



Developing High-Quality Learning Objectives

Overview

This fact sheet offers a brief guide for program managers to develop learning objectives when planning psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI) training. The task of creating these specific, performance-driven outcome statements is the single most important part of course design because it drives content development, materials and instructor selection and evaluation metrics development. By creating clear learning objectives, the instructor is better equipped to develop a course that will teach what is intended and subsequently to evaluate its short- and long-term impact and effectiveness.

Writing High-Quality Learning Objectives

Training programs have the greatest success when high-quality measurable learning objectives clearly communicate the intent of instruction at the beginning of the course and are consistently used to guide instructional activities. Learning objectives must not be so specific as to restrict instructor or learner ingenuity, nor so broad that the desired results are unclear. Ultimately, the question to be answered is, "What should learners know and be able to do at the end of the training program that they could not demonstrate before?" Well-written learning objectives should be measurable and include:

- An **action** word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated
- A **learning statement** that specifies what learning will be demonstrated
- A broad statement of the minimum **criterion** or standard that is considered acceptable performance
- An indication of the **timing** of when the desired learning is to be completed

Example: *At course end and given an adult head injury scenario, the learner will correctly identify a minimum of two physical and cognitive symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury.*

Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) - Important Input

Learning has been categorized into three domains of educational activities: knowledge (cognitive), skills (psychomotor) and attitudes (affective). When writing learning objectives, it is important to include elements of each of these. Descriptions and examples include:

Domain	Definition	Example
Knowledge	The information/content required for learners to develop the desired skills and attitudes.	By the end of the two-year course, the resident will recognize and articulate the criteria DSM-IV Multi-Axial Systems for Psychiatric Diagnosis in adults.
Skills	Activities required that contribute to learners' capability to effectively complete tasks.	By the end of the two-year course, the resident will administer and score the mental status exam.
Attitudes	Changes in beliefs, behaviors or values affecting the learner's approach to a skill.	By the end of the two-year course, the resident will demonstrate a caring, attentive manner when interviewing patients as evidenced by patient satisfaction surveys.

Summary: Why Learning Objectives Matter

In this context, learning is the extent to which participants develop knowledge, increase skills and change attitudes. Effective, well-designed learning objectives are categorized by KSA learning domains and written as four-part statements that identify the actions, learning statements, criteria and period of completion. These outcome statements create an important framework to evaluate a training program's overall effectiveness and serve as an implicit contract between instructor and learners.

About the DCoE Training & Education (T&E) directorate

The Training & Education (T&E) directorate's mission is to assess training and educational needs in order to identify and promote effective instructional material for stakeholders resulting in improved knowledge and practice of psychological health and TBI care.