Learning Objectives

Description

Learning objectives are granular, specific statements of what a learner should be able to know, think, or be able to do as part of a learning experience. Learning objectives should be measurable by multiple forms of assessment; include specific, observable behaviors that describe success; and be appropriately challenging. Effective learning objectives are created in a hierarchy, with broad top-level learning objectives describing cognitively complex outcomes after completing a learning experience, and more specific lower-level learning objectives that provide the building blocks for the top-level objectives.

Why is this important?

Learning objectives are the backbone of learner centered design and outcome-driven instruction, laying the foundation for all instructional decisions. Learning objectives allow for effective instructional alignment, which creates a cohesive and pedagogically sound learning environment and eliminates extraneous content. Students who report higher perceived value and awareness of learning goals and outcomes have been shown to have higher motivation, academic performance, retention and graduation rates.

Implementation Examples

Build courses based on learning objectives*	✓
Assessment and content alignment with learning objectives*	✓
Student-facing learning objectives in learning experiences*	✓
Instructor-facing learning objective reporting*	✓

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*in select courses

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Practical Applications

✓ When constructing learning objectives, include a verb that describes the desired behavior and reflects the cognitive level desired, and a noun that describes the knowledge desired. The objective should describe what the student is able to do after the learning experience.

✓ Develop learning objectives at the beginning of a learning experience, developing assessments and content around the desired outcomes

✓ Students should be aware of learning objectives and understand what the objectives mean in order to assume ownership of the goals, guide their self-monitoring, aid them in linking new knowledge to current knowledge, and make expectations of good performance clear.

✓ Students and instructors can use learning objective reporting from formative assessments to identify gaps in learning as well as recognize strengths and talents based on exceptional performance.

Sources: Anderson & Krathwohl (2001), Burton et al. (1991), Clark & Mayer (2011), Cohen (1987), Dick et al. (2015), Elliot (1999), Harackiewicz et al (2014), Hattie (2009), Hidi & Renninger (2006); Hulleman et al. (2010, 2017) Mayer (2011), Nicol & Macfarlane (2006), Sadler (1989)

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