

Writing Outcomes

Guidelines for Writing Outcomes Statements

Why does it matter how outcomes are written?

It is important to ensure that outcomes are properly written. When outcomes are not well-written, numerous problems arise. Outcomes that are neither clear nor specific make it unlikely that each individual instructor will interpret their meaning in the same way and, therefore, it will be difficult for course and program outcomes to be consistently achieved. It will also make it difficult for the student to have a clear understanding of what they will be able to do upon course completion. Outcomes that do not describe observable actions or are not measurable are extremely difficult (or impossible) to assess, which will make it unlikely that instructors will be able to determine the extent of student achievement and respond to those determinations.

Well-written outcomes provide instructors with clear, common, overarching goals to pursue in their curriculum and instructional practice, and they describe observable actions that can be measured, tested, or verified ultimately for the sake of improvement. Also, among the most important reasons outcomes should be well-written is so that *students* have a clear understanding of what exactly they are expected to know and be able to do when they complete a course or program. When writing outcomes, consider the characteristics of well-written outcomes below. See the next page for specific examples.

Characteristics of Well-Written Outcomes

Focus	Outcomes statements should focus on the “end” of a course or program rather than the “means” through which students learned. They should identify what students will be able to demonstrate or produce <i>as a result of</i> what they have learned.
Clarity	Outcomes statements should be written with enough specificity, clarity, and meaning, as well as use language that is widely understood, to ensure they are consistently interpreted by instructors.
Scope	Outcomes statements should be neither too broad nor too narrow, represent fundamental results of the course, and speak to the aggregate of skills mastered, concepts understood, and knowledge acquired.
Relevance	Outcomes statements should be rigorous and comprehensive, they should adhere to disciplinary standards and priorities, and they should be realistic and represent college-level work.
Expression	Outcomes statements should use concrete action verbs that describe definite, observable actions (explain, describe, evaluate vs. understand, know, appreciate).
Measurability	Outcomes statements should be measurable, testable, or verifiable.

Writing Outcomes, cont.

Poorly vs. Well-Written Outcomes

Focus

Focus is on the means...

Identify and describe the types of techniques marketers use to persuade consumers to buy a product.

Focus is on the end...

Develop a marketing plan that utilizes a variety of persuasion techniques to promote a product.

Clarity

Vague...

Use a variety of strategies for reading and engaging with a range of material.

Clear and specific...

Use the historical method to summarize a historical primary source document.

Scope

Too broad...

Demonstrate a knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology and of sudden illness or injury.

Neither too broad nor too narrow...

Assess the condition of an emergency patient to determine proper treatments to stabilize their condition.

Relevance

Represents lower-level work...

Write a paragraph in complete sentences.

Represents college-level work...

Compose expository or persuasive essays that conform to best practices in writing.

Expression

Describes unobservable actions...

Understand good customer communication skills.

Describes observable actions...

Describe best practices in customer relations through written or oral communications.

Measurability

Unmeasurable...

Think about biological issues as they relate to current events, new developments in research, and emerging technology.

Measurable...

Explain how fundamental principles of biology are at work in biology-related current events, research developments, or new technologies.