Job Aid: Writing "Good" Learning Objectives*

Step 1: Identify knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be learned.

3-5 objectives is reasonable for a course/single event (Moon, 2005; SUU, n.d.; Valamis, 2022).

- Do they align with course/program objectives? (See MSUCOM Program Objectives.)
- Do exam outlines/professional societies inform targets? (See Right Sizing a Course.)
- Do they pass the "So, what? Why?" test? (E.g., list of drugs vs. how drug classes work.)

Step 2: Draft SMART learning objectives using a simple template.

SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-Focused, and Time-Oriented. Avoid "less measurable" verbs or phrases (e.g., appreciate, know, understand, learn, etc.).

Template (Ryan, 2015)	Example 1	Example 2
By When?	After completing this reading,	By the end of this rotation,
Who?	1st semester medical students will	3rd year medical students will
Will Do What?	recall key lymphatic structures	identify a STEMI
Assessed How?	given a diagram of human anatomy.	when reviewing an EKG.

Step 3: Consider level and proficiency (a modification of Bloom & Gery).

Level & Proficiency ➜	**Conscious Familiarity: 1 Step**	**Conscious Application: 2 Steps**	**Unconscious Application & Synthesis: 3+ Steps**
Description	Recall when prompted.	Recall and apply when prompted.	Recall without prompting, integrating with new info.
When (flexible)	prep/foundational	mid-stage	advanced
Sample "Measurable" Verbs	Define, describe, identify, match, outline, recall, select.	Apply, compare, demonstrate, interpret, predict, relate, solve.	Critique, design, evaluate, justify, recommend, synthesize, treat.
Sample Objective	**After reviewing materials, list the primary causes of syncope.**	**During a vignette, determine the most-likely etiology of syncope.**	**Given a case, author a rationale for the most-likely etiology of syncope based on clinical presentation & data.**

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Step 4: Link learning objectives to assessments.

Learning objectives indicate what learners will be able to do at the end of learning. They should focus on a single outcome and be linked to a point of assessment. Anything not assessed should be considered supplemental.

- **What action does the verb imply?** Examples: *define* or *predict* might lean toward discussions, problem sets, or traditional exams while *evaluate* or *recommend* might lean more toward case activities, oral presentations, or performance of skills.
- **In what conditions might one best perform the action?** Consider this to allow more "authentic" learning and assessment conditions when possible in the instructional design.

References

- Moon, J. (2005). Learning outcomes: Guidance Notes. *TQA Manual.* Univ. of Exeter.
- Ryan, M. (2015). Developing meaningful learning objectives for courses and clerkships. MedEdPORTAL, 11, 10195.
- Southern Utah University (SUU). (n.d.). *FAQs for Writing Learning Outcomes.*
- Valamis. (2022). *Learning Outcomes.*

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