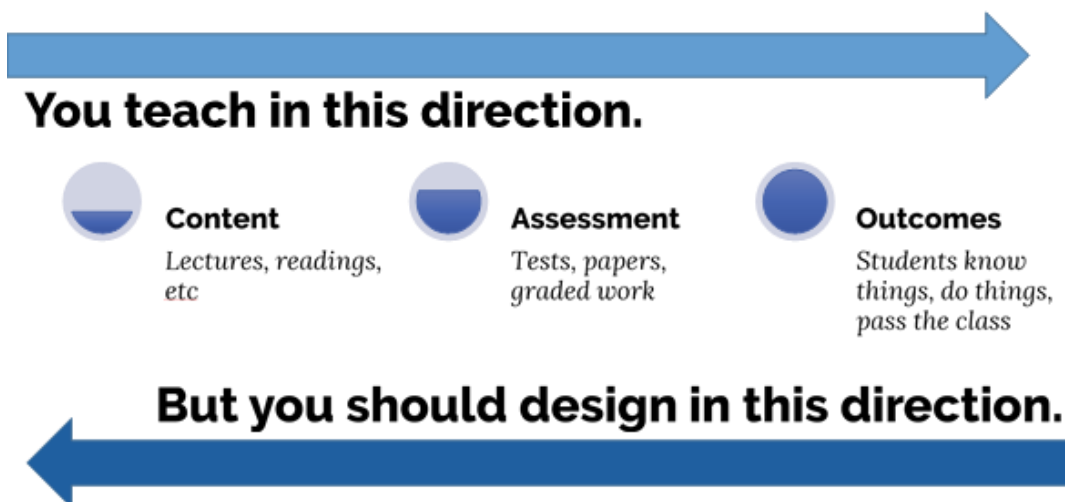


THE 3-PAGE GUIDE *to* COURSE DESIGN

A quick how-to on the basics of backwards design
to help you easily create a course that is
intentional, aligned, and produces *measurable outcomes*.



1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES aka STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

outcome objective?

These are often used interchangeably or (perhaps unintelligibly) indistinguishably...

And actually, that's ok!

Because a **learning objective** is the framing and stating of what you hope will be the **students' learning outcomes** after having successfully completed your course. Don't worry about mixing up the terms in practical usage.

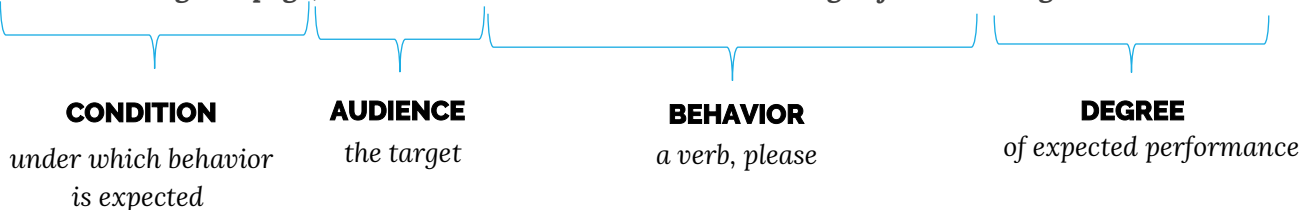
HOW TO WRITE GOOD OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE SMART:

Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time-Bound

OBJECTIVES SHOULD FOLLOW THE ABCDS:

After reviewing this page, instructors will be able to write learning objectives using ABCD structure.



Now you try – fill in the table with an objective.

CONDITION	AUDIENCE	BEHAVIOR	DEGREE
After completing this course,	students	will will be able to [+ verb]	according to with a score of using etc

VERBS TO AVOID

In general, there are some verbs you should avoid because they are **not measurable or observable**:

understand **know**
explore **appreciate**
demonstrate **learn**
improve **be aware of/familiar with**

In general, there are some verbs you may avoid because they are **not rigorous enough** for higher education (especially graduate courses):

recall **define**
recognize **identify**
describe **summarize**

2 USING OBJECTIVES TO BUILD ASSESSMENTS

Now that you have some solid learning objectives for your course, the next step is to create assessments that actually measure whether those objectives are being met.

Objective

After reviewing this page, instructors will be able to write learning objectives using ABCD structure.

Assessment

Ask the instructor to demonstrate their achievement by writing objectives. Use a rubric to evaluate whether they have met the expectation.

TIP #1: An important aspect of course alignment is that your outcome behaviors must match the methods you use to assess them.

So, if your objective is that students will “describe” a process, you should not expect to assess it via a multiple choice exam. Be sure you are writing objectives that you can assess, and that you are assessing them as written!

RUBRICS MAKE LIFE SIMPLE

A rubric will make it clear to you and your students how their performance on assessments will be scored. When designed well, rubrics speed up grading and minimize subjectivity.

Rubric

Criteria	Notes	Score
Objective includes “Audience.”		/5
“Behavior” is measurable and appropriate to the audience.		/10
Objective includes “Condition” under which performance is expected.		/5
Objective includes “Degree” of expected performance.		/5
Objective is SMART overall.		/10

CONSIDER INCREASING GRANULARITY

As you develop objectives for your overall course, you may find that it becomes easier to break them down into smaller, lesson- or module-based objectives for more straightforward and frequent assessment.

Perhaps your course outcomes include students producing a 20-page analysis of a topic. Each module could address and assess just one section of that paper, effectively scaffolding the student into a more significant achievement.

3 CURATING OR DEVELOPING THE CONTENT

Once you establish what you expect students **to be able to do** and how you will **know they have achieved it**, then you know exactly what and how you need to **teach them**.

FIRST, CHECK YOURSELF.

Do the topics you planned to teach still “fit” now that you know what you want the students to be able to do when they complete your course, and how you plan to assess them? This is the time to reconsider your ideas about the content before moving on.

KEEP THINKING BACKWARDS.

Going back to the example (and imagining the stated objective as an outcome – see Page 1 for a reminder about terminology):

Outcome

After reviewing this page, instructors will be able to write learning objectives using ABCD structure.

Assessment

Ask the instructor to demonstrate their achievement by writing objectives. Use a rubric to evaluate whether they have met the expectation.

Lesson

Present background information on objectives/outcomes, break down the components, and provide an example of what ABCD objectives look like. Then give instructors a chance to practice writing them.

Now turn this around to the “teaching direction” and what you have is tightly aligned, well-defined instruction that is essentially guaranteed to produce valid and defensible measurements of student learning.

TIP #2: Don't be afraid to use existing content for your lessons—or create your own REUSABLE content--when appropriate. Open Educational Resources (OER) can be helpful and are plentiful online.

It is completely acceptable if some of the material you teach is not original! Also, Fair Use copyright guidelines allow some flexibility for educational purposes even if the source was not originally intended for such uses.

APPENDIX: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY & "BEHAVIOR" VERB SUGGESTIONS

courtesy [Global Digital Citizen Foundation](#)

Lower Order Thinking Skills

Higher Order Thinking Skills

