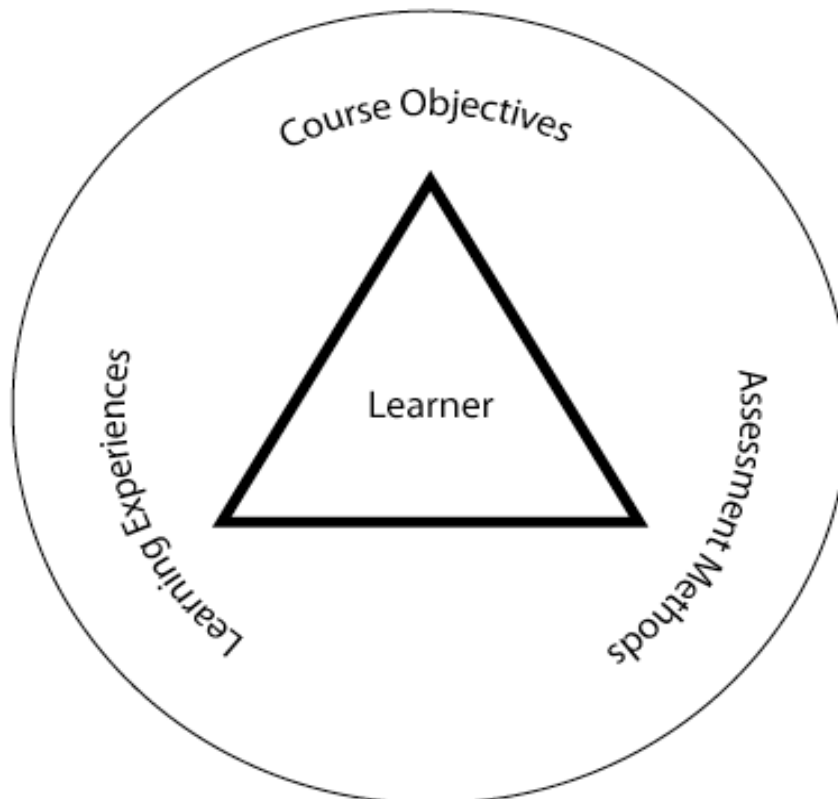
Faculty of Health Sciences
Queen's University

September 2008

How to Write An Effective Learning Objective

Introduction

- ❖ A learning objective is a statement that describes what the learner will be able to do upon completion of the learning experience.
- ❖ Learning objectives help to:
 - focus the overall purpose of the learning experience
 - determine where the particular learning experience best fits within the larger curriculum
 - select the appropriate learning experience
 - select the appropriate method of assessment
- ❖ Therefore, learning objectives are fundamental to creating effective learning experiences.



Writing an effective learning objective

❖ Learning objectives should be student centered not instructor centered

Example

Instructor Centered Objective	Learner Centered Objective
During this session the instructor will present three skills that relate to the evaluation of new drugs	By the end of this session the student will be able to describe three methods used to evaluate the efficacy of a new drug

❖ Learning objectives should describe the:

A = **A**udience expected to perform the desired behaviour

B = **B**ehaviour that the learner can now engage in

C = **C**ondition(s) under which the objectives should be attained

D = **D**egree of competency expected upon completion of the objective

Example

*By the end of this session the **first year medical student** will be able to **describe three methods** used to evaluate the efficacy of **any new drug** when **presented with evidence from the literature**.*

A = first year medical student

B = describe three methods

C = when presented with evidence from the literature

D = any new drug

❖ Learning objectives should reflect the appropriate level and domain of learning

DOMAIN	LEVEL		
	Knowledge	Application	Problem-solving
Cognitive	List Describe	Apply Interpret	Analyze Evaluate
Psychomotor	Observe Point out	Perform Operate	Create Design
Affective	Respond Receive	Value Respect	Consider Resolve

Examples

Cognitive, Application

By the end of this session the second year medical student will be able *to apply* one method in order to evaluate the efficacy of a new drug as described in the literature.

Cognitive, Problem-solving

By the end of this session the third year medical student will be able *to evaluate* the efficacy of any new drug when presented with evidence from the literature.

Affective, Problem-solving

By the end of this session the third year medical student will be able *to consider* which drug is most appropriate, given a particular clinical situation.

Steps in Developing Objectives

1. List the topics or overall goals for the session.

Is it clear that the topic is relevant to the needs of the learner?

Is the degree of specificity for each learning objective appropriate to the level of the learner?

2. Know where the learning experience fits into the overall curriculum.

Are there any experiences that have prepared students for this session?
What kinds of learning experiences will follow from this session?

3. Determine any key concepts or learning experiences the student must have been exposed to in order to maximize their learning experience in your session.

What prior level of knowledge or experience do you expect the student to have?

Remember: Creating effective learning objectives is more of an art than a science. Effective objectives develop over time and require ongoing review, and discussion with colleagues and students.

Steps for Creating Your Objective(s):

1. Select a topic, or a lesson focus that you want students to learn about:
2. Consider which level of learning students:
Knowledge _____
Application _____
Problem-solving _____
3. Consider which category or domain of learning within which students will work:
Cognitive _____
Psychomotor _____
Affective _____
4. Remember the example: *By the end of this session the **first year medical student** will be able to **describe three methods** used to evaluate the efficacy of **any new drug** when **presented with evidence from the literature**.*

5. Fill in the blanks below:

By the end of _____, (time period)
the _____ student (describe your Audience--student in a program, in a course, etc.)
will be able to _____ (cite **B**ehaviour from one of the domains)
etc.), _____ (describe **C**onditions for learning)
_____ (describe **D**egree of competency)

Review:

- ❖ Does the statement incorporate all of the aspects of this piece of learning that you hope?
- ❖ Is the student at the centre of this experience?
- ❖ Will you be able to determine how well the students learned? (Assessment Methods)
- ❖ Will you be able to design appropriate teaching and learning experiences, based on this objective? (Learning Experiences, Teaching Strategies and Methodology)