Writing Program Level Student Learning Outcomes

University of West Georgia
Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment

General Information

Every Academic Program must have clearly defined Student Learning Outcomes. These outcomes describe the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of their experiences and learning in their program of study. These same basic principles can also be applied to the development of learning outcomes for courses.

Outcomes should:

- **Contain an action verb that describes an observable or identifiable action**
    - Poor Example: Students will appreciate 18th century art.
    - Better Example: Students will be able to describe the identifying characteristics of 18th century art.
    - Poor Example: Students will understand criminological theory.
    - Better Example: Students will be able to critically evaluate the use of criminological theory to explain crime and criminal behavior.
- **Be focused and not contain multiple action verbs**
    - Poor Example: Students will be able to think critically, evaluate literature, and describe how themes apply in the modern world.
    - Better Example: Students will be able to critically evaluate literature by describing how the themes apply in the modern world.
    - Poor Example: Students will identify an issue, develop and arguable thesis about the issue, locate relevant supporting evidence, analyze the evidence, and draw a well-supported conclusion.
    - Better Example: Students will be able to apply research methodology and systematic analysis
- **Focus on the student as the performer - *What is the student expected to be able to know, think, or do?***
    - Poor Example: Students will be part of a professional organization.
    - Better Example: Students will reflect on their membership of a professional organization.
    - Poor Example: The program will offer students the opportunity to build their research skills by conducting authentic laboratory experiments.
    - Better Example: Students will be able to design an experiment that tests a valid hypothesis.
- **Be appropriate for the level of learning, i.e. undergraduate vs. graduate**
    - *Undergraduate level (1000-4000 level courses)*
        - Poor Example: Students will be able to conduct a solo research study.
        - Better Example: Students will be able to develop a plan for a future solo research study.
        - Poor Example: Students will be able to evaluate effective leadership behavior.
        - Better Example: Students will be able to identify effective leadership behaviors.

- o *Graduate level (5000-7000 level courses)*
  - ▪ Poor Example: Students will be able to recite the basic theoretical principles of the discipline.
  - ▪ Better Example: Students will be able to criticize complex theoretical principles of the discipline.
  - ▪ Poor Example: Students will be able to explain the role of entrepreneurs in managing businesses.
  - ▪ Better Example: Students will be able to assess the role that the global business environment plays in business decisions.

Tip: If you decide to have multiple action verbs in a single outcome, you must make sure that you are assessing <u>ALL</u> parts of the learning outcome. This is easily achieved by having multiple measurements for a single learning outcome.
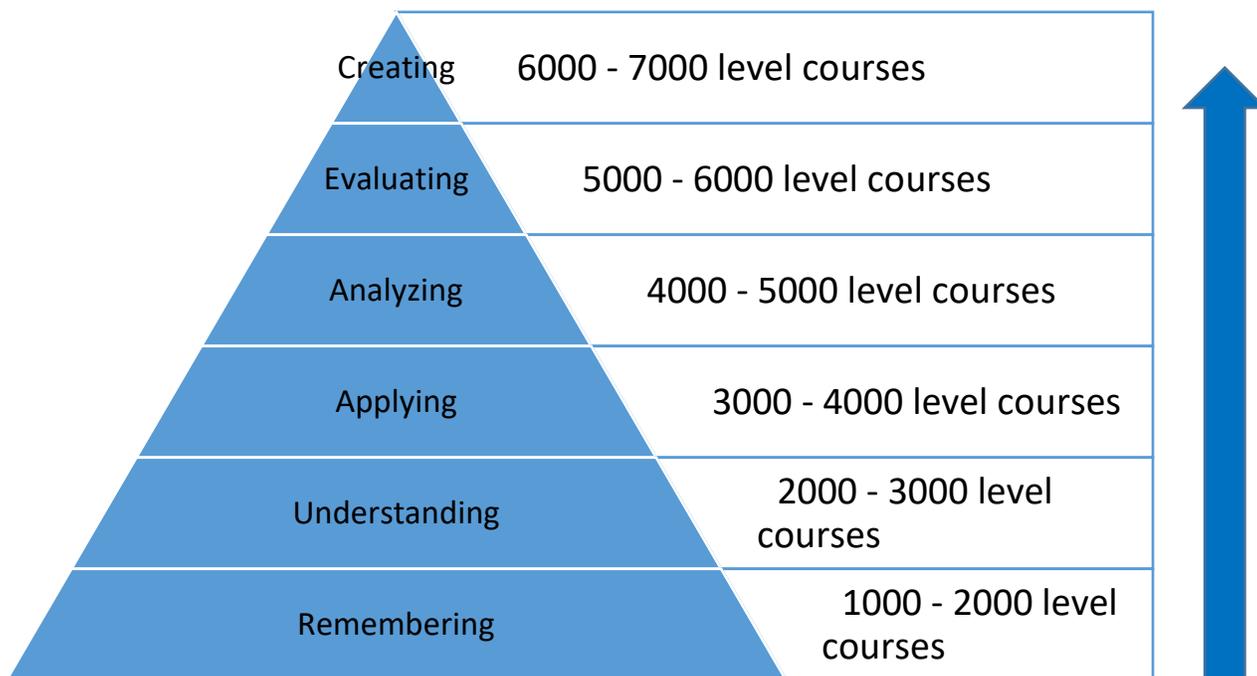
Finding the right action verb

Using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is an easy way to find usable action verbs when developing student learning outcomes. Bloom's Taxonomy classifies thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity.

The levels are ordered from simple and concrete to complex and abstract, with "Creating" being the highest level of thinking.

A correlation can easily be drawn between these levels of thinking and the course level for which the learning outcomes are being developed. For example, the higher levels of thinking, analyzing, evaluating, and creating are generally associated with learning outcomes for graduate courses.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Six Levels of Thinking

Creating	6000 - 7000 level courses
Evaluating	5000 - 6000 level courses
Analyzing	4000 - 5000 level courses
Applying	3000 - 4000 level courses
Understanding	2000 - 3000 level courses
Remembering	1000 - 2000 level courses

The course levels listed are provided as a guideline. In any course, you may have a variety of learning outcomes at different levels of thinking. The standard rule of thumb is that you should have very few "Remembering" learning outcomes in upper level courses and very few "Creating" learning outcomes in lower level courses.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Six Levels of Thinking Descriptions

Levels	Description
Creating	Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing. This includes generating new ideas, products, or ways of viewing things.
Evaluating	Making judgements based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing. This includes justifying a decision or course of action.
Analyzing	Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing.
Applying	Carrying out or using a procedure through executing, or implementing. This is using the information in another familiar situation.
Understanding	Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining. This is essentially demonstrating understanding of information by explaining ideas or concepts.
Remembering	Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory. This level is simply remembering or recalling previous learned information.

*Table reproduced from http://thepeakperformancecenter.com/educational-learning/thinking/blooms-taxonomy/blooms-taxonomy-revised/

The following table provides examples of action verbs you could use for each level of the taxonomy.

Level	Remembering	Understanding	Applying	Analyzing	Evaluating	Creating
Action Verbs	● Arrange ● Choose ● Identify ● Label ● List ● Match ● Memorize ● Recall ● Recite ● Tell ● Write	● Classify ● Compare ● Contrast ● Demonstrate ● Describe ● Explain ● Illustrate ● Outline ● Rephrase ● Show ● Summarize	● Apply ● Build ● Construct ● Develop ● Operate ● Organize ● Plan ● Produce ● Select ● Solve ● Utilize	● Analyze ● Categorize ● Classify ● Compare ● Discover ● Dissect ● Distinguish ● Examine ● Outline ● Research ● Test for	● Appraise ● Evaluate ● Assess ● Conclude ● Criticize ● Disprove ● Interpret ● Measure ● Prioritize ● Recommend ● Value	● Build ● Change ● Compile ● Construct ● Develop ● Design ● Formulate ● Modify ● Propose ● Solve ● Test

Tip: Oftentimes, verbs such as "know" and "understand" are used in learning outcomes, but how does one truly assess knowing and understanding? Using action verbs such as "explain", "compare" and "contrast", and "demonstrate" is more precise and can help you determine how to more accurately evaluate learning.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Writing Student Learning Outcomes

● The learning outcomes include words that are hard or impossible to measure.

- o Avoid terms such as understanding, develop awareness, possess a level of comfort, appreciate, become aware of, become familiar with, know, and learn. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to find good verbs for writing student learning outcomes.
- The learning outcomes include too many skills in one statement.
    - o Have only one skill per statement. If multiple skills are included, the outcome becomes complex and difficult to measure. An easy fix is to separate skills into two learning outcomes.
- The learning outcome is not a learning outcome and is more of a check box.
    - o For example: "The student will complete a self-assessment survey." Or "The student will utilize the Career Services office."
- There are too many learning outcomes.
    - o It is important to keep this manageable. No department can assess 30 program level student learning outcomes in a year. It is advised to keep things focused and prioritize learning outcomes to those that are necessary and important to the discipline.

For more information or assistance in writing Program Level Student Learning Outcomes, please contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment. www.westga.edu/iea *| 678-839-6449*