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Learning Goals

LEARNING GOALS OVERVIEW

Articulating the learning goals for your course is essential for designing, delivering, and assessing it.

A note on terminology: The academy uses a number of possible terms for this concept, including course goals, course outcomes, learning outcomes, learning objectives, and more, with among them. With respect for that ongoing discussion, given that the new Stanford course evaluations are focused on assessing learning goals, we will use "learning goals" when discussing your students to be able to do or demonstrate at the end of your class.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN LEARNING GOALS

Given the topic and level of your course, first think about the following:

- Ideas students will understand (e.g., theories, approaches, perspectives, and other broad themes in your field)
 - Information to apply in problem-solving (e.g., equations, facts, and other kinds of core knowledge)
 - Skills to develop (e.g., laboratory skills, problem-solving skills, creative skills, writing skills)
 - Some faculty also ask what attitudes they want students to develop as a result of their course, such as love of the field; a critical, questioning stance toward texts; or an appreciation of differences.
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HOW TO PHRASE LEARNING GOALS

Now turn these into measurable goals. Learning goals are what you want your students to be able to do at the end of the course, so use active verbs. Examples:

- Test hypotheses and draw correct inferences using quantitative analysis.
- Carry on a conversation with a native speaker in a friendly manner on topics such as daily life, hobbies, personal history, leisure time activities, and sharing personal episodes.
- Recognize patterns in observations of chemical phenomena and construct conceptual models to explain the phenomena.

Concrete verbs like those above are generally better at focusing student feedback than are "fuzzier" verbs, such as understand, know, learn, etc.

Learn more about Writing Learning Goals, including good examples from different disciplines.

SEE ALSO

[Designing Courses "Backwards"](#)

[Creating Learning Outcomes \(IRDS\)](#)

[Learning Goals Resources \(The Carl Weiman Science Initiative at UBC\)](#)

Check with the VPTL consultant in your disciplinary area

RESOURCES

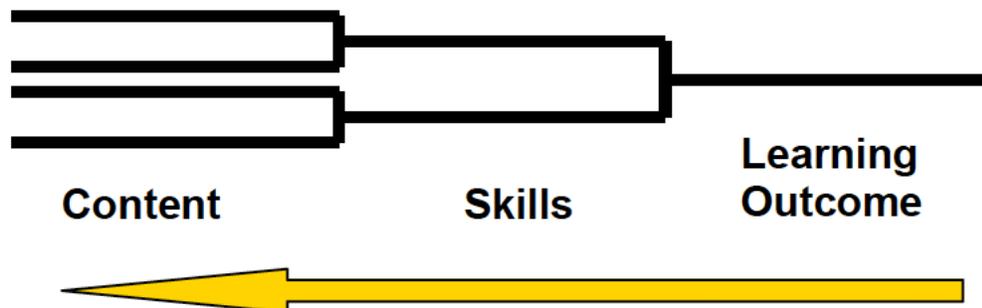
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Designing Courses Backwards



A "FORWARD-LOOKING" APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

You've got your calendar in one hand and your content in the other... you are ready to design your course. *"What will I cover?"*

But wait...that is forward thinking... and the most successful courses are designed backward. *"What should they learn?"* Or even more boldly, what should they *remember* next quarter?

- 1** Consider your own rationale for teaching this class. What is important to you about the material? About the way you plan to teach the material? About how the students interact with the material?
- 2** Skip directly to the end of the course. Distill five (or fewer!) major learning outcomes. (If this number is too small for comfort, you can add more later if you really must... but stick to five.) This is the way to get to the underlying, often unifying, themes of your course.)
- 3** Think broadly about these outcomes. Content or foundational knowledge is but one broad category in which you might have specific goals. For other ideas, see Writing Learning Goals.
- 4** Work backwards. What skills will demonstrate achievement of the learning goals? What content is required to support those skills?

Why bother? Some of the best payoffs include:

- The outcome goals will be threaded throughout the course. They provide unifying themes and context for the material you cover.
- These choices define the skills embedded in homework, projects, exams, etc. Students who have met the learning goals will be able to do what? Student work becomes more obvious, exam questions or projects become more authentic.
- This process helps distill the huge content "problem." Cutting content is always painful, but we know we have to do it... working backwards establishes priorities.

RESOURCES

Teaching

Learning

Course Preparation

Individual Consultation

Course Preparation Handbook

Course Design Aids

Designing Courses Backwards

Writing Learning Goals

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Creating A Syllabus

Writing Learning Goals
