

How to Choose Verbs for Effective Learning Objectives

"Begin with the end in mind." Stephen R. Covey

Learning objectives should explain in specific, observable and measurable terms what the learners will do to (a) learn specific skills and (b) demonstrate that they have learned them. **This entails using active verbs that are sufficiently clear that they do not require additional verbs to explain what they mean.** If the verbs are vague, the trainer will have no way to verify if the desired learning has occurred.

Unfortunately, it is very common to see lesson plans with learning objectives that use verbs that are vague and unclear, stating that the learners will: "know" or "understand" certain knowledge or skills. Without a second more active verb to clarify what the desired learning behavior is, it is not possible to measure or validate what has been learned.

A trainer cannot tell by simply looking at a learner who is passively sitting if that learner actually "knows" or "understands" anything. The only way to determine if a learner "knows" or "understands" content is to have that learner do something with that content: for example, "explain" what it means or "demonstrate" how to use it.

The verbs "explain" and "demonstrate" describe specific actions that the learner will take. Because they are actions, they can be observed. Because they are specific actions, they are also measurable.

When a learner "explains" what a word means or a procedure involves, the trainer can listen to that explanation. The trainer can also measure whether the learner's description is accurate.

When a learner "demonstrates" a skill, the trainer can observe the demonstration and measure how well the learner performs the skill.

A learning objective needs to be specific, observable and measurable. A verb is too vague to be used in a learning objective if it requires another verb to explain what it really means. In addition to "know" and "understand," there are a number of other verbs that fall into this category and should be avoided, such as:

process	believe	feel	focus
care	be aware	perceive	consider
learn	empathize	assume	be familiar with
worry	think	try	appreciate
sense	remember	see	explore

The list on the next page give examples of active verbs that can be used to create learning objectives that are specific, observable and measurable.

Verbs to Use in Creating Educational Objectives (Based on Bloom's Taxonomy)

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>Comprehension</u>	<u>Application</u>	<u>Analysis</u>	<u>Synthesis</u>	<u>Evaluation</u>
acquire	arrange	apply	analyze	alter	appraise
attend	categorize	calculate	appraise	calculate	argue
choose	change	change	break down	categorize	assess
collect	chart	choose	categorize	change	compare
complete	cite	classify	classify	classify	conclude
copy	circle	compute	combine	combine	consider
define	classify	conduct	compare	compile	contrast
describe	compile	construct	conclude	compose	critique
detect	conclude	demonstrate	contrast	conduct	decide
differentiate	convert	develop	criticize	constitute	describe
distinguish	defend	discover	deduce	construct	discriminate
duplicate	demonstrate	employ	defend	create	explain
find	determine	generalize	detect	deduce	interpret
identify	diagram	manipulate	diagram	derive	judge
imitate	differentiate	modify	differentiate	design	justify
indicate	distinguish	operate	discriminate	devise	recommend
isolate	document	organize	distinguish	develop	relate
label	draw	predict	evaluate	discover	standardize
list	edit	prepare	formulate	discuss	summarize
mark	estimate	produce	generate	document	validate
match	explain	relate	identify	expand	
name	extrapolate	restructure	illustrate	explain	
order	fill in	show	induce	formulate	
outline	formulate	solve	infer	generalize	
place	gather	transfer	outline	generate	
recall	generalize	use	paraphrase	modify	
recognize	give example		plan	organize	
reproduce	illustrate		point out	originate	
select	infer		present	paraphrase	
state	interpret		question	plan	
underline	itemize		recognize	predict	
	locate		relate	produce	
	organize		save	propose	
	paraphrase		select	rearrange	
	predict		separate	reconstruct	
	prepare		shorten	relate	
	quote		structure	reorganize	
	rearrange		subdivide	revise	
	record			rewrite	
	relate			signify	
	reorder			simplify	
	rephrase			specify	
	represent			summarize	
	restate			synthesize	
	rewrite			systematize	
	summarize			tell	
	translate			transmit	
	update			write	