

Tips for Writing Objectives for Continuing Medical Education Activities

Learning objectives guide instruction and articulate expectations in terms of measurable changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes/behavior. They should also fit into the bigger picture of the learner's education needs and changes in knowledge, competence, and (in some instances) performance.

The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) defines competence as knowing how to do something (ability, skills, and strategies). Performance is the result once skills, abilities, and strategies are put into practice.¹ Objectives should reflect what the learner should be able to do after the educational experience/intervention (apply, select, identify, implement, etc.).

Verbs such as know, understand, and appreciate should NOT be used to formulate objectives.

I. **Objective:** An objective is measurable

Example:

Upon completion of this lecture, students will be able to:

- 1) *Describe* the anatomy and function of the temporomandibular joint.
- 2) *List* the major clinical indications for antidepressant drugs.
- 3) *Explain* how foot processes and fenestrations differ.

Learning objectives should:

1) include an observable behavior (action verb).

Incorrect: Participants will *understand* how diuretics are used in the management of hypertension.

Correct: Students will *explain* how diuretics are used in the management of hypertension.

Correct: Learners will be able to *assess* respiratory distress in pediatric patients.

2) specify learning “outcomes” and not “process”.

Incorrect: Students will *review* medical literature and evidence-based medicine to further medical knowledge.

Correct: Students will *integrate* medical literature and evidence-based medicine to *justify* treatment plans.

Correct: Learners will *manage* acute respiratory distress in the emergency setting.

3) describe what the “learners” will do, not what the “teachers” will do.

Incorrect: *Faculty* will introduce different psychiatric illnesses and syndromes to review the evidence-based treatments for psychiatric problems.

Correct: *Students* will distinguish between the different psychiatric illness and syndromes to recommend the evidence-based treatments for psychiatric problems.

Verbs for Learning Objectives (Adapted from Bloom's Taxonomy)

Definitions	I. Remembering	II. Understanding	III. Applying	IV. Analyzing	V. Evaluating	VI. Creating
Bloom's Definition²	Exhibit memory of previously learned material by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts, and answers.	Demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptions, and stating main ideas.	Solve problems to new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different way.	Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.	Present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria.	Compile information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.
Verbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose • Define • Describe • Find • How • Label • List • Match • Name • Omit • Recall • Relate • Select • Show • Spell • Tell • What • When • Where • Which • Who • Why 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify • Compare • Contrast • Demonstrate • Explain • Extend • Illustrate • Infer • Interpret • Outline • Relate • Rephrase • Show • Summarize • Translate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply • Build • Choose • Construct • Develop • Experiment with • Identify • Interview • Make use of • Model • Organize • Plan • Select • Solve • Utilize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze • Assume • Categorize • Classify • Compare • Conclusion • Contrast • Discover • Dissect • Distinguish • Divide • Examine • Function • Inference • Inspect • List • Motive • Relationships • Simplify • Survey • Take part in • Test for • Theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree • Appraise • Assess • Award • Choose • Compare • Conclude • Criteria • Criticize • Decide • Deduct • Defend • Determine • Disprove • Estimate • Evaluate • Explain • Importance • Influence • Interpret • Judge • Justify • Mark • Measure • Opinion • Perceive • Prioritize • Prove • Rate • Recommend • Rule on • Select • Support • Value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt • Build • Change • Choose • Combine • Compile • Compose • Construct • Create • Delete • Design • Develop • Discuss • Elaborate • Estimate • Formulate • Happen • Imagine • Improve • Invent • Make up • Maximize • Minimize • Modify • Original • Originate • Plan • Predict • Propose • Solution • Solve • Suppose • Test • Theory

¹ ACCME Website. <https://www.accme.org/faq/whats-difference-between-knowledge-competence-performance-and-patient-outcomes> Accessed 2021-08-16

² Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing, Abridged Edition. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.