

What is the Difference between Learning Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes?

Learning Objectives...

- Describe the goals and intentions of the professor who teaches the course.
- Focus on the content and skills important within the classroom or program.
- Describe what the staff and faculty will do.
- State the purpose and goals of the course.
- Can be numerous, specific, and detailed.

Student Learning Outcomes...

- Describe or list essential, measurable mastered content, reflecting skills, competencies, and knowledge that students can demonstrate successfully upon completing a course.
- Express higher-level thinking skills that integrate course content and activities and can be observed as a behavior, skill, or discrete usable knowledge upon completing the course.
- Are exactly what Assessments show that the student is able to do upon completing the course.
- Is an end-product that can be displayed or observed and evaluated against criteria.
- Are clear and measurable criteria for guiding the teaching, learning, and assessment process in the course.

Objectives are collections of words and/or pictures and diagrams intended to let others know what you intend for your students to achieve.

- They are related to intended outcomes, rather than the process for achieving those outcomes.
- **They are specific and measurable, rather than broad and intangible.**
- They are concerned with students, not teachers. (Mager, 1997, p. 3)

Outcomes answer questions such as:

- By the end of a program of study, what do you want students to be able to do?
- How can your students demonstrate the knowledge the program intended them to learn?

Student learning outcomes are statements developed by faculty that answer these questions, typically expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, or values. ([Tarr, 2014](#))

Characteristics of Student Learning Outcomes:

- Describe what students should be able to demonstrate, represent or produce based on their learning histories. (Maki, 2010)
- Rely on active verbs that identify what students should be able to demonstrate, represent, or produce over time. (Maki, 2010)

Below is a clear example of these differences from Indiana University's Center for Teaching and Learning:

Action Verbs

Sample Learning Outcome: Students will **analyze** and **interpret** statistical data s they support decision-making processes throughout an organization.

Demonstrated Learning

Action Verb

Sample Learning Outcome: Students will **evaluate** the impact of monetary policy on the economy.

Demonstrated Learning

What Do We Mean By Measurable?

*"Lecturing is something an instructor does to help the student to learn; it is part of the process of instruction. But a lecture is not the **purpose** of the instruction. The purpose of the instruction is to facilitate learning. So when teachers teach (process), they do it because they hope that students will learn (the results or outcome). (Mager, 1997, p. 5)*

Measurable vs. Unmeasurable

An objective and an outcome is considered measurable when it describes a tangible outcome. For example, objectives/outcome that describe intended that you can see or hear are measurable. An objective that says, "Be able to tie a knot," is measurable because we can see knot-tying behavior and therefore assess whether it meets out expectations." These expectations are assessed via exams, quizzes, discussions, and/or project submissions produced by students to prove their learning. On the other hand, a statement that says, "Be able to internalize a growing awareness of confidence," is not only not measurable, it can't even be called objective. What would (be) measured? What would you watch a student do to decide whether or not the internalizing had occurred to your satisfaction? The statement doesn't say. (Mager, 1997, p. 10)

Importance of Action Verbs

- Action verbs result in overt behavior that can be observed and measured. (Use Bloom's Digital Taxonomy on the next page of this learning module when constructing student learning outcomes.)
- Certain verbs are unclear or relate to covert, internal behaviors that cannot be observed or measured. These types of verbs should be avoided (e.g., appreciate, become aware of, become familiar with, know, learn, and understand). ([Kheiry 2010](#), [Tarr, 2014](#))