

Writing subject learning outcomes

Guidelines for JCU Subject Coordinators

Subject Learning Outcomes (SLOs) identify what your students will know and be able to do upon successful completion of your subject. It is recommended that you develop between 3-5 SLOs per subject.

Step 1: Ensure that your SLOs are written from the perspective of student learning, as reflected in an appropriate stem, such as:

Students who successfully complete this subject will be able to:

•

Here is an example where the SLOs are not written from the perspective of student learning. Instead, these statements communicate what the subject or lecturer will do:

- Introduce basic concepts relating to sustainability
- Provide an overview of the key environmental challenges facing humanity

These statements can be easily translated into learning outcomes, as follows:

Students who successfully complete this subject will be able to:

- Define key concepts relating to sustainability
- Discuss key environmental challenges facing humanity

Check: Are your SLOs written from the perspective of student learning?

Step 2: Ensure that action verbs are used to frame your SLOs and reflect the appropriate level of demand. Avoid the following words:

• Know	• Be aware of	• Believe
Understand	• Have a good grasp of	Be interested in
• Be familiar with	Have knowledge of	
• Appreciate	• Realise the significance of	

Check: Do your outcomes begin with any of these words? If so, ask yourself how your students are going to demonstrate their understanding. Will they be required to *define... explain... compare... evaluate*? How will they demonstrate their awareness, or their familiarity?

Note: The verb in the learning outcome becomes the common link that establishes alignment with assessment (Biggs, 2014). The crucial point is to design assessment tasks that require students to enact the target verbs (Biggs & Tang, 2009). The higher education literature recognises that, "much traditional assessment tends to focus on remembering and repeating conceptual knowledge and understanding, whereas employability is more likely to be predicated on students' ability to apply that knowledge in different contexts": solving problems, thinking critically (i.e. analysing, synthesising, evaluating) and performing in professional settings (HEA, 2012, p. 12).



			Analysis	Synthesis combine 	Evaluation appraise assess critique
Knowledge • define	Comprehension describe discuss explain 	Application calculate demonstrate employ examine 	 analyse compare contrast differentiate prioritise 	 compose construct design formulate integrate 	 rank evaluate select persuade
 state record list cite 	 identify report summarise 	illustrateoperatepractice	solvedeconstructinvestigate	manageadaptcreate	 defend conclude justify

Check: Is there opportunity for your students to demonstrate higher order outcomes?

Original Taxonomy: Bloom, B., Engelhart, M. Furst, E., Hill, W. & Krathwohl, D. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: David McKay.

Step 3: Construct your SLOs according to the following format:

Verb	Content	Qualifier (if relevant)
at the appropriate level of understanding or performance intended	to which the verb applies	to provide the context or restrict the conditions and terms within which the outcome is met
¥	Ψ	Ψ

Evaluate psychologists' professional conduct in relation to the Australian Psychology Society's 'Code of Ethics'.

Note: Examples of qualifiers: using the ... framework; considering the ... theory; by referring to the manual; without supervision; in response to the patient's behaviour.

Checklist: Each of my SLOs is:

Measurable, commencing with an action verb that students can demonstrate?	
Distinct, focusing on one action?	Yes
Pitched at the appropriate level? (Refer to CLOs and AQF for learning outcomes per award type)	Yes

An excellent resource for writing subject learning outcomes:

Kennedy, D. (2007). *Writing and using learning outcomes: A practical guide*. University College Cork, Quality Promotion Unit. Retrieved from <u>http://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A-Learning-Outcomes-Book-D-Kennedy.pdf</u>

References

Biggs, J. (2014). Constructive alignment in university teaching. HERSA Review of Higher Education 1, 5-22.

- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2009). Applying constructive alignment to outcomes-based teaching and learning. Retrieved from http://drij.uitm.edu.my/DRJJ/MQAGGPAS-Apr2011/What-is-CA-biggs-tang.pdf
- Higher Education Academy. (2012). A marked improvement: Transforming assessment in higher education. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf