INTRODUCTION

Clear and constructively aligned learning outcomes provide the foundation of effective curriculum design. Writing clear and constructively aligned learning outcomes should always be the first step in curriculum development, and is a skill that – like all skills – requires some practice to master.

This guide is aimed at helping subject coordinators understand the levels of interpretation of learning outcomes and the principles of constructive alignment involved, as well as providing guidance to aid in mastering writing effective learning outcomes.

DEFINITION

Intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are explicit statements of what a learner is expected to achieve, and to what standard or level of achievement. Biggs and Tang (2007) describe ILOs as “statements, written from the students’ perspective, indicating the level of understanding and performance they are expected to achieve as a result of engaging in the teaching and learning experience” (p. 55).

The key to La Trobe University ILO standards is that each ILO will have standards developed to measure the achievement of graduate capabilities in the course at cornerstone, midpoint and capstone elements of the subjects.

LEVELS OF ILOs

There are different levels of ILO statements that determine the curriculum:

**University level ILOs** are institutional undertakings from the University to Government, Quality Enhancement and Accreditation Boards and reflect the requirements of Australian Qualifications framework.
**Course level ILOs** is broad statements at course level. They relate to the university’s mission and encompass the benefits to and requirements of the key stakeholders namely the University, Professional Accreditation Bodies, employers, students and discipline communities.

**Subject level ILOs** relates to the course ILOs and outline the graduate capabilities and outcomes that will be achieved in the subject.

**Topic level ILOs** relate to the subject and describe the graduate capabilities and outcomes that will be achieved in a specific teaching and learning session.

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**INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**

*Describing the course context*

- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- Professional Accreditation
- University Graduate Capabilities, Standards and Essentials

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**COURSE LEVEL**

*Setting Course Intended Learning Outcomes*

- Aims of the course
- Describe to students what they will be able to on completion of the course
- Design and sequence the learning experience so students achieve the course learning outcomes
- Design subjects, assessment and feedback so that students have the best opportunity to achieve course learning outcomes

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**WHAT ARE LEARNERS EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE AND TO WHAT STANDARD**

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**WRITING CLEAR INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are the foundation of effective curriculum design. They are statements about what you would like students to learn, the level you would like them to learn...
at, and how they are expected to demonstrate their learning. In other words, they describe student learning at the end of a program of study. All other aspects of teaching and curriculum (for example, your selection of the learning activities and the assessment tasks) should flow from a clear statement of learning outcomes. ILOs signal to students what they should focus on and where they should direct their effort in order to be a successful learner in your subject.

This Quick Guide is intended to help you write ILOs that are appropriate to the subject you teach. Intended Learning Outcomes should be written with the following **CLEAR** dimensions in mind. Use the Checklist to ensure your ILOs are appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is this important?</th>
<th>Checklist: Does the ILO?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSTRUCTIVELY</strong></td>
<td>☐ Take account of the subject’s year level.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ALIGNED</strong></td>
<td>☐ Account for the status of the subject if it contains cornerstone, midpoint or capstone elements (i.e., faculty graduate capabilities).</td>
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<td>☐ Advance a course degree outcome.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>☐ Take account of La Trobe University policy requirements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>☐ Meet the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).</td>
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| **LEARNING FOCUSED** | ILOs are not statements of disciplinary knowledge or content. They are statements about what you would like students to learn and do with the disciplinary content. Subject ILOs should contain a ‘verb’ that expresses the learning students are expected to actively demonstrate. | ☐ Contain a single verb that is appropriate to the level of learning students are expected to demonstrate.  
☐ Convey information about what the student has to do to demonstrate their learning.  
☐ Provide opportunities for cognitive, affective and kinaesthetic forms of learning. |
|---|---|---|
| **EQUITABLE** | It is important that all students have an opportunity to achieve the subject ILOs. Where appropriate, it may be important to build in the flexibility for students to achieve the ILOs in different ways. | ☐ Present all students with an opportunity to achieve it.  
☐ Account for the diversity of the student cohort. |
| **ASSESSABLE** | The ILOs in a subject are most effective when they are directly linked to the assessment. Since ILOs express the most important aspects of student learning in the subject, the opportunity to demonstrate that learning should be made available through a range of assessment tasks. | ☐ Directly inform the design of the subject’s overall approach to assessment.  
☐ Relate specifically to an assessment task, and the assessment task to the ILO.  
☐ Enable a valid and confident measurement of student learning. |
RELEVANT

The ILOs need to be relevant to the aim of the subject and/or the professional context. It is likely that the ILOs will take into account the latest research and development in the discipline.

Articulate with professional accreditation requirements.

EXPRESS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND/OR CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DISCIPLINE/PROFESSION THAT ARE RELEVANT TO THE SUBJECT.

TAXONOMIES

Here are examples of two taxonomies which you might like to refer to. Look at the hierarchical nature of the taxonomies and which level of skills you would like your students to develop.

Biggs’ SOLO Taxonomy

SOLO stands for Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome. It provides a systematic way of describing the structural complexity of students’ responses, i.e. how a learner's performance grows in complexity when mastering many tasks. The categories are not content specific. They are assumed to apply to any kind phenomenon that involves learning, and shifts in understanding.

1. Prestructural
   - Use of irrelevant information or no meaningful response.
   - The task is not attacked appropriately; the student hasn't really understood the point and uses too simple a way of going about it.

2. Unistructural
   - Answer focuses on one relevant aspect only.

3. Multistructural
   - Answer focuses on several relevant features but they are not coordinated together.
   - One (unistructural), then several (multistructural), aspects of the task are picked up and used, but are treated independently and additively. Assessment of this level is primarily quantitative.

4. Relational
   - The several parts are integrated into a coherent whole; details are linked to conclusions; meaning is understood.
These aspects then become integrated into a coherent whole (relational); this level is what is normally meant by an adequate understanding of the topic. Assessment of this level becomes qualitative if it is to pick up its nature.

5. Extended abstract
   - Answer generalises the structure beyond the information given; higher order principles are used to bring in a new and broader set of issues.
   - The previous integrated whole may be conceptualised at a higher level of abstraction and generalised to a new topic or area (extended abstract); this too requires qualitative assessment.’

SOLO might be used to classify the quality, as represented by the sophistication of the assumed underlying logic, of students’ responses to assessment items (warning if students have been ‘told’ a sophisticated answer in their classes then there need be very little thinking at all underlying its reproduction in an examination!). (Ramsden, 2003).

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Revised by Anderson & Krathwol, 2001)

Bloom proposed that there are six levels of thinking in the cognitive domain that move in a hierarchal order of complexity. These are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

1. Knowledge
   - a. memorisation of facts, theories and principles.
   - b. recall, list, name, state, define, identify, match, memorise, order, recognize, duplicate, label, arrange, relate, repeat, reproduce, state.

2. Comprehension
   - a. show basic understanding.
   - b. discuss, paraphrase, compute, extrapolate, describe, explain, distinguish, translate, classify, restate, review, report, express, identify, indicate, locate.

3. Application
   - a. apply knowledge (ideas or theories or principles) to new situations.
   - b. solve, demonstrate, apply, interpret, choose, classify, use, calculate, apply, choose, illustrate, dramatise, employ, practice, operate, relate, schedule, sketch, administer.
   - c. application to situations where there is a correct answer.

4. Analysis
   - a. decompose a topic into its constituent parts, show relationships between the more basic ideas.
b. separate, recognize, test, differentiate, compare, contrast, criticise, discriminate, examine, question, solve, analyse, appraise, calculate, categorise, distinguish, experiment.
c. solutions where there is not necessarily a specific correct answer.

5. Synthesis
a. put parts of knowledge together, discover relationships among different parts, create new patterns.
b. design, order, develop, create, summarise, combine, compose, construct, formulate, plan, prepare, propose, arrange, assemble, manage, organise.

6. Evaluation
a. make judgements regarding extent to which something satisfies chosen criteria.
b. evaluate, justify, critique, appraise, argue, judge, predict, assess, defend, value, compare, estimate, support.

EXAMPLES OF INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through accessing subject information from five modules (Context of Care and the Health System, Organisational Dynamics, Professional Development, Evidence/Quality and Professional Accountability) and through written activities, discussions, other readings, on-line interaction and team work, students will be able to:

- describe, discuss and analyse the structure and influences of the health system, demonstrate an interdisciplinary awareness.
- describe and explore the contribution of other professions to health and human service delivery.
- engage in team work with students from other health and human service professions.
- describe and analyse the rights and expectations of service consumers and apply the key issues of ethical decision making.

KEY REFERENCES ON LEARNING OUTCOMES


Bloom’s Taxonomy (Colorado Community Colleges Online).


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