Writing Course Objectives
A Guide for Quality Matters Reviews at Columbia Gorge Community College
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Introduction and Overview

Quality Matter Standards:

• 2.1 The course learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable.
• 2.2 The module/unit learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.
• 2.3 All learning objectives are stated clearly and written from the students’ perspective.

What are good learning objectives?
A sound learning objective is an intent communicated by a statement describing a proposed change in a learner leading to a pattern of behavior that is observable and measurable.

In other words, what can a learner do after his or her time with you that he or she couldn’t do before?

Good objectives should:

• Give the learner clear expectations of the course/unit.
• Inform the selection of instructional materials and the instructional strategy.
• Mirror the assessment strategy.

Forbidden terms
Here are some “forbidden” terms below to assist you in creating measurable objectives: understand, learn, know, become acquainted with, realize, recognize, internalize, appreciate, believe.

Terminal and Enabling Objectives
Two terms that are helpful to think about are terminal and enabling objectives.

Terminal objective=course objective (QM standard 2.1): What students should be able to do when the course is done.

Enabling objective=module/unit objective (QM standard 2.2): What students need to be able to do during the course to achieve the terminal objectives (subordinate to the terminal objective).
The Peanut Butter and Jelly Example:

Here is an example of a bad learning objective:
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to understand the basics of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Here are examples of a good terminal learning objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

– Select appropriate ingredients for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

– Assemble a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

– Consume a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

– Properly dispose of sandwich remains.

If we take the first terminal objective, select appropriate ingredients for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, we can break it down into module and pre-requisite skills.
Terminal objective: Select appropriate ingredients for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Course-level objectives

Enabling objective: Differentiate between different types of breads.

Enabling objective: Identify types of jellies and jams, including flavors appropriate for PB&J sandwiches.

Enabling objective: List the features of the different varieties of peanut butter.

Enabling objective: Describe accommodations for those with dietary preferences and/or restrictions.

Module/unit-level objectives

Entry skill: Define bread

Entry skill: Define jelly and jam

Entry skill: Define peanut butter

Enabling objective: Explain the purpose of gluten-free bread.

Enabling objective: Explain the purpose of low-sugar jelly.

Pre-requisite skills
Self-check questions

*Do you need to work on your course level objective?* Ask yourself:
What can students do, after taking your course, that they couldn’t do before?

*Do you need to work on module objectives?* Ask yourself:
What must students be able to do before accomplishing the course objectives?
This gives you your subordinate (module-level) objectives.
Be sure to differentiate between subordinate objectives and entry-skills.

*Do you have objectives that are immeasurable, vague or “fuzzy”?* Ask yourself:
How are you planning on assessing this objective?
- Multiple choice: define, identify
- Fill-in-the-blank: recall, name, recite
- Essay: [prompt] = objectives
- Project: [final product] = objectives

*Are you stuck?* Ask yourself:
Your student is going to work at an entry-level job in the area of this course. What is he/she going to do at work? What earns him/her a paycheck?”
This will hopefully, at the least, giving you a jumping-off point.