

Instructional Objectives

Robert Mager, in *Writing Instructional Objectives*, defines an objective as:

"...a written statement, defining in precise terms, what the learner will be able to do at the end of training and how well."

An objective describes the specific skill or task you want learners to be able to perform or accomplish before you consider them successful. The objective focuses on what will happen as a result of instruction rather than how it will happen. Objectives are useful in pointing to the content materials and procedures that will lead to successful instruction, in helping to manage the instructional process itself, in selecting instructional methods, and in determining whether the instruction was successful. Clear objectives are also important for the learner so that he/she can prepare how best to personally approach and mentally organize the module, session or course.

The best statement of an objective is one that excludes the greatest number of possible meanings other than your intent. According to Mager, the key question is: "What is the learner actually doing when demonstrating achievement of the objective?"

The parts of an effective objective:

1. **Learner Oriented:** The focus is on what the learner will be able to do by the end of the session.
2. **Performance:** Specifies what the learner will be able to do by using action verbs to describe the behavior.
3. **Conditions:** Describes what the learner will be allowed to use and what will be denied.
4. **Criteria:** Describes the quality or level of performance that will be considered successful and acceptable.

Performance

A meaningful objective successfully communicates your intent. The key to clarity in writing the objective involves using action verbs that describe the specific behavior the learner will be asked to do. Focus on what the task or skill is that will be performed.

Samples:

- Arrange the following list . . .
- Name all of the . . .
- Explain how to . . .
- Demonstrate the effective use of . . .

Action Verbs Used In Writing Instructional Objectives

The five key verbs used to describe "knowledge" categories are identify, name, describe, construct, and order. A more specific list of "action" verbs used when writing objectives are:

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| alphabetize analyze apply arrange build choose classify compare compute contrast copy decide define demonstrate | describe detect differentiate discern discuss draw explain finalize identify interpret isolate judge justify list | label make mark match name order pick point out prepare prove quote rank recall recognize | record repeat reproduce restate reorganize select sequence solve state transcribe write |
|--|--|--|---|

Conditions

The "condition" portion of an objective includes a description of relevant or important conditions or circumstances under which the learner will be expected to perform. This could involve listing what the learner will be allowed to use or what the learner will be denied.

In writing objectives, "conditions" answer the questions:

1. What will the learner be allowed to use?
2. What will the learner be denied?
3. Under what conditions will you expect the desired performance to occur?

Samples:

- "Given a problem..."
- "Given a list..."
- "Without the use of reference aids...."
- "Given a standard set of tools...."
- "Through a role-play situation...."
- "Given any reference of the learner's choice..."

Other Points:

- Be detailed enough to be sure the target performance would be recognized by another competent person.
- Conditions can be stated in a negative sense ("without the use of reference aids") or with no "given" at all.

Criteria

The criteria identify "how well" you expect the learner to perform. It is the standard by which performance is evaluated. If you can specify at least the minimum acceptable performance for an objective, you have a performance standard against which to test your instruction. Only impose those criteria that are important.

Sample characteristics of performance criteria:

- **Speed** (time limit) - "Given a dry track, you will run the 100 yard dash in 14 seconds."
- **Accuracy** - "The learner will correctly punctuate at least 80% of the sentences in a written exam."
- **Quality** - "Given a compass, ruler, and paper, the learner will construct and bisect any given angle larger than five degrees. Bisections must be accurate to one degree."

Ways to Indicate a Criteria "Non-Explicitly":

1. Reference
....according to Standards Chart, 1984 edition.
....according to criteria described on page 33, Manual 27.
2. Procedure
...with each action to compare in quality with the Performance Checklist.
3. Examples
....as demonstrated in the videotape.

Examples of Well-Written Objectives:

- Given a list of possible penalties, the learner will be able to correctly identify (check off) if the penalty is a "civil" or "criminal" penalty according to Section 11 of the Penalties and Enforcement Act.
- Given a role-play situation, the learner will demonstrate the skill of active listening by restating the speaker's key points and feelings.
- Given a computer printout, the learner will complete Form 120A in 15 minutes with 98% accuracy.
- Using the agency correspondence manual, the learner will be able to prepare a routine memo without format errors.
- Given a copy of the booklet Environmental Partnerships: A Field Guide for USFWS, the learner will be able to identify 5 barriers and 5 possible alternatives to developing partnerships with other agencies and natural resource organizations.