Writing Learning Objectives

Learning objectives describe the knowledge or skill that learners should be able to apply to their practice by the end of an educational program. Learning objectives should be tied to the knowledge or skill gap identified in the needs assessment phase of program development. Focused learning objectives help health care professionals' practice and lead to improved patient outcomes.

The Benefits of Strong Learning Objectives

Benefits to Participants

1. Clearly identify what participants will be able to do after attending an educational session.

2. Help participants understand how the knowledge/skill will be applied in specific contexts.

3. Help participants choose sessions to attend.

Benefits to Presenters/Facilitators and Program Planners

1. Guide program development and the selection of instructional strategies and materials.

2. Help to measure the effectiveness of the program, identify gaps, and improve the learning for future sessions.

3. Guide how assessments are developed.

When writing learning objectives, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What are the essential things that learners should **know** after the session?
- What are the essential things that learners should be able to **do** after the session?
- What knowledge or skills will be **new** to the learners in this course?
- How do the knowledge or skills to be learned contribute to the learner's practice and professional life?
- What context will the learner apply the knowledge or skills?
- How will the knowledge or skills contribute to the patient experience and lead to improved patient outcomes?
- How do the goals of the session align with CanMEDS roles?
- What is the patient outcome you hope to achieve with the program?

Use the SMART Formula to help guide the development of Learning Objectives:

S	SPECIFIC	Learning Objectives are direct, detailed, and meaningful.
M	MEASURABLE	Learning objectives demonstrate a change in knowledge or skill through experience/application.
A	ATTAINABLE	Learning objectives are realistic and learners have the tools and resources to attain them.
R	RELEVANT	Learning objectives align with scope of practice, professional goals, and intended patient outcomes.
T	TIME-BOUND	Learning objectives have a deadline and the knowledge/skill can be learned in the span of the session.

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Characteristics of Strong Learning Objectives

Learner-Centered	Write learning objectives from the perspective of the learner and explain what the learner will do.	**Example**: By the end of the session, learners will be able to... **Avoid**: This session focuses on...
Specific & Actionable	Provide a specific and actionable description of what participants will be able to do in practice after the program.	**Example**: Participants will be able to create a personal learning plan with 3 goals to achieve by next year's annual meeting. **Avoid**: Participants will understand...
Measurable	Clarify how the participant or facilitator will know that the knowledge or skill has been successfully learned.	**Example**: Participants will be able to develop a patient care plan... **Avoid**: Participants will explore...
Put in Context	Explain the context in which the skills or knowledge will be applied.	**Example:** Participants will be able to apply active listening strategies when communicating with palliative care patients and their families.

What to Avoid when Writing Learning Objectives

Learning objectives are not an agenda or list of topics which will be covered in an educational session.

Avoid:
1. Understand Parkinson's disease.
2. Review the pathophysiology of Parkinson's disease.
3. Learn about treatment plans for Parkinson's disease.

Improved:
Participants will be able to:
1. Identify the features of the pathophysiology of Parkinson's disease.
2. Diagnose Parkinson's disease in a patient presentation/clinical setting.
3. Design a treatment plan and communicate it effectively to the patient.

Learning objectives are not a description of what the presenter or facilitator will do in the session.

Avoid:
Talk about psychological safety and how to create safe spaces for team members.

Improved:
Participants will be able to:
1. Define psychological safety.
2. List strategies to create a psychologically safe environment.
3. Develop and implement policies to create safe spaces for team members or learners in a clinical or educational environment.

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## A Formula for Writing Learning Objectives

After participation in (educational program), participants will be able to (measurable verb) + (knowledge or skill) in (context [optional]).

Example:

As a result of completing the respiratory distress workshop, participants will be able to assess respiratory distress in pediatric patients.

Breakdown:

As a result of completing the respiratory distress workshop, participants will be able to

assess	respiratory distress	in pediatric patients.

Measurable verb   Context

Knowledge/Skill
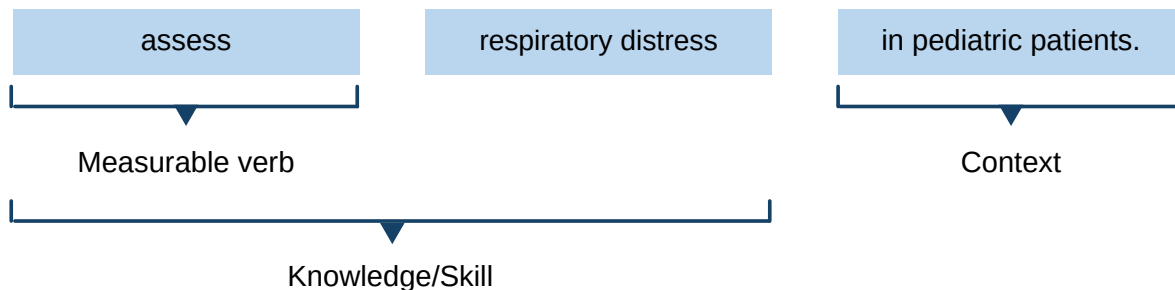
Align Learning Objectives to the CanMEDS Roles

Connect learning objectives to the CanMEDS roles described below (read the full descriptions at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada website by clicking here).

COMMUNICATOR	Apply therapeutic communication strategies with patients and family members to to provide effective, patient-centered care.
COLLABORATOR	Collaborate effectively with other health care professionals to provide safe, high-quality, patient-centered care.
LEADER	Demonstrative collaborative leadership and management skills in interprofessional and interdisciplinary health care teams.
HEALTH ADVOCATE	Contribute expertise and influence in partnership with communities or patient populations to improve health.
SCHOLAR	Demonstrate a lifelong commitment to excellence in practice through continuous learning and by teaching others, evaluating evidence, and contributing to research.
PROFESSIONAL	Develop a professional identity centered on ethical practice, high personal standards of behaviour and accountability to the profession and society.
MEDICAL EXPERT	Integrate all of the CanMEDS Roles, applying medical knowledge, clinical skills, and professional values in the provision of high-quality and safe patient-centered care.

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