

Guidance for Writing and Improving Learning Outcomes Statements



Aspirational description for program-level learning outcomes:

*The learning outcomes are **clear, specific, measurable, student-focused**, and guide the development and assessment of the program. Outcomes describe learning with a level of specificity appropriate for a program. Outcome statements include a condition, action, and criterion for success. Program-level outcomes are general statements **reflective of the theories, practices, and methods of the discipline, which are meaningful to an audience of students, faculty, and staff.***

From the [UMD Learning Outcomes Assessment Guide](#), a learning outcome has three written components:

1. the condition (i.e., “After completion of the program/course/assignment”),
2. the action the student will be able to take (state, explain, describe, analyze, etc.), and
3. the criterion for success (what the student needs to know/do).

Attributes of Program Learning Outcomes statements. Consider the attributes that characterize strong learning outcome statements. Use this information to improve learning outcomes (LOs).			
Attribute	Another way to say this would be:	Signs there is a problem:	Suggestions for improving this attribute of your learning outcome statement:
Clear	<p>Legible, logical sentences, whose meaning is obvious.</p> <p>Its meaning is understandable (does not require disciplinary knowledge).</p> <p>Explicit.</p>	<p>The sentences are long, complex, hard to follow, confusing, or contains jargon.</p> <p>Includes multiple seemingly unrelated expectations that make unclear how a student might meet this outcome.</p>	<p>Consider precisely what you would like students to know or be able to do. Be explicit with the statement of the three components: the <i>condition</i> (At the <u>completion of the program</u> a student will be able to...), the <i>action verb</i> (for example, is this outcome aimed at “writing”? If so, the outcome would be most clear if stated as, “at the completion of this program students will be able to <u>write</u>...), and the <i>criterion for success</i> that reveals what the students should know or do (“... write <u>for the intended audience of the text</u>”).</p>
Student focused	<p>Places emphasis on the learner. The LO orients a student to the skills/knowledge/abilities they will gain from the program.</p>	<p>Student focused</p>	<p>Places emphasis on the learner. The LO orients a student to the skills/knowledge/abilities they will gain from the program.</p>

<p>Specific</p>	<p>The condition, action, and criterion of the outcome are clearly defined/identified and concrete.</p> <p>How specific? There is a range of specificity in LO language. LO language becomes broader, progressing from the assignment, to course level, to program level, and finally to the university level. <i>Assignment-level</i> LOs have the highest degree of specificity; they are the most detailed and constrained. For an assignment level outcome, you would expect that students would meet this outcome by completing the assignment. For a <i>program-level</i> outcome you would expect that the outcome <i>could not</i> be met within one course. To meet a program LO you would expect that students would need to have learning experiences across a few courses.</p>	<p><i>Too narrow for a program-level outcome</i>—this outcome could be met in one course or perhaps in one assignment.</p> <p><i>Too broad for a program-level outcome</i>—the outcome does not identify details that portray the learning of your program. For example, rather than referring to “communication skills, leadership skills, and critical thinking,” define learning the expectation in the context of your program (see information below about meaningful outcomes).</p>	<p>Write outcomes to support the hierarchy of learning from assignment, to course, to program.</p> <p>Can the expectation be met in one assignment? ➤ Assignment-level outcome</p> <p>Can the expectation be met in one course? ➤ Course-level outcome</p> <p>Does the expectation require a student to have a set of learning experiences that occur across courses, including perhaps courses at different levels (100- 400)? ➤ Program-level outcome</p>
<p>Measurable</p>	<p>The action verb <i>can be assessed</i>.</p> <p>The action verb is one of the three components of an LO statement—it should be an observable, behavioral element.</p> <p><i>How the LO is assessed (operational definition) will be described in methods for measure.</i> If LOs include more than one verb/criterion pair, it is essential that these are addressed in the assessment measure.</p>	<p>Does not include a verb/action.</p> <p>Too broad to measure. Ambiguous.</p> <p>Unclear how one would measure or demonstrate mastery.</p> <p>* Note that if the outcome is complex and includes more than one verb/criterion pair, then the measure (e.g., rubric) must address the discrete expectations. There must be criteria that allow “unpacking” to determine which criteria are met and not met.</p>	<p>Check for the action verb. Does the outcome include the action of interest by the program? Is this action what you expect students to do?</p> <p>Next, can you determine a method to measure the expectation described in the outcome?</p> <p>Does the measure reveal learning stated in the outcome?</p> <p>If not, does the outcome need revision? Or is a different assessment measure required?</p>

<p>Meaningful</p>	<p>Reflective of the theories, practices, and methods of the discipline, which are meaningful to an audience of students, faculty, and staff.</p> <p>Resonates with the faculty and students as important. Will help guide the development of the program. Will motivate student learning.</p>	<p>Superficial; not geared to the scholarship of the program or does not include skills and/or knowledge necessary for careers in the field. Does not highlight what is unique about the program. Faculty and students do not find the skills/knowledge meaningful for the program.</p>	<p>The outcome does reveal how this learning is particularly meaningful to your program. To make it more transparent why the outcome has meaning to your program, make the statement more detailed, add context and criteria that resonate with your faculty, or students, or perhaps alumni.</p>
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