Guidelines for Writing Learning Objectives

What do you want participants to be able to do as a result of this continuing education activity?

The learning objectives for your educational activity stem from a thorough needs assessment. The needs assessment will help you determine what gap(s) in physician knowledge, competency and/or behavior the educational activity will address and for what audience. Once you have determined the gap and audience, you must now decide how you want the activity to address the gap(s). Writing clear, concise learning objectives will identify what you want participants to do differently **as a result** of participating in your educational activity. In addition, the learning objectives help you measure if a change occurred after the conclusion of the activity.

The purpose of learning objectives is to:

- Facilitate educational activity development by promoting goal-directed planning
- Inform participants of the standards and expectations of educational activity

Two to five learning objectives are typical of activities provided by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Interprofessional Continuing Education Partnership (UW-Madison ICEP). Effective learning objectives are usually characterized by the following:

- Participant focused; to help maintain that emphasis, start learning objectives with "As a result of this program, participants will be able to…"
- Written with action words; employ a verb to specify the desired outcome and follow with a detailed description of the educational activity's content gap.
- SMART (Specific, measurable, acceptable to participants, realistic to achieve and time-bound). Learning objectives should be behavior-based and measurable; by keeping statements short and concise, it allows you to measure if a learning objective has been met. Also, it will assist the learner in recognizing when they have closed a gap in practice.

As you plan educational activities, keep in mind that the learning objectives will help you select faculty relevant to the topic of the activity. By having already identified the gaps that will be addressed by the educational activity, you can ask faculty to present information about one specific topic instead of asking a faculty member what they want to present.

Learning objectives are critical to potential participants' ability to determine if the educational activity will be relevant to their practice. Clearly defined learning objectives give your target audience direct information on what the educational activity will cover and how the information can be applied to their practice.

Checklist for Learning Objectives

Things to consider as you write learning objectives for a continuing education activity

- Are the learning objectives related to a goal for participants?
- Do the learning objectives answer the question, "What will participants be able to know or demonstrate at the end of this activity?"
- Are the learning objectives stated in clear, observable and measurable terms?
- Are the learning objectives realistically attainable by the end of the activity?
- Do the learning objectives match instructional activities and assessments?
- For an interprofessional activity designed for learners from more than one profession: Are the learning objectives consistent with one or more interprofessional competencies/practice domains (ie, values/ethics for interprofessional practice; roles/responsibilities; interprofessional communication; teams/teamwork)?

Learning objectives must be measurable and begin with an action verb. The following verb list is a guide to help you prepare your learning objectives. Because your activity is designed to change *competence* and/or *performance,* focus on words in Columns III-VI. The words in Columns I and II pertain to learning objectives addressing improvement in knowledge.

Note: This list is not exhaustive. Depending on context, the same verb may communicate different meaning. UW-Madison ICEP team may provide additional guidance in order to ensure compliance with accreditation criteria.

REVISED Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs

Definitions	I. Remembering	II. Understanding	III. Applying	IV. Analyzing	V. Evaluating	VI. Creating
Bloom's Definition	Exhibit memory of previously learned material by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts, and answers.	Demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptions, and stating main ideas.	Solve problems to new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different way.	Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.	Present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria.	Compile information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.
Verbs	• Choose • Define • Find • How • Label • List • Match • Name • Omit • Recall • Relate • Select • Show • Spell • Tell • What • When • Where • Which • Who • Why	• Classify • Compare • Contrast • Demonstrate • Explain • Extend • Illustrate • Infer • Interpret • Outline • Relate • Rephrase • Show • Summarize • Translate	• Apply • Build • Choose • Construct • Develop • Experiment with • Identify • Interview • Make use of • Model • Organize • Plan • Select • Solve • Utilize	• Analyze • Assume • Categorize • Classify • Compare • Conclusion • Contrast • Discover • Dissect • Distinguish • Divide • Examine • Function • Inference • Inspect • List • Motive • Relationships • Simplify • Survey • Take part in • Test for • Theme	• Agree • Appraise • Assess • Award • Choose • Compare • Conclude • Criteria • Criticize • Decide • Deduct • Defend • Determine • Disprove • Estimate • Evaluate • Explain • Importance • Influence • Interpret • Judge • Justify • Mark • Measure • Opinion • Perceive • Prioritize • Prove • Rate • Recommend • Rule on • Select • Support • Value	• Adapt • Build • Change • Choose • Combine • Compile • Compose • Construct • Create • Delete • Design • Develop • Discuss • Elaborate • Estimate • Formulate • Happen • Imagine • Improve • Invent • Make up • Maximize • Minimize • Modify • Original • Originate • Plan • Predict • Propose • Solution • Solve • Suppose • Test • Theory

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing, Abridged Edition. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.