

## FAQs for Writing Learning Outcomes

### What is a Learning Outcome?

- A learning outcome is a statement that describes what a student will **know** (knowledge), **be able to do** (skill), and/or **value/appreciate** (disposition) as a result of a learning experience.
- Learning outcomes can be written for **a major/program** (departmental outcome or the SUU Essential Learning Outcomes), **a course** (learning outcomes included on a syllabus), and/or **an individual lesson**
- Learning outcomes are phrased in terms of **OUTPUTS (student learning)** not inputs (what the instructor provides in class or assignments student are required to complete).
- Learning outcomes should be written in the following form including **all three components**:

- 1) **Students can/will be able to...**
- 2) **action verb** (see back for a comprehensive list of action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy)...
- 3) **specific action/skill they will be able to do** (including discipline-specific knowledge, skill, or ability).

### How Can Learning Outcomes Enhance Teaching and Learning?

- For each lesson, course, and academic program, instructors are urged to ask:
  - **What knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions do I want students to get from this?**
  - **What evidence can I gather to show that students are getting it?**
- Because learning outcomes must be observable/measurable, evidence can be produced to demonstrate what students are actually learning.
- Assessment evidence provides valuable data for improving instruction and increasing student learning in courses and programs.

### Examples of Well-Written Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to read, interpret, and analyze common reference maps.
- Students will be able to apply critical thinking skills to offer a solution to a real-world problem.
- Students can create narratives about the past based on primary source documents.
- Students can explain the relationship between genetics and disease risk.
- Students can choreograph a dance reflecting a specific dance style.

### Common Mistakes Made When Writing Learning Outcomes:

- **Using vague verbs that are difficult to measure like "appreciate," "be aware of," "learn," "understand," or "know."** How will you know if students appreciate, understand, or know? Use specific action verbs—you will know that students understand if they can: explain, describe, summarize, analyze, compare, evaluate, apply, etc.
- **Writing learning outcomes that describe inputs like assignments or lecture content rather than the learning that will occur because of the assignment or lecture.** "Students will read essays by significant philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" describes reading assignments students will complete (inputs), but does not describe what students will know, be able to do, or value, as a result of completing the readings (outcomes).
- **Including too many learning outcomes.** The best target for the number of learning outcomes for a course or program is 2 – 4. (Note: 1 learning outcome is acceptable if it is very rich, and 5 or 6 are acceptable if you can make a really strong argument for greater than four.) Learning outcomes are meant to be broader learning goals targeting important knowledge, skills and dispositions, not a comprehensive listing of discreet skills or bits of knowledge.

## BLOOM'S TAXONOMY (Revised 2001)

### Learning Outcome Action Verbs at Each Bloom Taxonomy Level

| <b>Cognitive Level</b> | <b>Illustrative Action Verbs</b>  | <b>Definitions</b>  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Knowledge              | arrange, define, describe, duplicate, identify, label, list, match, memorize, name, order, outline, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, select, state   | remembering previously learned information  |
| Comprehension          | classify, convert, defend, discuss, distinguish, estimate, explain, express, extend, generalize, give example(s), identify, indicate, infer, locate, paraphrase, predict, recognize, rewrite, report, restate, review, select, summarize, translate   | grasping the meaning of information   |
| Application            | apply, change, choose, compute, demonstrate, discover, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, manipulate, modify, operate, practice, predict, prepare, produce, relate schedule, show, sketch, solve, use write  | applying knowledge to actual situations   |
| Analysis               | analyze, appraise, breakdown, calculate, categorize, classify, compare, contrast, criticize, derive, diagram, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, identify, illustrate, infer, interpret, model, outline, point out, question, relate, select, separate, subdivide, test | breaking down objects or ideas into simpler parts and seeing how the parts relate and are organized |
| Synthesis              | arrange, assemble, categorize, collect, combine, comply, compose, construct, create, design, develop, devise, explain, formulate, generate, plan, prepare, propose, rearrange, reconstruct, relate, reorganize, revise, rewrite, set up, summarize, synthesize, tell, write                         | rearranging component ideas into a new whole  |
| Evaluation             | appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, conclude, contrast, defend, describe, discriminate, estimate, evaluate, explain, judge, justify, interpret, relate, predict, rate, select, summarize, support, value  | making judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria                                    |