

# How to Write Goals and Objectives for Outcomes Assessment: A Practical Guide

MSU-Great Falls College of Technology

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This guide is intended to assist you in writing measurable goals and objectives. Setting measurable goals and objectives will form the foundation for good planning and the measurement of student learning, departmental, and institutional effectiveness.

Here at MSU-Great Falls, we have identified operational definitions for the terminology of assessment. Below you'll find those terms defined as they apply to the assessment of student learning, departmental effectiveness, and institutional effectiveness.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS – Assessment of Student Learning

- **Abilities** – Learning that is central to the personal and professional success of all MSU-Great Falls COT students, e.g. institutional outcomes for student learning.
- **Program Goal** – The general expectations of individual programs listed in the College Catalog (big-picture, vision statement, hopes). The program goal is linked to the college mission.
- **Program Outcomes** – The specific knowledge, skills, or developmental attributes listed in the College Catalog that students develop through their experience in a program. Program outcomes are linked to the College's abilities.
- **Course Objectives** – The specific measurable expectations that appear on course syllabi about what an individual in a course will achieve. Course objectives are linked to program outcomes.
- **Course Measures** – The instrument(s) developed by the faculty and used to gather information on student learning, development, or success in area (e.g., observations, quizzes, papers, presentations, portfolios, surveys, self-reflections, etc.).
- **Evidence** – Information about the results of the process. Evidence is gathered through analysis and study of course measures.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS – Assessment of Departmental Effectiveness

- **Strategic Plan** – The integrative framework central to institutional effectiveness at MSU-Great Falls College of Technology. The strategic plan is linked to the college mission.
- **Departmental Goal(s)** – The general expectations of individual departments articulated in the strategic plan (big-picture, vision statement, hopes). The departmental goal(s) is linked to the strategic plan.
- **Departmental Outcomes** – The specific tasks to be accomplished, e.g. what the department will *do*. The departmental outcomes are linked to the departmental goal(s).
- **Program/Area Objectives** – The specific measurable expectations about what an individual(s) in an area will achieve. Departmental objectives are linked to program outcomes.
- **Measures** – The instrument(s) used to gather information on effectiveness, growth, or success.
- **Evidence** – The information about the results of the process. Evidence is gathered through analysis and study of the measures.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS – Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness

- **Strategic Plan** – The integrative framework central to institutional effectiveness at MSU-Great Falls College of Technology. The strategic plan is linked to the college mission.
- **Institutional Goal(s)** – The general expectations of the institution articulated in the strategic plan (big-picture, vision statement, hopes). The institutional goal(s) is linked to the college mission.
- **Institutional Outcomes** – The specific tasks to be accomplished, e.g. what the institution will *do*. The institutional outcomes are linked to the institutional goal(s).
- **Departmental Objectives** – The specific measurable expectations about what an individual department will achieve. The institutional objectives are linked to institutional outcomes.
- **Measures** – The instrument(s) used to gather information on effectiveness, growth, or success.
- **Evidence** – The information about the results of the process. Evidence is gathered through analysis and study of the measures.

Key point to remember: Goals are big picture, general expectations.

## Measurable objectives state:

- Who is involved  
The people whose behaviors, knowledge, and/or skills are to be changed as a result of the work of the assignment, course, division, area, or program.
- What the desired outcomes are  
The intended behavior, knowledge, and/or skill changes that should result.
- How progress is measured  
What tool or device (surveys, tests, logs, other data, etc.) will be used to measure the expected changes. Remember you need to ensure that the College has the resources/capacity (time, staff, funding, etc.) to perform the measurement. Please contact Heidi (4397) or Joe (4313) if you need further information on availability.
- Target(s)  
Identify the criteria for success.
- When the outcomes will occur  
Identify the time frame for success.

The following terms might be CONSIDERED when writing learning objectives:

To explain	To apply	To predict
To identify	To employ	To evaluate
To describe	To illustrate	To defend
To integrate	To use	To assess
To contrast	To interpret	To distinguish
To sort	To categorize	To diagram
To solve	To formulize	To report
To relate	To organize	To restate
To recall	To prepare	To review
To list	To arrange	To classify
To name	To construct	To translate
To recognize	To create	To discriminate

General terms such as those listed below are not as useful because they are open to many interpretations (they are non-specific) and are not accessible to quantification.

AVOID the following terms when writing learning objectives:

To know	To understand	To really understand
To fully appreciate	To internalize	To grasp the significance of
To have an awareness of		

## Tips on Writing

Most objectives need to have three components:

- A measurable verb (also known as performance)
- The important conditions (if any) under which the performance is to occur
- The criterion of acceptable performance (target)

It is important to add that many objectives are written in a manner in which the important conditions and criterion are implicit. Make the objective specific, descriptive and more measurable.

**EXAMPLE**

<b>Example:</b>	By December 2008, the percentage of students in developmental math courses using math and writing tutoring services will increase by 15% as reported by student use rosters in the tutoring lab.		
<b>Who:</b>	All students using math and writing tutors	<b>How measured:</b>	As reported on student use rosters
<b>What:</b>	Increase percentage of use	<b>Target:</b>	From current usage rate of 40% to 55% of all developmental mat students enrolled.
<b>When:</b>	By December 2008		

**Measurable objectives can relate to the:**

***Student***

Example: What is the **outcome** ?  
Change in achievement  
Change in behavior  
Change in attitude

How is it **measured**?  
Assessment  
Incidence of behavior (record numbers)  
Log  
Survey

***Program Implementation***

What is the **outcome**?  
Enrollment  
Number of Classes Offered  
Student/teacher ratio  
Course offerings  
More students enrolled in sequential course offerings leading to success in math and English

How is it **measured**?  
Number of incidences  
Changes in programs

***Faculty/Staff***

What is the **outcome** ?  
Pedagogy  
Knowledge  
Skill  
Attitude

How is it **measured**?  
Observation  
Teacher plans or some other document  
Logs  
Assessment  
Student Surveys

## Objectives Worksheet

**Directions:** Write your goal, then for each objective in the space provided write who is involved; what the desired outcomes are; how progress will be measured; when the outcome will occur and the target. Next put the pieces together into a sentence. Finally, use the checklist to ensure that the objectives contain all necessary components. Use a new worksheet for each goal.

**Goal:**

**Objective 1:**

Who:

What:

How:

When:

Target:

Written Objective:

**Objective 2:**

Who:

What:

How:

When:

Target:

Written Objective:

**Objective 3:**

Who:

What:

How:

When:

Target:

Written Objective:

## Objectives Checklist

- Objectives contain all elements
  - Who
  - What
  - How
  - When
  - Target
- Redundancy has been eliminated
- Objectives relate to any relevant assessment findings already identified
- Objectives can really be measured
  - Is assessment meaningful?
  - Instrument or data source has been identified