

Writing Learning Objectives

The first thing we do in the Design Phase is to use the information we have collected to create learning objectives.

We now shift a little and our thinking from analyzing the performance context, to looking at the learning context.

There are lots of different names for objectives. And Dick and Carey like to break them out into different kinds of objectives. The process works regardless of what you call the objective. This is perhaps one of the more valuable parts of designing instruction. It's often the part that many instructors are taught. But as you've already learned through the goal and context analysis so much is left out if you start with learning objectives.

When presented to students, I think of learning objectives as [advanced organizers](#) (this is a term that is used within cognitive learning theory) – Giving students an advanced organizer helps them figure out what's relevant and not relevant when they receive new information.

Goals vs. Objectives

I'm often asked what's the difference between a goal and objective.

The biggest is that the goal is set in the performance context. The question I often ask is what does someone who does this successfully already do? That is the goal.

Objectives, on the other hand, are set in the learning context and are typically specific to a single lesson. What do you want your students to do by the end of the lesson? How will you, as the teacher, and your students know they have achieved that goal?

Example

Goal: Instructional designers need to be able to use the Dick and Carey method of instructional systems design to create an instructional design document.

Learning Objective: After completing the lesson, learners will be able to articulate the difference between goals and objectives.

Types of Learning Objectives

Dick and Carey divide learning objectives into the terminal objective and the subordinate objectives. The relationship between the types of objectives and the instruction goal is described as:

"The goal is a statement of what students will be able to do in the performance context ... The goal is rephrased as a terminal objective describing what students will be able to do in the learning context, and

subordinate objectives describe the building-block skills that students must master on their way to achieving the terminal objective” (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2014, p.119).

Further a given objective might be classified as:

- **Performance** objectives – those related to performing a skill
- **Learning** objective – those related to verbal information or intellectual knowledge
- **Behavioral** objective – those related to changes in attitude or behavior

The process for creating learning objectives is the same, regardless of the type of objective.

I prefer to determine two types of objectives: **performance** objectives and **learning** objectives. These align nicely to the task analysis, where the performance objectives are related to what the expert does, and the learning objectives focus on what the learner need to know or know how to do (that is, knowledge and skills).

Another way to think about is, what do you need learners to be able to do after the course? Those would be performance objectives. They are typically associated with the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

When you break down the performance objectives into what knowledge and skills are necessary, these align with the learning objectives. These are often associated with the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Where Do You Get Your Learning Objectives?

Your learning objectives should be derived directly from your task analysis. Typically, your goal analysis provides you with high level tasks that can be written as learning objectives. These would be examples of terminal objectives. These objectives typically use the higher levels of [Bloom's taxonomy](#).

Recall in the task analysis, that you looked at what the learner needed to know. These are usually learning objectives, sometimes also called subordinate objectives. These are the objectives that are needed in order to complete the upper level objectives. These often use the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Example: Performance Objectives

Instructional Goal: Instructional designers need to be able to effectively evaluate new technologies using a minimal amount of time.

| Goal Analysis | Performance objective |
|---|---|
| 1. Set a timeline for the evaluation. | No objective required. |
| 2. Write out evaluation criteria. | Given a tool category and evaluation purpose, learners will be able to write and least five different evaluation criteria. |
| 3. Search for several tools that meet the criteria. | Given a tool category and evaluation purpose, learners will be able to use a search engine such as Google to find at least three tools to evaluate. |
| 4. Choose one tool and evaluate against criteria. | Given evaluation criteria, learners will be able to evaluate at least three tools. |
| 5. Create a journal entry outlining findings. | Given evaluation criteria and access to at least three tools, learners will be able to write a short report outlining their evaluation findings. |
| 6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 with other tools. | No objective required. |
| 7. Stop when time ends. | No objective required. |

Example: Learning Objectives

Performance Objective:

Given a tool category and evaluation purpose, learners will be able to write at least five different evaluation criteria.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learners will be able to write an evaluation goal statement.
2. Learners will be able to identify the purpose of the tools being evaluated.
3. Learners will be able to identify three tools to be evaluated.
4. Learners will be able to find current tool reviews.
5. Learners will be able to filter search results by date.
6. Learners will be able to identify the audience of the evaluation.
7. Learners will be able to discover what common tasks are done with the selected tools.
8. Learners will be able to document evaluation exit criteria.

Writing Objectives

The mnemonic – ABCD – helps remember the different parts to an objective.

AUDIENCE – Who will be doing the behavior?

BEHAVIOR – What should the learner be able to do?

CONDITIONS – Under what conditions do you want the learner to be able to do it?

DEGREE – How well must it be done?

Example

Instructional design students will be able to write learning objectives with the aid of this document 100% of the time.

When the degree is 100% of the time, that part of the statement is not required because it is implied that if you do not include a number here, the number is 100%.

Objectives do not describe how you will teach.

Validating Your Learning Objectives

A mnemonic that is used to validate learning objectives is SMART.

Are you learning objectives:

S – Specific – What do you want learners to do? Is it observable?

M – Measurable – How will you know it is done successfully?

A – Achievable – Do the learners have the prior knowledge and skills necessary?

R – Relevant – Is the objective relevant to the course or lesson goal?

T – Time-Bound – When will it be done?

Rebecca's Objective Writing Practice

When I create objectives, I start with the goal and create performance objectives. I use the ABCD method for writing performance objectives. Recall that our goal uses the phrase "**need to be able to**". Our objectives use the phrase "**learners will be able to**".

Example ABCD Performance Objectives

1. Given a tool category and evaluation purpose, learners will be able to write and least five different evaluation criteria.
2. Given a tool category and evaluation purpose, learners will be able to use a search engine such as Google to find at least three tools to evaluate.
3. Given evaluation criteria, learners will be able to evaluate at least three tools.
4. Given evaluation criteria and access to at least three tools, learners will be able to write a short report outlining their evaluation findings.

Learning objectives are then derived from each of the performance objectives. Notice how this aligns directly with the task analysis!

Example Learning Objectives

1. **Given a tool category and evaluation purpose**, learners will be able to write and least five different evaluation criteria.
 1. Learners will be able to write an evaluation goal statement.
 2. Learners will be able to identify the purpose of the tools being evaluated.
 3. Learners will be able to identify three tools to be evaluated.
 4. Learners will be able to find current tool reviews.
 5. Learners will be able to filter search results by date.
 6. Learners will be able to identify the audience of the evaluation.
 7. Learners will be able to discover what common tasks are done with the selected tools.
 8. Learners will be able to document evaluation exit criteria.
2. **Given a tool category and evaluation purpose**, learners will be able to use a search engine such as Google to find at least three tools to evaluate.
 1. Learners will be able to identify good search terms.
 2. Learners will be able to search using the AND operator.
 3. Learners will be able to search using the OR operator.
 4. Given a search term, learners will be able to broaden the terms to find additional results.
 5. Learners will be able to evaluate search results.
3. **Given evaluation criteria which includes a list of tools**, learners will be able to evaluate at least three tools.
 1. Learners will be able to find tutorials on the tool website.
 2. Learners will be able to find tutorials on YouTube.
 3. Learners will be able to identify other sites for tutorials such as LinkedIn Learning.
 4. Learners will be able to follow the evaluation criteria in a systematic way.
 5. Learners will be able to identify hype about the tools.
 6. Learners will be able to identify actual use cases for the tools.
4. **Given evaluation criteria and access to at least three tools**, learners will be able to write a short report outlining their evaluation findings.
 1. Learners will be able to clearly identify which tool is being evaluated.
 2. Learners will be able to write a paragraph about each of the evaluation criteria.
 3. Learners will be able to identify information that is not required in the report.
 4. Learners will identify strategies to keep the evaluation report short and easy to create.
 5. Learners will be able to create a comparison table, demonstrating how multiple tools compare to one another.
 6. Learners will be able to write a summary paragraph.



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