

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:

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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:

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • <i>Know</i> | • <i>Be aware of</i> | • <i>Believe</i> |
| • <i>Understand</i> | • <i>Have a good grasp of</i> | • <i>Be interested in</i> |
| • <i>Be familiar with</i> | • <i>Have knowledge of</i> | |
| • <i>Appreciate</i> | • <i>Realise the significance of</i> | |

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?

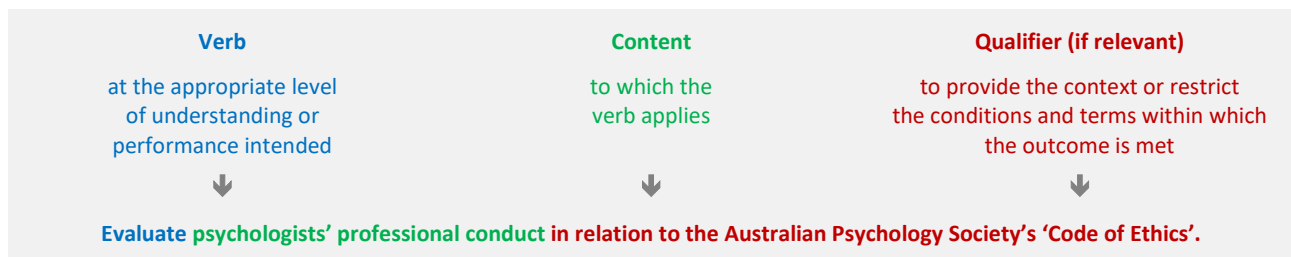
Note: The verb in the learning outcome becomes the common link that establishes alignment with assessment (Biggs, 2014). The crucial point is to design assessment tasks that require students to enact the target verbs (Biggs & Tang, 2009). The higher education literature recognises that, “much traditional 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).

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:



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?	Yes
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 <http://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A-Learning-Outcomes-Book-D-Kennedy.pdf>

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://drjj.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