

Examples of Learning Outcomes: Good and Bad

Well-written learning outcomes are concise and clearly stated, specific enough to be observable and measurable and thus capable of being assessed. They are broad enough so as not to limit flexibility in achieving them and they are realistic given available time and resources.

A good outcome is SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound.

The ideal learning outcome has three elements:

1. Action verb(s)
2. Subject
3. Context

Begin your list of outcomes with the statement, “By the end of this program, successful students will be able to ...”

Begin each outcome with an action verb that specifies the desired level of learning based on Bloom’s Taxonomy. See Appendix 1 for an extensive listing of verbs in six levels of learning. The action verb is followed by the subject of the learning and context in which the learning occurs.

The chart below demonstrates how these guidelines can be applied to create well-written learning outcomes.

By the end of this program, successful students will:

	Learning Outcome	Analysis
Option 1: Not an outcome	Be given opportunities to learn effective communication skills	Describes program content, not the attributes of successful students
Option 2: Vague	Have a deeper appreciation for good communication practices	Does not start with an action verb or define the level of learning; subject of learning has no context and is not specific
Option 3: Less vague	Understand principles of effective communication	Starts with an action verb, but does not define the level of learning; subject of learning is still too vague for assessment
Option 4: Specific	Communicate effectively in a professional environment through technical reports and presentations	Starts with an action verb that defines the level of learning; provides context to ensure the outcome is specific and measurable

Use the Self-Assessment of Learning Outcome Statements charts (Appendix 2 in the Guide to Writing and Assessing Learning Outcomes) to evaluate these examples.