

WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

WHAT ARE LEARNING OBJECTIVES?

Learning objectives are guiding statements that benefit all people who interact with the content of a course.

“LEARNING OBJECTIVES ARE NOT A LIST OF WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO TEACH. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ARE A LIST OF WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO DO.” (SHANK, P. 1).

Learning Objectives help...

- ... the curriculum **designer** focus on statements that will guide which learning experiences need to be developed
- ... the **instructor/trainer** know what knowledge and skills they need to teach and measure in a course
- ... the **participant/student** easily identify what it is they are expected to know and do in order to be successful in a course

STEP 1

IDENTIFY KEY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL LEARN)

First, identify the desired results of your program (Hadley, 2007, p. 1). Determine what knowledge or skills your participants need to learn to successfully complete your course.

1. Write a statement describing the overall goal of your course.
Example: *By the end of this course, I want participants to be effective product owners.*
2. Determine what big ideas or concepts are key components of your course goal.
Example: *Refining the product backlog is highly important.*
Example: *Using open communication to keep stakeholders involved in the process is also important.*
3. Make a list of the knowledge and skills participants need to have to grasp these big ideas.
Example: They need to know what a product backlog, stakeholder, user stories, etc. are.
Example: They need to be able to build a product backlog, evaluate user stories, communicate with stakeholders, etc.

As you work through the three steps above, remember that they all build on each other. This will help you determine if you are missing anything important OR if you have items that are not relevant.

If, in your list you have a knowledge or skill item that does not relate to the big idea or overall goal of the course, then it is not relevant and likely should only be covered as an accessory item.

STEP 2

SELECT AN ACTION WORD FOR EACH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL ON YOUR LIST

Using the list of key knowledge and skills you want participants to learn, select a measurable action word that aligns with how the knowledge or skill will be demonstrated in the course.

For each item in your list, identify an action word using Bloom's Taxonomy (see below) based on the type of knowledge or skill that item represents.

For example:

- If I want participants to **know what a product backlog is**, I may choose the action word **describe**, because this is a basic knowledge item (*remember previously learned information*).
- If I want participants to **communicate with stakeholders**, I may choose the action word **illustrate**, because this skill is an application (*apply knowledge to actual situations*) of basic communication knowledge.
- If I want participants to **evaluate user stories**, I may choose the action words **compare and contrast**, because this skill represents the participant's ability to analyze something (*break down objects or ideas into simpler parts*).

TIP: AVOID THE USE OF "LEARN," "UNDERSTAND," AND "KNOW." THESE ARE NOT OBSERVABLE AND MEASURABLE, AND MAY LEAD TO UNCLEAR AND INEFFECTIVE STATEMENTS.

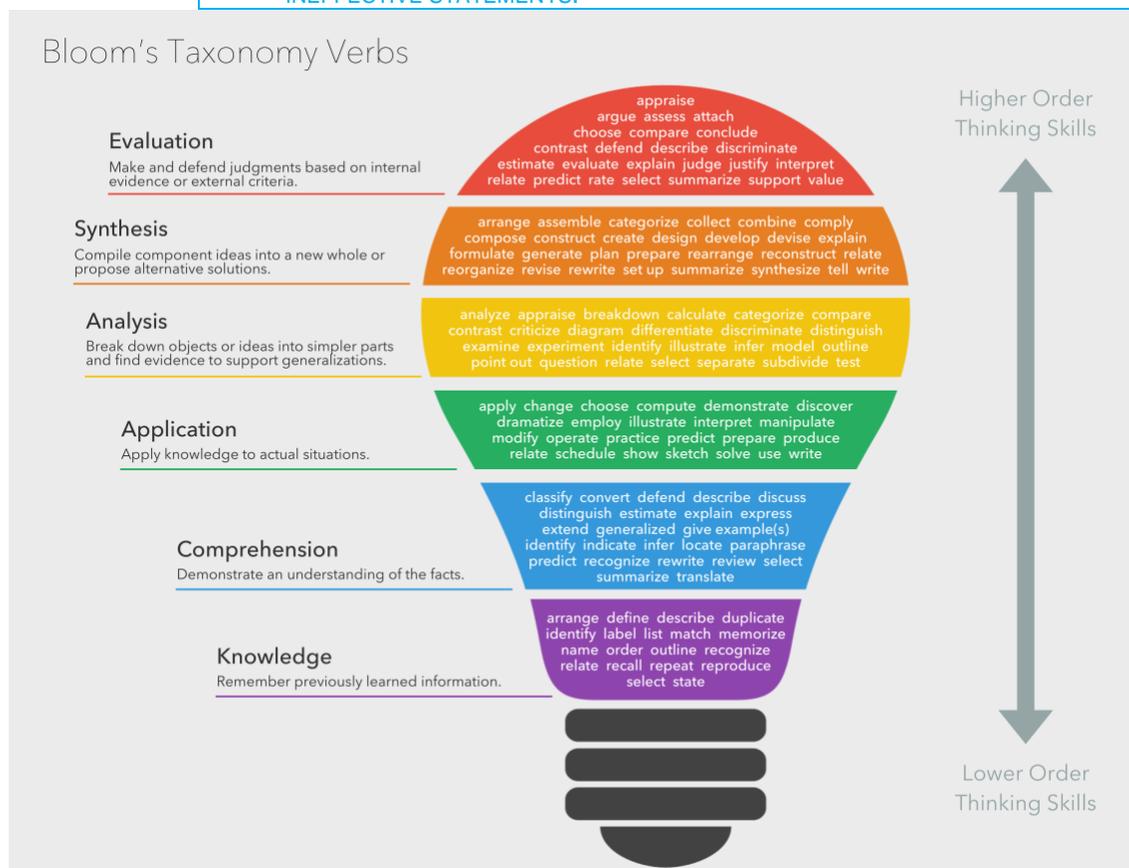


Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy Verbs by [Fractus Learning](#) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

STEP 3

USE AN EASY-TO-READ FORMAT

“A STANDARD [OF LEARNING] ANSWERS THE QUESTION, ‘WHERE AM I GOING IN MY LEARNING?’ WHILE LEARNING [OBJECTIVES] SHOW STUDENTS THE PATH TO GET THERE.” (GOODWIN, 2009, P. 90).

Now that you have an appropriate action word for each of the knowledge and skill items you’ll teach in your course, it’s time to write the statement for what participants will accomplish. It’s important that your statements are easy to read and have a consistent format.

Template: ① sentence stem ② action word ③ what knowledge/skill will be taught by ④ how this will be accomplished

- ① Start with a common **sentence stem** at the beginning of each statement:

Example: *Upon successful completion of this course, the learner will be able to...*

Example: *At the conclusion of the course/unit/module, students should be able to...* (The University of Vermont)

Example: *Participants will be able to...*

TIP: NO NEED TO REWRITE THIS STARTER STATEMENT FOR EACH LEARNING OBJECTIVE. SAVE TIME AND SPACE BY WRITING IT ONCE AND THEN BEGIN EACH NEW LEARNING OBJECTIVE WITH “...”

- ② With your sentence stem, add in the **action word** you selected in Step 2.

EX: Define, evaluate, list, discuss, perform, practice, etc.

TIP: MAKE SURE EACH OBJECTIVE INCLUDES ONLY ONE ACTION AND ONE CONTENT PART. (HADLEY, 2007, P. 3).

- ③ Write about the **what** your participants will learn regarding the specific knowledge or skills that will be presented in the course.

Example: three characteristics of the product backlog

TIP: IF YOU ARE WRITING STATEMENTS FOR OTHER PEOPLE WHO WILL USE THEM TO DESIGN CONTENT, CONSIDER INCLUDING EXAMPLES.

- ④ Describe **how** this will be done in the course by stating the learning activity students will accomplish.

Example: labeling parts of a product backlog

TIP: THIS SHOULD BE SIMPLIFIED AND REPRESENT THE LEARNING ACTIVITY DONE IN THE COURSE. IN OTHER WORDS, USE HIGH LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

If you wrote objectives using the template above, you should have something that looks like this:

- ① Upon successful completion of this course, the learner will be able to...
- ... ② describe ③ three characteristics of the product backlog ④ by labeling parts of the product backlog.
 - ... ② illustrate ③ two ways to communicate with stakeholders ④ by participating in a skit.
 - ... ② compare and contrast ③ user stories ④ by dissecting example user stories from other groups.

STEP 4

REVIEW EACH LEARNING OBJECTIVE TO ENSURE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

A learning objective should be clear, brief, and measurable. Read each of your statements and **if you can answer yes** to the three questions below, your learning objectives should be good to use. **If you cannot answer yes**, rework your learning objective.

- **Clear:** Can any person read this statement and immediately understand the knowledge or skill they will gain as a result of being in your course?
 - Any learner of this course should be able to read this statement and immediately know the knowledge or skill(s) they will gain by the end of the course.
 - Keep it plain and understandable by avoiding confusing language, obscure terms, and wordy statements.
- **Brief:** Is this statement short enough that a person can read and comprehend it with little effort?
 - The statement should be short and straight to the point.
 - If your learning objective requires more than one read through or is multiple sentences in length, your statement is likely too long. This may indicate that you may be trying to put multiple objectives into one statement. Tip: You can fix this by breaking it up into individual statements.
- **Measurable:** Is this learning objective something my participants can talk about, perform, or demonstrate in the course?
 - The learning objective should be able to be measured or assessed to determine whether the learner gained the key knowledge or skill(s) stated.
 - If there is no way your participants can demonstrate the knowledge or skill you address, your objective may need to be revised for the course or audience.

References

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