

What are Learning Outcomes?

Learning outcomes are clear statements of the critical/essential knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that a learner is expected to demonstrate upon completion of the course. They describe learning that is meaningful and significant, and transferable to other contexts. Performance-based, learning outcomes are verifiable and allow learners to demonstrate achievement in different ways. A good learning outcome identifies the indicators that will verify the learning, the conditions under which the learning will be demonstrated and the criterion required. As such, they reflect relatively high levels of critical thinking. Typically, they reflect, as appropriate, the program standards for vocational skills, general skills and general education. When in a course, learning outcomes are kept to a manageable number and reflect a balance between practical and theoretical understanding. They do not overlap, but should complement one another and work holistically to describe all important learning in the course.

Why are Learning Outcomes Important?

1. To help a potential student quickly identify what a course involves and decide if they want to take it.
2. To help a student understand what is expected and valued by the teacher.
3. To define the type and depth of learning students are expected to achieve.
4. To help the teacher clarify goals and focus your curriculum.
5. To guide assessment choices: the wording tells us what should be measured.
6. To help the teacher create focused objectives – smaller, achievable steps in lessons.
7. To promote accountability.

Three Essential Ingredients

Action Word (verb - performance)	Learning Statement (the “what”)	Criterion (governs the “what”)
Design	a creative playschool area	to facilitate development of gross and fine motor skills.
Calculate	the amount of	merchandise mark-up required to obtain desired cash flow profit.
Produce	Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet reports	for both profit and non-profit accounting situations.

Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes must be **SMART**.

S	M	A	R	T
Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-framed
to what the learner will be able to do.	and can be observed by the end of the course.	for the learner within specified conditions.	to the needs of the learner.	and achievable by the end of the course.

Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes Checklist

Includes verb, learning statement and criterion

Is clear and specific

Focuses on one goal at a time

Contains one verb only – at the beginning of the statement. Consider Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Is observable and measures student behaviour

Reflects the highest level of achievement expected in the course

Is student-centered, not teacher-centered

A Helpful Tool: Backward Design

Looking at the ultimate goal of your course first can help you to craft outcomes that are meaningful and relevant to your students. Consider the following:

1. **Overall goal.** “I would like my students to be effective campfire builders.”
2. **Learning outcome.** By the end of this course, students will be able to design a plan with all needed materials to hold a campfire safely at Humber College.
3. **Evidence “in the wild.”** If I was out at a cottage and saw someone doing this well, what would they be doing?
4. **Evidence “in captivity.”** In our college environment, how could a student demonstrate mastery of this skill?
5. **Assessment design.** How can students demonstrate this mastery in a way I can evaluate it, and know whether or not the learning outcome has been met?
6. **Instruction plan.** What do students need to know to achieve the outcome and succeed at the assessment, and what is the best way to facilitate this learning?