

Developing learning objectives

Learning objectives describe what students should gain from taking a course. Well-defined learning objectives will help students to assess their growth in a course and help educators evaluate student success.

Objectives can be broken down into two general categories: things that you want students to understand and things that you want students to be able to do.

Understanding

Understanding is the foundation of any successful learning. It almost goes without saying that students should gain some degree of knowledge when taking a course. However, students can demonstrate various degrees of understanding, based on the specific needs of the course. For example, it might be good enough that a student can name a group of proteins, but they don't need to be able to explain how these proteins interact to a peer. For other topics in the course, the deeper level of understanding is crucial.

As an educator, it's important that you define your expectations for these nuances so that students can focus on what is truly important and not get stuck focusing on work that may not be relevant to your overall goals.

Fill in the table below with some bullet points about what you need students to know across these three levels of understanding. Start with the Expert category - it's easier to fill in the Intermediate and Beginner categories once you know the highest level expectations.

| Expert | Intermediate | Beginner |
|--|--|---|
| Could hold a conversation about the topic, debating nuances with another informed person | Could explain the concept to someone with some knowledge in the area and do some analysis of the topic | Could list details about a topic, but might need to reference notes to do |
| | | |

Turning ideas into objectives

Take each bullet point and refactor it into a sentence. Add a descriptor verb to each bullet point to identify which level of understanding you expect of students.

For bullet points listed under the Expert category, use verbs such as: analyze, evaluate, and examine. For Intermediate: discuss, compare, and apply. For Beginner: describe, name, list, and recall. This is not an exclusive list. The point is to avoid using language which we tend to over-rely on, such as "understand" or "know" for learning objectives which actually require deeper levels of understanding.

Doing

When students apply what they've learned, they often reinforce their knowledge and sometimes even learn new things. In professional studies, knowledge application is crucial. Student need to be able to do something with the information and skills they're learning. As educators, it's important to be able to identify what you want students to do with their knowledge.

Fill in the table below with some actionable tasks that students should be able to perform after taking your course. Think about real-world applications of your teaching. We've started you off with a few examples.

| Action | Deliverable | Content + Context |
|--------|-------------|-------------------|
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Turning ideas into objectives

In brainstorming, you've actually likely created the entire learning objective. Nice work! If you're struggling to come up with your "understanding" objectives, try using this formula: Action > Deliverable > Content + Context.



Want some feedback on how you did? The Learning Design team is happy to review your learning objectives. Just send us an email at gpsfaculty@brandeis.edu.