

How to Write a Clear Learning Objective – A Suggested Approach

Step One: Learning objectives begin with the phrase.

“By the end of the conference, the participant will be able.....”

Step Two: Connect step one with an action verb or a phrase which communicates the performance by the learner (see sample verbs listed below)

Step Three: Finish with the specifics of what the learner will be doing when demonstrating achievement or mastery of the objective.

SAMPLE VERBS

COGNITIVE THOUGHT PROCESSES

SIMPLE <-----> COMPLEX
Knowledge Comprehension Application Analysis Synthesis Evaluation

Sample performance verbs:

Knowledge: recall, select, identify, define, list, state, indicate, draw, match, name, record, relate.

Comprehension: discuss, describe, summarize, give examples, recognize, translate, conclude, explain, classify, express.

Application: demonstrate, solve, interpret, apply, operate, report, locate, illustrate, practice, use.

Analysis: distinguish, classify, compare and contrast, analyze, calculate, criticize, differentiate, examine, test.

Synthesis: design, hypothesize, diagnose, formulate, organize, arrange, construct, assemble, compose, propose.

Evaluation: assess, justify, critique, establish, measure, recommend, test, determine, evaluate, judge, rate, select, score.

SAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Original (vague)

This course will cover:

1. Appropriate decision-making about whom to treat medically.
2. Appropriate decision-making about whom to treat medically.

Improved (explicit)

By the end of the course the physician will be able to:

1. Assess relevant clinical features of angina with pertinent differential diagnosis.
2. Develop criteria to determine which angina pectoris patients to treat medically vs. surgically.

In summary, writing simple, explicit learner objectives forces the instructor to ask, "What do I want the physician to know or be able to do as a result of my teaching?" Later, those same objectives can easily be used as evaluation questions, enabling the instructor to determine whether the physician did indeed master the subject. It also helps the prospective attendee determine whether the CME activity is appropriate for his or her educational needs. Ultimately, CME activities will be improved by having clearly stated objectives and by better marketing, realistic expectations, better instructional methods, evaluation and long-term event effectiveness.