**The New School**
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**Writing Course-Level Learning Outcomes**

Course-level learning outcomes on a syllabus represent the most important aspects of learning in the course, and should be limited in number (approximately 5-10). Smaller, more discrete learning outcomes are still important and may remain a goal for a particular unit or assignment.

Consider the following question: **"At the end of this course, students will be able to…."** Brainstorm a list of answers to this question, keeping the following suggestions in mind:

- Focus on what you want students to learn and be able to do, rather than the content or coverage of what you will teach
- Think long-term: What do you want students to be able to do a year or two after the course?
- Consider the course's function within the curriculum: Is the course required? Do students need to learn particular knowledge and skills to advance to the next level? What program-level outcomes are addressed in the course?
- Do other faculty in your division teach same course? If so, most of the learning outcomes for the course should be the same. If these course-level learning outcomes have not been developed by the program, faculty members may need to meet with each other to create them.
- Choose an appropriate level of "staged" learning: Generally, introductory courses introduce concepts; in mid-level courses, students develop increased facility and engage in more complex, higher-level learning; and in senior capstones, students demonstrate mastery.
- Consider including learning from different areas: In addition to specific disciplinary content/skills, what else is being taught in the course? Many courses strengthen student learning in a variety of areas, such as oral communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, teamwork, and more.

Once you have an initial list, your task will be to prioritize and narrow to no more than 5-10 learning outcomes. You may find that some outcomes can be grouped together. When you have drafted a final list, the next step will be to write these as learning outcomes.

- Learning outcomes should be observable, since you'll want to judge whether or not your students have accomplished this learning.
- To ensure that outcomes are observable, precise language is necessary. In the context of a learning outcome, verbs such as "appreciate," "know," or "understand" are vague and difficult to observe.
    - To avoid vague terms, think of how students would demonstrate their knowledge, appreciation, or understanding more specifically – for example, students might explain concepts on an exam or in a paper. Identifying behaviors, activities, or student work that provides evidence may help you find more specific language.
    - Outcomes are most commonly written with "action verbs." Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive thought is a useful aid for finding appropriate verbs, and can be found here: http://www.newschool.edu/leadership/provost/learning-assessment/program-assessment/tips-writing/
- Write outcomes in language a student will understand.

Here are some examples of course-level learning. **At the end of this course, students will be able to:**

- Critically review the methodology of a research study published in a professional psychology journal.
- Produce a marketing plan for a small fashion firm.

- Demonstrate familiarity with American literary traditions from 1492 to 1865, including prominent authors, literary movements and styles, and the historical and cultural contexts important to those traditions.

**A final note:** Many faculty find beginning the course planning process by creating student learning outcomes to be effective. Once you have determined what students should learn, you can think about how they will apply and demonstrate this learning, as well as the instructional strategies that will aid students in meeting the learning outcomes. Since the ultimate goal of the course is for students to learn what you have identified as being most important, activities and assignments should be related to course learning outcomes. For more information on how to plan a course beginning with learning outcomes, see www.newschool.edu/teachingresources