

DOE Learning Outcomes and Objectives Primer

One of the first most important steps for developing a syllabus and/or course is the formation of quality learning objectives and/or outcomes. Here are some sites with great instructions for writing excellent learning objectives, which contain a task/behavior, condition, and standard:

- <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/templates/objectivetool.html>
- <http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/writinglearningobj.html>
- <http://www.oucom.ohiou.edu/FD/writingobjectives.pdf>
- Penn State's Objectives Primer: <http://ets.tlt.psu.edu/learningdesign/objectives/writingobjectives>
- Bloom's Taxonomy remixed in 3D: <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/RevisedBlooms1.html>
- http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art3_4.htm
- Interactive Objectives Builder: <http://www.radiojames.com/ObjectivesBuilder/>

Examples

(from Kruse, K. http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art3_4.htm)

- *Given a stethoscope and normal clinical environment, the medical student will be able to diagnose a heart arrhythmia in 90% of effected patients.*

This example describes the observable behavior (identifying the arrhythmia), the conditions (given a stethoscope and a normal clinical environment), and the standard (90% accuracy).

An example of a poorly defined objective is:

- *In this course you will learn how to operate the phone and properly communicate with callers.*

This statement is not an objective but a description of the course contents. Other examples of poorly written objectives are:

- *After completing this course you will be able to.** operate your phone** know how to greet callers*
 - *understand the procedure for transferring a call*

These objectives do not indicate observable behaviors, making assessment of their mastery impossible. How does one know if someone knows or understands something? What does it really mean to operate the phone?

The following performance objectives are good examples of the use of observable behaviors.

After completing this course you will be able to:

- *place a caller on hold*
- *activate the speaker phone*
- *play new messages on the voice mail system*
- *list the three elements of a proper phone greeting*
- *transfer a call to a requested extension*

These objectives are built around very discrete tasks. Instead of the vague objective to "operate the phone," the learner knows exactly what is expected for successful operation - namely, using the hold feature, speakerphone, and voice mail system. More importantly, these behaviors are observable. A student can be watched as he activates the speakerphone or listened to as she describes the elements of a good phone greeting. Because there is no ambiguity, learner expectancy is achieved and a proper evaluation can be made.