

Writing Behavioral Learning Objectives and Assessments

(from the American Psychological Association's
Standards and Guidelines for continuing education)

The successful design of programs to be offered for continuing education credit requires careful planning of the educational objectives that identify what prospective participants will learn. These learning objectives should be available to prospective participants before registration for the event and must be stated in measurable terms with action verbs that focus on the participant/learner's abilities.

- Rather than describing topics to be covered, learning objectives or outcomes are statements that clearly define what the participant will know or be able to do as a result of having attended the program.
- Learning objectives must be **observable and measurable**.
- Learning objectives should (1) focus on the learner, and (2) contain action verbs that describe measurable behaviors.
- As a guideline, programs should have one learning objective for each hour of learning time. A 4-hour program should have at least 3 or 4 learning objectives. 7- or 8-hour programs should have 5 or 6 learning objectives.

Verbs to consider when writing learning objectives:

- list, describe, recite, write
- compute, discuss, explain, predict
- apply, demonstrate, prepare, use
- analyze, design, select, utilize
- compile, create, plan, revise
- assess, compare, rate, critique

Verbs to avoid when writing learning objectives

- know, understand
- learn, appreciate
- become aware of, become familiar with

Distinguishing Insufficient and Sufficient Learning Objectives:

For a program entitled, "*Succeeding in an Academic Career*," the following are **INSUFFICIENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES** which **DO NOT** meet the APA's criteria:

At the conclusion of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the advantages in advancing one's career of having a systematic research program.
2. Manage the complexities of scheduling research assistants, supervisees and other helpers.
3. Negotiate the ins and outs of getting publications and grants.
4. Discharge advising obligations while still having time to write.
5. Increase chances for retention, tenure, and promotion through understanding academic policies and the administrative structure.

The learning objectives listed here, however, are **ACCEPTABLE, SUFFICIENT and DO meet the APA's criteria:**

At the conclusion of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the practical applications for teaching effectiveness of building a systematic research program.
2. Identify relevant ethical codes associated with research, clinical, or academic supervision with students.
3. Negotiate the regulatory and ethical information regarding publication and grant writing with colleagues or students.
4. Apply appropriate mentoring skills for maximal student growth.
5. Use an understanding of academic policies and the administrative structure to create more efficient classrooms and labs.

Note: Insufficient learning objectives identify the advantages that might accrue to the individual faculty member, but fail to link these to improved services and the broader regulatory, ethical or professional issues that might also serve broader constituents within this context. By contrast, the acceptable learning objectives effectively tie the knowledge gains associated with this program to the effective functioning of the students and the administrative units associated with the faculty's functioning, and highlight the professional and scientific gains that would be expected to accrue as a result of the program.