CC COLORADO COLLEGE

Offices & Services

ASSESSMENT

Writing & Evaluating Outcomes

A learning outcome has three components

1. A phrase or sentence beginning "Students can" or "Students are able to"
2. A verb that captures the action the student will be able to take the demonstrates the knowledge (articulate, explain, describe...) or skill (analyze, design, write, develop, create, test...) in question
3. A concluding phrase that elaborates on the verb (explain how socialization works in everyday life; analyze DNA using electrophoresis)

Strong Versus Weak Learning Outcomes

The below table compares strong and weak learning outcomes.

Strong Direct Learning Outcomes	Weak Direct Learning Outcomes
Flow from curricular goals	Unrelated to curricular goals or goals are treated as outcomes
Meaningful: get at faculty interests regarding student learning of relevant knowledge/skills	Not meaningful; selected for ease rather than actual value or meaningfulness; perhaps chosen in a hurry or under pressure

Strong Direct Learning Outcomes	Weak Direct Learning Outcomes
Focus on skills/knowledge to be gained in a specific course, minor, or major	Not meaningful; selected for ease rather than actual value or meaningfulness; perhaps chosen in a hurry or under pressure
Outcome verbs are sharp clear, and specific (write, calculate, explain, predict, describe, create, analyze, evaluate…) and make it crystal-clear what students should know and be able to do at the end of the course/minor/major	Outcome verbs are vague (understand, comprehend, demonstrate an understanding of) and don't really get at the intended outcome (how exactly students demonstrate "understanding" or "comprehension"?)
One verb per learning outcome	Multiple verbs per learning outcome
Brief and to the point – bullet-point length is fine in most cases. "Students will be able to…"	Wordy, packing in multiple ideas and perhaps including assessment demonstrations, which are ideally separated from the outcomes
Readily observable/demonstrable/measurable through a thoughtful assessment process	Not easy to observe/demonstrate/measure, usually because the verbs are not clear

Strong Direct Learning Outcomes	Weak Direct Learning Outcomes
Manageable: not too many outcomes (not more than 8 for a course; not more than 20 for a department/program, and fewer can be better)	Unmanageable: too many outcomes, overwhelming as departments/programs try to figure out what to assess and when
Discipline-specific much of the time	Overwhelmingly general education skills, even within a department/program

Inviting Students to Help You Evaluate Outcomes

In most cases this table should enable you to evaluate how strong your learning outcomes are, but you might also discuss learning outcome ideas with students with whom you are particularly close (senior advisees, research students) to see how the student would answer questions such as the following:

- Does the learning outcome make sense?
- Is the learning outcome written clearly?
- Does the learning outcome relate to knowledge or skills already learned by the student?
- Does the learning outcome relate to knowledge or skills that the student expects to learn in the course or during the major or minor?