University of Ottawa
Office of Continuing Professional Development (OCPD)

Writing Learning Objectives for a CPD Program

-----Sample of a possible invitation to a presenter----------

Dear colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our Continuing Professional Development program. Please review the description of our program, the targeted learners and the topic we would like you to be responsible for.

Then, please write two or three learning objectives that will be appropriate for your learning activity.

(If you have received some suggested learning objectives and you feel that the learning objectives do not describe what you feel is correct, we suggest that you make changes or revisions depending on your session content and goals, based on the needs of your target audience.)

Before doing so, please refer to the following information concerning learning objectives.

This information outlines the format required for accreditation of the program and could save you time in re-revising the learning objectives.

Thank you.

The planning committee for XXX

Required:
- Determine learning objectives for the overall program and individual sessions

Definition:
- A learning objective is a description of the skills, abilities and/or attitudes expected of the participant by the end of the program, session or learning activity.

NOTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT...

*"What would you like to **teach** your participants by the end of your session?"*

Common Errors	The most common errors in writing learning objectives are: 1. Describing what the **presenter** will do, rather than what the **participant** will be able to do at the end of the session 2. Using a fuzzy, non-observable action verb, such as "understand", "know", "appreciate", "value", etc.
Purpose of learning objectives	Why do we ask for clear learning objectives? • They help you as a presenter, because they provide a focus and parameters around your presentation. • At the same time, clear learning objectives provide a cognitive map for your participants • The learning objectives help the participants to organize information, assess their progress and support them in achieving those objectives.
The Essence	In essence, the learning objective should describe what the participant will be able to • DO at the end of the session Or • DEMONSTRATE at the end of the session Student-centred Learning *What would you like your participants to* **learn** *by the end of your session?* *(Or even more important…)* *What would you like your participants to be able to* **do** *by the end of your session?* *Criteria for learning objectives:* *Observable and specific* **(And watch out for the fuzzy "Sinister Sixteen"! Appended.)**
Consider this scenario…	Just imagine it is the end of the lesson and you turn to a participant and say: *"Dr. X, could you please…* (insert your learning objective)" If your objective used a fuzzy verb like "understand"… At the end of this session the participant will be able to: • *Understand the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions*? You would turn to a participant and say: *"Dr. X, could you please understand the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions?"* Poor Dr. X might be in a quandary.

She might very well "understand" (or *"know" or "appreciate")* what you are asking about, but there is actually nothing specific that you are asking her to do about it or with it. So she would probably be expressing confusion or she might spring into some kind of action, while guessing at what you mean.

Maybe "understanding" isn't exactly what you meant. We're just used to using that sort of verb.

Be Specific

So open up or "unpack" that objective to get what you really want. Reconsider the needs assessment; what is needed to answer the challenge?

What would you want to see your learners **doing**?

 For example:

Perhaps you would be satisfied if they could:

- **Describe** the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions

Or perhaps you want them to do a more challenging objective:

- **Explain** the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions

Or even more complex:

- **Evaluate** the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions

Now go back to your imagined Dr. X. with one of the revised learning objectives.

If you asked her to:

> *"Explain the factors that influence risks and benefits of selected interventions"*

She would now have a clear action to do.
And not only could **you** tell if she reached this objective, but so could **she**!

You can consult the action verbs in the appendices of this document.

Resources

Bloom's Taxonomy (below) is a useful tool for considering the level of cognitive challenge that you want your participants to reach. The levels are not better or worse, they simply indicate, going from top to bottom, a greater level of complexity.

As you review the need for the topic, the need for the learning activity, have a look at the taxonomy and reflect on the type of outcome you are looking for.
On the following page are lists of verbs that are associated with different levels of cognitive performance.

There are also some useful resources from the Royal College.
There some suggestions of specific, observable verbs at the site.
Royal College text on learning objectives
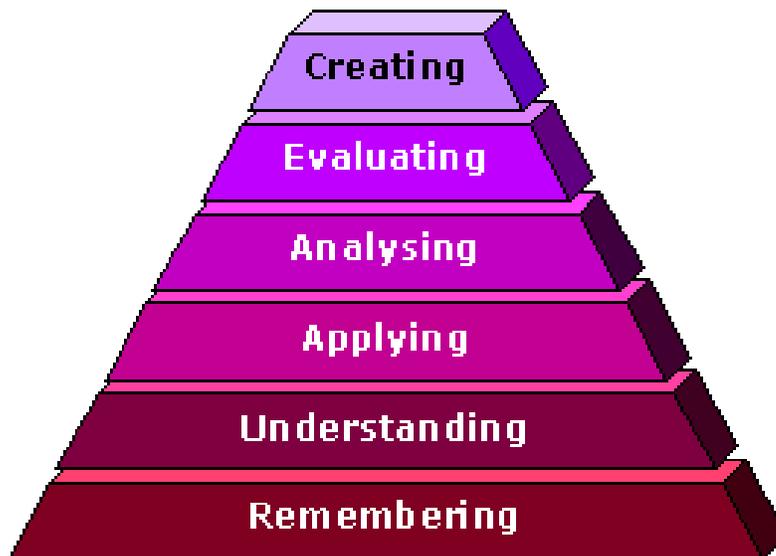
Revision of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain following Anderson and Krathwohl (2000)

Specific and Observable Verbs to Express Learning Objectives Using Bloom's Taxonomy

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Choose	Classify	Apply	Analyze	Appraise	Adapt
Define	Compare	Administer	Arrange	Argue	Anticipate
Identify	Contrast	Build	Assume	Assess	Build
Label	Demonstrate	Choose	Categorize	Choose	Change
List	Describe	Construct	Classify	Compare	Combine
Match	Explain	Demonstrate	Compare	Conclude	Compile
Name	Extend	Develop	Contrast	Critique	Compose
Recall	Illustrate	Experiment	Correlate	Deduce	Construct
Relate	Infer	with	Dissect	Defend	Create
Select	Interpret	Identify	Distinguish	Determine	Design
	Outline	Illustrate	Divide	Diagnose	Develop
	Relate	Interview	Examine	Estimate	Diagram
	Rephrase	Make use of	Infer	Evaluate	Elaborate
	Show	Model	Inspect	Interpret	Estimate
	Summarize	Organize	List	Judge	Formulate
	Translate	Plan	relationships	Justify	Imagine
		Practice	Simplify	Measure	Improve
		Select	Survey	Prioritize	Invent
		Solve		Prove	Model
		Utilize		Rate	Modify
				Recommend	Originate
				Score	Plan
					Predict

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Verbs that are Passive, Internal and/or Otherwise Unobservable

The most common verbs and phrases we see in learning outcomes are all unacceptable:

Understand	Be conscious of
Appreciate	Learn
Comprehend	Perceive
Grasp	Value
Know	Get
See	Apprehend
Accept	Be familiar with
Have a knowledge of	
Be aware of	

All of these are **internal**. In other words, they aren't public and **can't be observed**.

References

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Bloom Benjamin S. and David R. Krathwohl, (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*. New York: Longman, Green.

Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University, *Course Design* http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/Teaching/CourseDesign/Objectives/BloomsTaxonomy Verbs.pdf

Kristensen, E. & Robertson, A. (2007) *Communication: the Key to Promoting Positive Attitudes, Behaviours and Learning Goals in Clinical Placements.* University of Ottawa workshop. Ottawa.

Krathwohl, D. R, Bloom, B. S and Masia, B (1964) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals– Handbook II: Affective Domain* New York: McKay

Potter, M. K., & Kustra, E. (2012). *A primer on learning outcomes and the SOLO taxonomy*. Centre for Teaching and Learning. University of Windsor. Windsor, Canada. Retrieved from http://www1.uwindsor.ca/ctl/system/files/PRIMER-on-Learning-Outcomes.pdf

Wilson, Leslie O. (2006) Beyond Bloom - A new Version of the Cognitive Taxonomy. Retrieved October 2009, from: http://www.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/curric/newtaxonomy.htm