

Guide to Developing Measurable Outcomes

Everything starts with the **mission statement** of your department/service area. Make sure your mission supports the broader college or service area mission and values.

Outcomes should be:

- ❖ Specific
- ❖ Measurable
- ❖ Attainable
- ❖ Results-Oriented
- ❖ Time-Bound

ACADEMIC – Student Learning Outcomes: SLOs are statements that specify what students will know, be able to do, or be able to demonstrate when they have completed or participated in the program, course, project or activity.

- Think...what are the most important things a student should know, be able to do, or demonstrate after completing or participating in my program, course, project or activity?

SERVICE AREA – Service Outcomes: Service outcomes are statements that specify what an area intends to do, achieve, or accomplish through certain activities or experiences (what an area accomplishes for its students, faculty/staff or institution).

- Think...what are the most important things my area does for the students, faculty/staff or university?

Specify an action by the student that must be observable, measurable or demonstrated.

Use actions verbs that result in behavior that can be observed and measured such as:

analyze	compile	differentiate	label	prepare	select
apply	compute	discuss	list	propose	solve
argue	create	distinguish	locate	question	state
arrange	criticize	estimate	manage	rate	translate
assemble	critique	examine	memorize	recognize	use
assess	defend	explain	order	repeat	utilize
calculate	define	formulate	operate	report	write
categorize	demonstrate	identify	organize	reproduce	
choose	describe	illustrate	plan	review	
classify	design	indicate	practice	revise	
compare	develop	interpret	predict	schedule	

You can find a set of verbs categorized according to Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives (Bloom, 1956) as well as the description of the categories and examples.

Avoid:

- Appreciate
- Become aware of
- Familiar with

- Know
- Learn
- Understand

(These cannot be measured.)

Test it: Does your outcome:

- ❖ Support the program/department objectives?
- ❖ Results in learning or improvement?
- ❖ Is the outcome detailed and specific enough to be measured?
- ❖ Academic: Describe what the program intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective, attitudinal), or do (behavioral, performance)?
- ❖ Service: Think in terms of providing a service, performing a task, or process.
- ❖ Is it possible to collect accurate and reliable data for each outcome?
- ❖ Can the outcome be used to make decisions on how to improve the program?

Structure of a Learning Outcome statement

- An **action** word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated
- A **learning statement** that specifies what learning will be demonstrated in the performance
- A broad state of the **criterion** or standard for acceptable performance

Example:

Poor: *Students should know the historically important systems of psychology.*

This is poor because it says neither what systems nor what information about each system students should know. Are they supposed to know everything about them or just names? Should students be able to recognize the names, recite the central ideas, or criticize the assumptions?

Better: *Students should know the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.*

This is better because it says what theories students should “know”, but it still does not detail exactly what they should “know” about each theory, or how deeply they should understand whatever it is they should understand.

Best: *Students should be able to recognize and articulate the foundational assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.*

This is the clearest and most specific statement of the three examples. It clarifies how one is to demonstrate that he/she “knows”. It provides even beginning students an understandable and very specific target to aim for. It provides faculty with a reasonable standard against which they can compare actual student performance.

Measures

Combines the assessment Methodology and a Target – ask yourself:

- ❖ What data will allow us to determine whether the outcome has been met?
- ❖ Is the data attainable?
- ❖ How often should it be collected?
- ❖ Who is responsible for collection, analysis, reporting?
- ❖ When will the collection, analysis, reporting occur?

What is the Methodology?

Direct (most applicable to academic programs):

An assessment method designed to directly measure what a participant knows or is able to do. It requires demonstration of the skill or knowledge, such as write an essay.

Indirect (most applicable to service units):

An assessment method that indirectly measures what a target subject knows, can do or values (i.e., what a subject perceives or is satisfied with).

What is the Target? What is expected? What is success? Push the envelope! Should be hard to obtain. Example would be 95% of students can do (what ever task to ____ degree). The units satisfaction survey will result in 95% of those serviced as satisfied.

For example, **a measure could evaluate** the following:

- Experiential activities (e.g., internships, voluntary activities, etc.)
- Student work samples (e.g., case study responses, essay responses, etc.)
- Collection of products demonstrating extent of learning (portfolios)
- Surveys (students, alumni, etc.)
- Exit interviews
- Employment rates
- Retention/Graduation rates
- Focus groups
- Performance
- Efficiency
- Compliance
- Attitudes
- Process

Strive to develop **two assessment measures** for each outcome. Consider:

- What data will you need?
- Where/how will the data be collected?
- Are there mechanisms in place already to collect data?
- How often is the data collected?
- How will data be disseminated and discussed?

Information obtained from Northwestern State University of Louisiana (nsula.edu) and from American Association of Diabetes Educator (DiabetesEducator.org)