

# Writing learning outcomes

A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a period of learning, and how a student is expected to demonstrate their achievement of the learning (Moon, 2002).

Learning outcomes should:

- Start with an action verb, recognising an appropriate level of achievement;
- Clarify the content and educational objectives;
- Communicate the learning purpose to students;
- Be observable and/or measurable;
- Indicate how the learning will be demonstrated, linking to assessment.

## Constructive alignment

Learning outcomes must align with the overall course objectives and professional competencies, leading students toward a measurable level of skills, knowledge and performance. There should be clear alignment between the unit content, learning activities and assessments, with the learning process guiding students towards achievement of the stated learning outcomes in a clearly scaffolded way. This process is known as constructive alignment (Biggs, 2014):

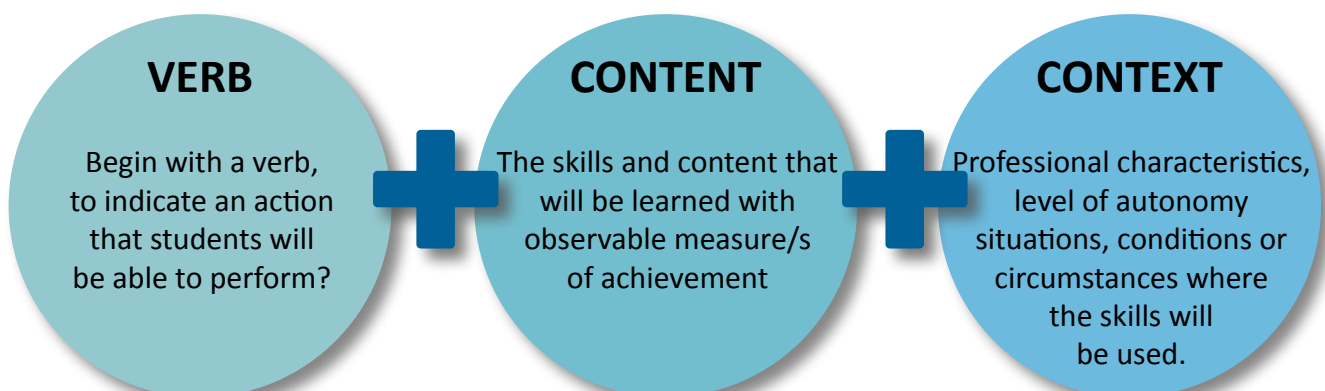
*“In constructive alignment, start with the outcomes you intend students to learn and align teaching and assessment to those outcomes.”*

## Structure of a learning outcome

Learning outcomes should be written from the perspective of the student and should define the required level of knowledge, skills and understanding that students need to achieve by the end of the unit. Learning outcomes should provide answers to the following statement:

*Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to ...*

There are three main sections in effectively written learning outcomes:



The verb at the start of the outcome is used to depict the action and level of complexity of the statement. Bloom's taxonomy verbs and the Revised Bloom's taxonomy verbs are widely used to classify learning according to lower and higher levels of complexity. You may also wish to refer to the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) course level descriptors to help with determining complexity and achievement requirements for your unit.

The content description should explain the knowledge and skills that a student will perform, with some indication of the complexity or some observable measure of achievement.

Context helps to define the purpose for the learning or any relevant circumstances under which the skills will be demonstrated. Context is the element that supports development of authentic assessment activities; try to identify the professional conditions or situations where the knowledge and skills will be applicable, then identify the types of assessment activities that will allow students to demonstrate their capabilities.

Here are some examples of well written learning outcomes:

Verb	Content What will students know or be able to do?	Context In what context and at what level will students perform?
Communicate	with clarity and purpose, using appropriate research evidence and language	to support judgements and justify opinions.
Evaluate	published research literature relating to evidence-based practices in clinical contexts	to inform clinical decision-making.
Investigate	contemporary treatment and management of cardiac conditions	to manage cardiac conditions of patients in critical care situations.
Examine	and correctly assess patients with life threatening conditions	formulating appropriate pre-hospital care and treatment plans.

Avoid the following words:

- Know
- Understand
- Appreciate
- Be aware of
- Have knowledge of
- Realise the significance of
- Be familiar with
- Believe
- Demonstrate

Demonstrate	responsibility and high-level organisation skills	In a clinical research report.
Understand	the principles of effective communication	in the workplace.
Know	how to use research evidence and language	to support and justify opinions.
Become familiar	with published research literature	relating to clinical contexts.

This is a useful guide to writing learning outcomes:

[Kennedy, D. \(2007\). Writing and using learning outcomes: A practical guide. University College Cork, Quality Promotion Unit.](#)

## Use this checklist to help evaluate your learning outcomes

<input type="checkbox"/>	Commence with action verbs at an appropriate level?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Describe student capabilities & knowledge development?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide context for the learning (by, with, to, for)?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearly stated, with no ambiguous language?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explain what a student will be able to do or perform?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Define measurable or observable actions?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recognises Course Learning Outcome requirements?
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 to 5 (maximum 6) Unit Learning Outcomes per unit?