

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 measureable.

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

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

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

Entry skill: Define peanut butter

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.