

# 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:

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

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

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| know<br>understand<br>believe<br>learn the basics of | be aware of<br>appreciate<br>have a good grasp of<br>be interested in | be familiar with<br>realise the significance<br>become acquainted with<br>obtain a working knowledge of |
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