

Writing Program Outcomes

Program outcomes are clear, measurable statements that express what a unit intends to achieve in support of its mission and the broader goals of the institution. These outcomes serve as a foundation for meaningful assessment and continuous improvement across educational programs, administrative offices, and academic support services.

- **Educational programs** define outcomes that focus on student learning. These include the knowledge, skills, and abilities students are expected to develop through their academic experiences.
- **Administrative** outcomes usually reflect the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of their operations. These outcomes help demonstrate how services and processes contribute to institutional success.
- **Academic and student support units** often combine service-oriented and learning-focused outcomes. These may include measures of student engagement, satisfaction, or development outside the classroom.

Writing Outcomes for Administrative and Academic Support Units

Effective outcomes for administrative and support units begin with a clear understanding of the unit's mission and core functions. Establishing outcomes that are meaningful and aligned with institutional priorities ensures that assessment efforts contribute to continuous improvement and institutional vitality.

Outcomes should be specific, measurable, and actionable. They may focus on areas such as service quality, operational efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, or the broader impact of services on the university environment. The following categories offer a framework for identifying outcome types:

- **Efficiency** (e.g., timeliness, resource utilization)
- **Quality** (e.g., accuracy, consistency)
- **Delivery or Completion** (e.g., volume, turnaround time)
- **Perceptions or Behaviors** (e.g., engagement, usage patterns)
- **Satisfaction** (e.g., feedback from students, staff, or faculty)
- **Institutional Impact** (e.g., contributions to strategic goals)
- **Knowledge or Skills** (e.g., learning outcomes for clients or staff)

The subject of each outcome may vary depending on the unit's scope. Internal outcomes typically focus on departmental performance, while external outcomes may center on the experiences or achievements of students, faculty, or other stakeholders.

Outcome statements should use active verbs and precise language to clearly convey what is being measured. Well-crafted outcomes serve as a foundation for meaningful assessment, guiding planning and decision-making while supporting the institution's commitment to excellence and improvement.

Guidelines for Writing Effective, Measurable Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) specify what students will know, think, or do following completion of a program, course, or project. Effective outcomes describe expected student behavior, the conditions under which the behavior will occur, and the standards used to evaluate performance. Outcomes should be written from the student's perspective using observable verbs that reflect the intended level of performance. Each outcome should be specific, measurable, and aligned with the program's mission and goals to support continuous improvement.

Effective, measurable SLOs should:

- Be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
- Frame outcomes from the student's perspective by starting with phrases like "The student will be able to..."
- Consist of two parts: an action verb and a content area. The action verb (e.g., "analyze," "design", "evaluate) specifies an observable student deliverable, followed by a clear description of the content or skill to be demonstrated.
- Be concise and focused on a single learning objective to ensure clarity and ease of assessment.

SLO Do's and Don'ts:

Below are four example SLOs from an imaginary Widget Studies program. The first three contain language that makes insight or data analysis difficult. The final one is measurable, useful, and uses active verbs.

Table A.1. SLO Do's and Don'ts		
DO:	DON'T:	Observation
The student will be able to explain the role of marketing in the widget industry.	Students will appreciate the importance of marketing in the world of widgets and feel confident about their ability to contribute creatively to discussions on widget strategies.	A student's appreciation or confidence level is subjective and not directly observable.
The student will be able to identify key innovations in widget design.	Students will learn about widget innovations and understand strategies that position widgets within competitive marketplaces.	The focus here is on what students know, not what they can do, produce, or demonstrate.
Students will be able to develop effective strategies to position widgets within competitive marketplaces.	Students will show growth in their ability to communicate and market widget innovations by developing and executing strategies that position widgets within competitive marketplaces.	Growth is not a useful metric. A student who progresses from Fs to Ds, for example, shows growth but does not meet any competency outcomes of a rigorous academic program.

Sources

Outcome measures table presented by Dr. Melissa Ray, The University of Texas at Dallas at 2018 TxAHEA Conference

Sources: (Baruch College, 2008, Berman, 2006; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickomott, 2009/2010; Henning & Roberts, 2015/2016; Krist et al., 2008, Lee & Nove112015; Nichols & Nichols, 2000; Schuh, Biddix, Dean & Kinzie, 2016; Tucker, 2014)

Guidelines for Writing Effective, Measurable Student Learning Outcomes adapted from [Program Learning Outcomes: Guidelines for Writing Effective, Measurable Program Learning Outcomes](#), (California Polytechnic State University, n.d.).

