

Make Learning Outcomes Work for You

Creating learning outcomes can be an exercise in compliance. However, you can also use learning outcomes to honestly express what you hope students will become through your course.

Well-written learning outcomes emphasize student abilities (the end) rather than topics, activities, or experiences (the means). In other words, learning outcomes should elegantly express what is most important for students to achieve. Thus, the task of writing learning outcomes requires honest, thoughtful reflection about how your course contributes to the development of students' abilities, attitudes and expertise. As you write your learning outcomes, here is an approach you might take.

First-thought Writing. We suggest you take 5 minutes to write the ideas that come to mind without editing on the following questions: How will students be different at the end of my course? Who will they become? Even if it seems impossible to measure, write it down.

Create Learning Outcomes. Consider your ideas and convert them into 3-5 learning outcomes. For examples, see page 2. Again, even if it seems impossible to measure, write it down.

Evidence, Not Proof. To say that something is measurable or observable does not necessarily entail that the measurement must be quantifiable. Many important learning outcomes rely on qualitative data. Before you reject a learning outcome because it is “not measurable,” contact the Center for Teaching & Learning to help you consider how to find evidence of student achievement.

Verbs that Suggest a Form of Evidence. Where possible use verbs that bring to mind a way to gather evidence. For examples, see the table below.

Verb	Possible source of evidence
Interpret, evaluate	Oral presentation Written report
Appreciate	Oral presentation Reflective essay
Discuss	Class discussion Online discussion Oral presentation Essay
Characterize	Oral presentation Written report
Identify, classify	Exam, quiz

The General Form for Learning Outcomes

Students will (be able to) [ability] + [disciplinary context] + [criteria or means (ideal, but optional)].

Example 1

Students will be able to evaluate representative philosophical texts, teachings, and problems.



Example 2

Students will appreciate the role of faith in God by scientists.



Example 3

Students will be able to discuss important issues in sociology in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



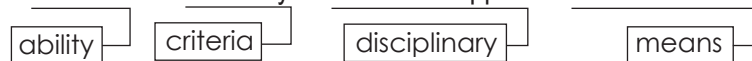
Example 4

Students will be able to characterize an aquifer basin using methods of geological analysis.



Example 5

Students will be able to evaluate the credibility of statistical support in research articles.



Example 6

Students will evaluate the feasibility and viability of potential new ventures through rigorous hypothesis testing.



Example 7

Students will be able to interpret results of statistical methods to academic and nonacademic audiences.

