

# Writing Learning Objectives for Unit and Lesson Plans

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## Purposes of Objectives:

- (1) They provide the teacher with the goal of the teaching-learning process. In other words, you know your destination when you begin instruction. They answer the questions, "What are the students supposed to know or be able to do once the unit or lesson is completed?"
- (2) They provide a clear framework for assessment. Assessment is, after all, an effort to determine to what extent students have reached or achieved the objectives.
- (3) They provide the students direction and a goal for learning. Students have a better opportunity to stay the course when they know the goal of the learning.

## What Objectives Are NOT Designed To Do:

Objectives should not describe what the *teacher* does during the lesson (i.e., instructional strategies or methods). They may or may not overlap with the students' activities, but they ultimately should describe what the *student* is able to do after the learning.

## Examples of Objectives:

- The learner will list three characteristics of invertebrates.
- The learner will design a healthy diet.
- The learner will justify the actions of the main character of the play.
- The learner will explain three causes of the Civil War.
- The learner will solve fifteen division problems (with single digit divisors).
- The learner will distinguish between faith and obedience in the life of a Christian.
- The learner will compare the populations of any three states in the U.S.
- The learner will label the parts of a cell.
- The learner will spell 80% of the words on the spelling list correctly.
- The learner will list at least five reasons that water is a necessary resource.

## Non-Examples of Objectives:

- The learner will cut out patterns to color later in class. [This is an activity.]
- The learner will work in groups to discover cause and effect for electromagnetic forces. [This is an activity.]
- The teacher will provide work sheets for students to complete their math problems. [This is an instructional strategy or method that the *teacher* will do.]

## Using Bloom's Taxonomy in the Construction of Learning Objectives

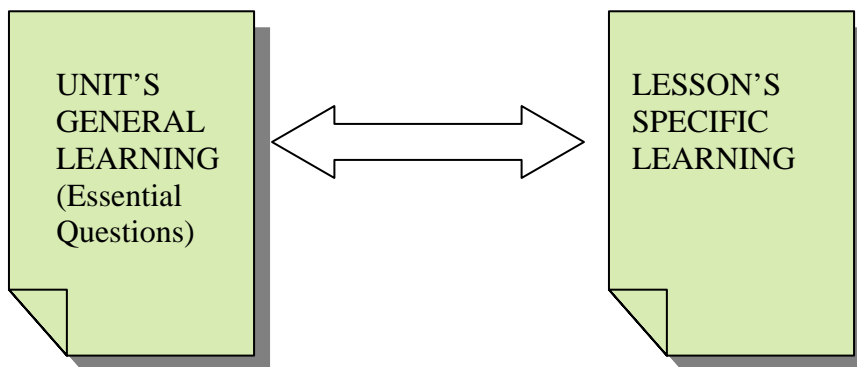
Bloom's Taxonomy, now over fifty years old, provides an excellent framework of levels of thinking that inform the writing of objectives, questions, and assessments. For the most part, instruction occurs at the knowledge level, the lowest level of cognitive functioning on Bloom's Taxonomy. While this level is certainly essential to learning (without facts and recall, higher learning levels will be virtually impossible), learning should not totally reside at this level. In a complex world that demands complex decisions and thinking, it is important that we challenge our students with higher-level learning objectives, questions, and assessment. Another important consideration is that many criterion-referenced tests now include a preponderant amount of higher-level questions and problems for students.



Many educators now place synthesis at the top of the ladder, displacing evaluation to the position directly below it.

## Constructing Behavioral Learning Objectives for Lessons

It is important that objectives always tie together the unit's essential questions or general area of learning and a specific learning for the lesson. The string that ties them together is the specific behavior that the student will exhibit when accomplishing the objective.



Avoid the following when writing behavioral objectives:

appreciate	enjoy
like	love
celebrate	understand

Your objectives should be clear and understandable.

### **Writing Unit Objectives versus Lesson Objectives**

When writing unit objectives, *you may write more general objectives* and even use words like “appreciate” or “understand”, but you must provide *indicators* (behavioral) which will indicate how a teacher will know these have been reached or achieved.

For example:

The student understands and appreciates the diversity of the people who make up American society. [Indicators below tell a teacher how he or she can know that the student in fact has reached this objective.]

- Can define diversity in the words of others or in his or her own words.
- Can give instances of how diverse persons or groups have enriched the cultural life of Americans.
- Can explore in writing how maintaining appreciation for diversity is a fragile and difficult goal to achieve.

(from Norman Gronlund, 1978, 1982).

Of course, the individual lessons within this unit would lead to the behaviors in the indicators under the general objective.

### **Practice**

The essential question in a unit on The American Frontier might be

- “What forces prompted the western movement in American history?”
- “Why did families sacrifice sometimes even their lives to move west?”
- “How did the western migration change the face of the West?”

Pretend you are going to create a unit on The American Frontier.

- (1) Suggest three unit objectives.
- (2) From these objectives, list four lesson plan titles.
- (3) For each lesson plan, suggest three learning objectives.

To assist you, consult the notes above on writing objectives.

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