

Characteristics of Well-Written Instructional Objectives

Instructional Objectives

Instructional objectives (also known as behavioural objectives or learning objectives) are basically statements which clearly describe an anticipated learning outcome. When objectives were first coming into their own in education, they almost always began with the phrase: "Upon completion of this lesson, the student should be able to...." This phrase focused on the outcome of learning rather than on the learning process. In fact, one of the criteria for a well-written objective is that it describes the outcome of learning, that is, what the learners can do after learning has occurred that they might not have been able to do before the teaching and learning process began.

Characteristics of a Well-Written Instructional Objective

A well-written Instructional objective should meet the following criteria:

1. Describe a learning outcome

A well-written objective should describe a learning outcome (e.g., to correctly spell the spelling words on page seventeen). It should not describe a learning activity (e.g., to practice the words on page seventeen by writing each one ten times). Learning activities are important in planning and guiding instruction but they are not to be confused with instructional objectives.

2. Be student oriented

A student-oriented objective focuses on the learner, not on the teacher. It describes what the learner will be expected to be able to do. It should not describe a teacher activity (e.g., to go over the words on page seventeen with the students, explaining their meaning and telling them how the words are pronounced). It may be helpful to both the teacher and the student to know what the teacher is going to do but teacher activities are also not to be confused with instructional objectives.

3. Be observable (or describe an observable product)

If an instructional objective is not observable (or does not describe an observable product), it leads to unclear expectations and it will be difficult to determine whether or not it had been reached. The key to writing observable objectives is to use verbs that are observable and lead to a well defined product of the action implied by that verb. Verbs such as "to know," "to understand," "to enjoy," "to appreciate," "to realize," and "to value" are vague and not observable. Verbs such as "to identify," "to list," "to select," "to compute," "to predict," and "to analyze" are explicit and describe observable actions or actions that lead to observable products.

There are many skills that cannot be directly observed. The thinking processes of a student as she tries to solve a math problem cannot be easily observed. However, one can look at the answers she comes up with and determine if they are correct. It is also possible to look at the steps a student takes to arrive at an answer if they are written down (thus displaying his thinking process). There are many end products that also can be observed (e.g., an oil painting, a prose paragraph, a 3-dimensional map, or an outline.)