

Student Learning Outcomes Quick Guide:

For Academic Programs and Courses



*Prepared by Accreditation,
Assessment and Learning,
Fall 2021*

assessment@kent.edu

Sources:

Chaplot & Stute. (2008). Mt. San Antonio College: A guidebook to student learning outcomes and administrative unit objectives.

Kerns, J.A. (2020, June). Best practices in writing SLOs. In AALHE 2020 Conference.

Suskie, L. (2018). Assessing student learning: A common sense guide. (3rd Ed.).

<https://www.kent.edu/aal/assessment-student-learning>

INTRODUCTION

Learning outcomes, at a conceptual level, are the result of a person taking in information you provide. Think about a course completer or program graduate. What kind of course/program experience would allow for the greatest student success? As a result of this course/program:

- *What should this student learn?*
- *What will this student be able to do?*
- *What kind of skills or values will this student possess?*



The following three factors help ensure that a learning outcome has a solid foundation:



• Central - Make certain any learning outcome you develop is central to your course and program/department's mission.



• Feasible - State your outcome in a way that is measurable given the resources (human, time, technological, etc.) at hand.



• Meaningful - Are you selecting the outcome because it is easy to measure or because you really think it is important?

Developing Outcomes – use the following template when constructing a learning outcome:

[¹Target population] will [²cognitive action verb] [³context specific action]

¹Target Population Examples:

- *Programs: Students who earn a _ (degree)_ in _ (program)_ will...*
- *Courses: Students who complete _ (course)_ will...*

²Cognitive Action Verbs: References to Bloom's taxonomy verbs

- [Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching](#)
- [Iowa State Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching](#)

³Context Specific Action:

- *Keep specific to the program or course – topic/concept students would not be able to learn, value or gain skill without this specific educational experience*

Examples of Student Learning Outcomes:

Program Learning Outcome (PLOs):

[Students who earn a BS in Crop Science] will [apply crop plant management techniques] [to achieve high agricultural field yields].

Course Learning Outcome (CLOs):

[Students who complete World Crop Distribution 10100] will [identify the types of naturally occurring plant communities] [in different geographic locations around the world].

Criteria that make a student learning outcome assessable:

	Observable action What's inside the student's head is not directly observable (i.e., <u>avoid</u> using understand, know, value). Choose actions like create, describe, analyze, apply, etc. that faculty can physically observe.
	Single action Avoid “and”. If referring to more than one concept, likely another outcome is needed (unless synthesizing two concepts -> integrate, synthesize).
	Be succinct Keep it simple and specific to the discipline. Plus, words are precious real estate on a syllabus, catalog or website.
	Measurable Measurements are imperative, though <u>not</u> mentioned in the outcome itself, but on the syllabus or assessment plan.
	One moment in time Keep the end in mind. Avoid comparative verbs (e.g., improve); instead set a threshold.
	Specific to academic discipline Skill, body of knowledge, level of mastery students should <u>not</u> have known <u>before</u> academic experience!

BEWARE of “FAUX” SLOs:

	Inputs and Experiences e.g., “Students will successfully complete an internship,” “Students will study X,” “Students will explore X,” “Students will successfully pass X course.”
	Student Achievement Outcomes e.g., “Students will be prepared for entry-level jobs in the field,” “Students will have the foundation needed for graduate school admission,” “Students will obtain a peer-reviewed publication.”
	Self-reports e.g., “Students will reflect on how much they’ve learned about X.” Note: reflections alone aren’t enough, but with appropriate prompts faculty can measure the reflective growth, i.e., via rubrics.

Common Learning Outcome Questions, Misconceptions and Considerations:

How many outcomes should a unit have?

Three to five is very common

Measures included in the Outcomes (Misconception)

While not embedded in the outcome language itself, after developing the outcome decide HOW you will know students are achieving the outcome. Best practice is from learning artifacts (e.g., assignments, research papers, specific test questions) or performance-based activities (e.g., presentations, performances, etc.) graded by rubrics with criteria that reflect the outcome(s).

Equity-minded assessment (putting ALL students first)

Ensure outcomes are understood by those we expect to achieve them (no jargon) and ubiquitous - following the recommendations above is a great start! Provide measurements using multiple approaches and modalities. Inquiring directly with students if measurements are working is an equitable assessment practice.

Reminder: Academic major programs must submit annual [programmatic assessment reports](#) by September 30, which includes an overview of the academic program’s mission, key learning outcomes, measures to assess progress toward learning outcomes, annual findings and a description of how the assessment data are used by the program for improvement (e.g., curriculum changes, delivery of course, professional development).

Still have questions or would like to discuss further with your academic unit? Email assessment@kent.edu