An introduction to writing learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what students should be able to do by the end of a teaching session or course. They are related to, but different from, teaching aims, which instead describe broadly what the session or course is about and its overall purpose.

Writing learning outcomes can help you to focus your teaching, for example, by prioritising key learning points for the session or course and enabling you to plan your teaching across a session or course. You may also want to share learning outcomes with your students to help them to understand what they are meant to be learning.

Core principles of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes should:

1. Avoid jargon.
2. Use action verbs to describe what it is that students should be able to do during and/or at the end of a session or course. One way to ensure this is by completing the sentence: “By the end of the session students will be able to ...” (see the ‘Learning outcome verbs’ table on the next page).
3. Not be too numerous. This helps to avoid writing a list of ‘content to be covered’ and will also help you to prioritise what students need to do.
4. Be specific.

Examples of learning outcomes

All learning outcomes should include an action verb to describe what students should be able to do at the end of the course / session to demonstrate their learning. Two examples are provided below:

“Describe qualitatively the relationships between risk factors and acute respiratory infections using data from published sources.”

“Analyse the use of language and symbolism in Middle English poetry by close reading extracts of verse.”
Learning outcome verbs
This table lists some examples of action verbs which you may find helpful when writing learning outcomes for your session or course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To enable students to demonstrate their...</th>
<th>Examples of associated learning outcome verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Knowledge and understanding outcomes written to enable students to demonstrate knowledge / understanding / awareness / intellectual curiosity | state  
record  
identify  
clarify  
describe  
recognise  
make distinctions  
list  
recount  
discuss  
recognise  
respond to  
disclose  
define  
name  
indicate  
explain  
account  
outline  
refer to  
illustrate |
| Application outcomes written to enable students to demonstrate that they can apply their knowledge | apply  
compute  
calculate  
demonstrate  
discover  
manipulate  
modify  
demonstrate  
perform  
predict  
predict  
prepare  
produce  
relate  
show  
solve  
use |
| Analysis outcomes written to enable students to demonstrate the skill of analysis | analyse  
compare  
criticise  
examine  
appraise  
debate  
contrast  
question  
distinguish |
| Synthesis / creativity outcomes written to enable students to demonstrate the skill of synthesis / creativity | arrange  
plan  
formulate  
redefine  
initiate  
arange  
plan  
formulate  
redefine  
initiate  
assemble  
prepare  
construct  
propose  
start  
organise  
design  
develop  
produce  
create |
| Evaluation outcomes written to enable students to demonstrate the skill of evaluation | evaluate  
estimate  
measure  
Recommend  
evaluate  
estimate  
measure  
Recommend  
assess  
criticise  
compare  
advocate  
judge  
appraise  
discriminate  
defend |

When writing learning outcomes, avoid using words that are vague and which are more difficult to assess. This includes words such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>know</th>
<th>be aware of</th>
<th>be familiar with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>understand</td>
<td>appreciate</td>
<td>realise the significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believe</td>
<td>have a good grasp of</td>
<td>become acquainted with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn the basics of</td>
<td>be interested in</td>
<td>obtain a working knowledge of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>