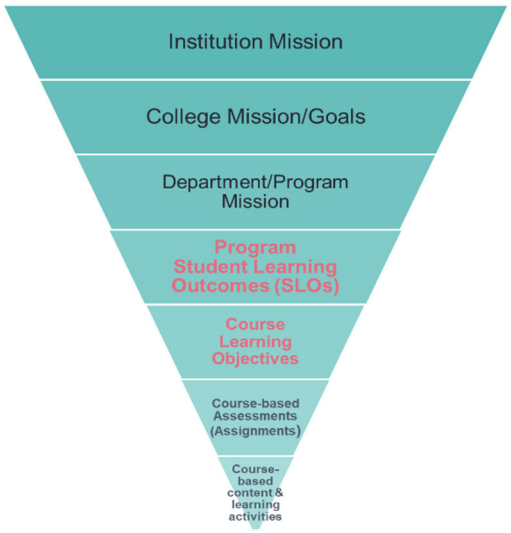
Guidance for Course Learning Objectives

Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment



- **Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):** All academic degree programs must articulate a set of program-level Student Learning Outcomes (recommended: 3-8 outcomes per program). (SACSCOC Standard 8.2.a)

  At APSU, Program SLOs are statements of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or attitudes demonstrated by students upon completion of a degree program.
  Program faculty **align curriculum** with Program SLOs and **identify measures** for each SLO **to evaluate and improve** effectiveness in designing and delivering the program's intended educational objectives.

- **Course Learning Objectives:** All APSU syllabi must include course objectives (Faculty Handbook).

Learning objectives for courses in a degree program should be aligned with the Program SLOs.
Producing a **program curriculum map** – mapping program courses to program SLOs – is the best tool to identify which courses in the curriculum align with which program SLOs. In some programs, course learning objectives (and program SLOs) may be guided (or dictated) by what is required by specialized program accrediting bodies.

Learning objectives in general education courses should align with the General Education Pillars and Learning Outcomes.

Generally, course learning objectives (sometimes also referred to as course learning outcomes or course goals[1]) are statements that clearly describe what students are expected to achieve as a result of instruction in a course. Course learning objectives **articulate** the **specific and measurable** knowledge, skills, attributes, and habits that a course is **designed** to help students achieve.

Course learning objectives are specific to each course and are typically the same across all sections of a course (or substantially the same with some additions/flexibility for particular sections, if warranted by course design, modality, or topic). In general, each course should have a common set of course learning objectives that is shared by all sections, even if particular sections identify additional course learning objectives that are specific to its content, design, or modality. Well-designed common learning objectives in a course can support: consistency in student learning in the course and program; increased reliability of assessments to measure learning and to identify improvements; transfer articulation; course and program proposal/revision; instructor onboarding/training; program review; compliance with accreditation and state requirements.

Course instructors design course content, teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessments to help students achieve the course learning objectives. How course learning objectives are "operationalized" can, and usually does, vary by section and/or instructor (i.e., the course design, content, lessons, activities, assignments, assessments, etc.). Always check with the Department Chair to ensure you are working with the current course learning objectives and, if applicable, to be sure you are also including any required course content, design, and assessments.

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[1] Definitions for and use of the terms "objectives" vs. "outcomes" vs. "goals" vary, depending on the source and the context. For the purpose of this guidance, we are using the term "objectives" for any statements of course-level outcomes/goals, etc. "Objectives" matches terminology used for courses in other areas such as the Faculty Handbook and in Distance Education/Quality Matters training and resources; however, "course-level learning outcomes" is used in the New Course Form in Curriculog. Ultimately, the terminology is not as important as the purpose: To articulate the knowledge, skills attributes, and/or habits that we expect students to achieve at the end of a particular course.

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Writing Course Learning Objectives

(adapted from Boston College Center for Teaching Excellence Resources: https://cteresources.bc.edu/documentation/learning-objectives/)

1. Identify the object (think about skills, knowledge, attitudes, abilities to be gained).

2. Determine the expected mastery level for the course (represented by an action verb, usually from a taxonomy of learning such as Bloom's or Fink's, see below).

3. Complete the learning objective statement (the details or context of the learning).

4. Tweak and refine the learning objectives, as needed.

Examples:

Define the object	Determine the mastery level	Complete the learning objective	Tweak & refine
① Fundamental principles of physics (Physics)	① apply	① Students will be able to apply fundamental principles of physics to real-world situations.	① Students will be able to apply fundamental principles of physics to real world situations in both speech and writing.
② How to use primary source material (History)	② critique	② Students will be able to critique primary source material from the 18th century.	② Students will be able to critique primary source material from the 18th century, including such considerations as authenticity, reliability, and bias.

Checklist for course learning objectives:

- ✓ **Objectives are specific**. Course learning objectives generally focus on one desired educational outcome of a course at a time. Try to avoid loading up one objective with lots of learning items; instead, break them up into separate objectives.
- ✓ **Objectives are measurable**. Whether or not an objective is deemed "measurable" can be a bit subjective and might vary by discipline. Generally, course learning objectives that identify "observable indicators" of a student's learning, as defined by the conventions or expectations of the field of study, makes it "measurable." Most importantly, "measurable" objectives can be clearly aligned with course-based activities and assessments that are used to evaluate student achievement of that objective.
- ✓ **Objectives are achievable**. Course learning objectives should be appropriate to the course level and student level (e.g.: a freshman level course as compared to a graduate level course, majors vs. nonmajors). They should also take into account realistic constraints of time, modality, technology, etc. available to faculty and students for the course.
- ✓ **Objectives are aligned.** Course learning objectives should be aligned with Program SLOs and/or General Education Pillars and Learning Outcomes, as relevant to the particular course. Course content, design, activities and assessments should be aligned with the course learning objectives to help students achieve the desired outcomes of the course and to measure achievement of the outcomes.

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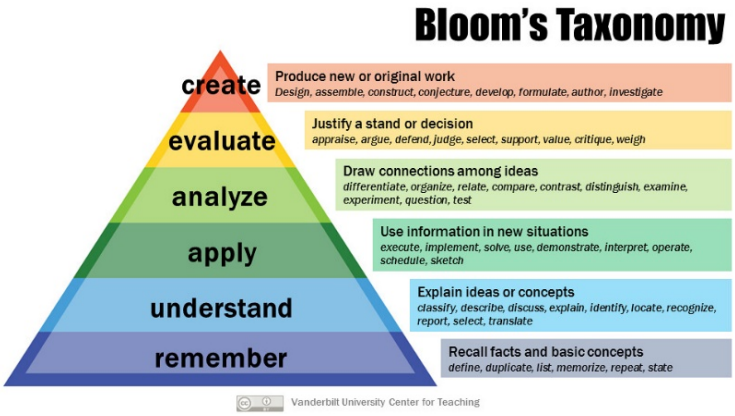
Additional Resources

APSU's Distance Education staff includes Instructional Designers who are available for course design consultations, and also manages the APSU Online Quality Fundamentals (AOQF) and Quality Matters training to support high quality course design. These resources are applicable beyond only online courses and would be useful to any faculty member or program interested in reviewing/developing course learning objectives and aligned course design.

Distance Education Support
Mon-Fri, 8:00am-4:30pm
Request Assistance
online@apsu.edu
931-221-6625
McReynolds 216

Taxonomies of Learning (for learning objective action verbs)



Bloom's Taxonomy - Vanderbilt Center for Teaching

Category of Learning	Meaning	Examples
Foundational Knowledge	Students will understand and remember key concepts, terms, relationships, facts, etc.	Students will be able to define Plate tectonics (term, concept); describe the interaction between pressure and temperature (relationship); identify the dates of the US Civil War (facts)
Application	Students will know how to "do" important tasks.	Students will be able to perform physical tasks (use a microscope); employ critical thinking; use creative problem-solving; make decisions; sequence multiple steps in a complex project
Integration	Students will be able to identify the relationship between "x" and "y".	Students will be able to compare major psychological theories; describe how the geography and dominant cultures of a region have affected its history; describe how prior learning in another course has shed light on certain new learning in a current course
Human Dimension	Self: Students will better understand themselves Others: Students will be able to interact positively and productively with others.	Self: Students will be able to identify and describe their thoughts and feelings about a topic or concept in relationship to themselves, their life goals, their strengths, weaknesses, capabilities Others: Students will be able to be an effective member of a team; empathize with and better understand people different from themselves (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, age, etc.); work effectively with people different from themselves
Caring	Students will care more deeply about this subject or issues related to this subject.	Students will develop deeper values in relation to "green" environmental policies, critical thinking, religious and racial tolerance, correct English usage, etc.; Students will become excited about and desire to learn more about the general subject of the course, e.g., ancient history, astronomy, insects, etc.
Learning How to Learn	Students will develop the ability to learn better (more efficiently and effectively), both in this course and in life in general.	Students will improve certain skills that are important for being a good student in college, e.g., taking notes from readings or lectures, taking different kinds of tests, study skills, etc.; Students will learn how knowledge is created and tested in different intellectual domains, e.g., how to use the scientific method, literary analysis, historical analysis;Students will become effective self-directed learners, meaning they can develop (a) a learning agenda and (b) a learning strategy for this agenda for learning more about the general subject of this course – after the course is over.

Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning - Intentional College Teaching
Verb List - Fink's Taxonomy - Intentional College Teaching