Tips for Writing Learning Objectives

A learning objective is a statement that describes the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities that participants will gain from the educational activity.

WHEN DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES, ASK THESE QUESTIONS

1. What should the result of the educational activity be for participants?
2. What should the participant be able to do?
3. What should the participant know?

HOW TO WRITE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learning objectives should:

• Be congruent with the identified gaps
• Reflect the continuing medical education (CME) mission of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), with a minimum of improving competence
• Be in a learner-centric format versus a faculty- or instruction-centric format
• Be measurable (e.g., do not use “understand,” “know,” etc., as these are not measurable verbs)
• Consist of only one action or outcome
• Follow the Kern and Thomas Approach:1 Who will do how much (how well) of what by when?
  — Who = The participant, learner, provider, physician, etc.
  — Will do = What do you want them to do? Describe the expected, observable action/behavior.
  — How much (how well) = How well should the action/behavior be done? (if applicable)
  — Of what = What do you want them to learn? Describe the knowledge that should be gained.
  — By when = End of the course, etc.

Examples

Upon completion of this learning activity, participants should be able to:

— Assess a patient’s condition accurately and in a timely manner.
— Identify the correct sequence of priorities used when assessing a traumatically injured patient.
— Demonstrate central venous catheter placement at a mastery level.
— Identify all essential equipment needed when managing a patient with a difficult or potentially difficult airway.

WHY DEVELOP LEARNING OBJECTIVES?

Through the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the ACS is an accredited provider of CME. As an accredited provider, ACS is responsible for ensuring that all CME programs have learning objectives to:

1. Guide the design and development of the educational activities
2. Provide clear expectations for the educational activity to the learners, and
3. Provide measurable outcomes in terms of knowledge, competence (knowledge in action), and/or performance (what one does in practice).

VERBS TO USE: BLOOM’S TAXONOMY

The verb list below has been found to be effective in formulating learning objectives; it is from Bloom’s Taxonomy by Benjamin S. Bloom, originally published in Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956).²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Competence</th>
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<th>Evaluation</th>
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<td>Information</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
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<td>choose</td>
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<td>count</td>
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