

What is a learning outcome?

Learning outcomes are statements of what students will learn in a class or in a class session. The statements are focused on student learning (What will students learn today?) rather than instructor teaching (What am I going to teach today?). These statements should include a verb phrase and an impact ("in order to") phrase -- what students will do/be able to do and how they will apply that skill or knowledge.

Sample Learning Outcomes for Library Instruction

- Students will be able to search a database using boolean logic and flexible vocabulary in order to retrieve articles that are on-target and topic-relevant.
- Students will know the name and contact information for their subject librarian in order to get subject specific library help.
- Students will be able to develop topic-relevant vocabulary in order to search databases with maximum flexibility and effectiveness.
- Students will be able to use a thesaurus or controlled language list in order to select topic relevant vocabulary.
- Students will be able to construct a search statement using topic-relevant and controlled vocabulary in order to search databases with maximum effectiveness.

How do I write learning outcomes?

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (published in 1956 and revised in 2001) gives you a way to express learning outcomes in a way that reflects cognitive skills.

There are five levels (lowest to highest cognitive skills):

- Knowledge/remembering
- Comprehension/understanding
- Application/applying
- Analysis/analyzing
- Evaluation/evaluating
- Synthesis/creating

You can use Bloom's taxonomy to identify verbs to describe student learning.

Examples of learning outcomes verbs for library instruction include:

- Knowledge/Remembering: define, list, recognize
- Comprehension/Understanding: characterize, describe, explain, identify, locate, recognize, sort

- Application/Applying: choose, demonstrate, implement, perform
- Analysis/Analyzing: analyze, categorize, compare, differentiate
- Evaluation/Evaluating: assess, critique, evaluate, rank, rate
- Synthesis/Creating: construct, design, formulate, organize, synthesize

There are some verbs to avoid when writing learning outcomes. These verbs are vague and often not observable or measurable. For example, how would you measure whether someone has "become familiar with" a particular tool? Use a more specific verb. If you want students to "understand" something, think more closely about what you want them to be able to do or produce as a result of their "understanding."

Verbs to avoid:

- Understand
- Appreciate
- Know about
- Become familiar with
- Learn about
- Become aware of

How do I use learning outcomes in my teaching practice?

When you have concrete and specific learning outcomes like the ones above, you can use those learning outcomes to assess student learning through worksheets or one-minute papers where students demonstrate that they have met the learning outcome.

What about the framework?

The framework encourages practitioners to craft their LOs locally. While this gives librarians some level of freedom, it can also be ambiguous. Try to think about what students would need to master before they could master that frame.

Other resources: