

# Course design

## Crafting Strong Learning Outcomes: A Guide for Educators



Strong learning outcomes clarify what learners should know or be able to do at the end of instruction. They guide lesson design, assessments, and instructional strategies while making expectations transparent for students.

### What Are Learning Outcomes?

Learning outcomes are **clear, measurable statements** that describe the knowledge, skills, or abilities students should demonstrate after a learning experience.

Well-written outcomes:

- Focus on **student performance**, not teacher activity
- Are **observable and measurable**
- Align with assessments and instructional activities

### Why Learning Outcomes Matter

Effective learning outcomes:

- Provide direction for lesson and unit planning
- Help students understand goals and success criteria
- Support alignment between instruction, assessment, and standards
- Improve consistency across courses and grade levels

### The Anatomy of a Strong Learning Outcome

A strong learning outcome typically includes three elements:

1. **Action Verb** – Describes what students will do (use observable verbs)
2. **Content** – Specifies the knowledge or skill
3. **Context or Criteria** (optional) – Clarifies conditions or level of performance

**Formula:**

*Students will be able to [action verb] [content] [context/criteria].*

### Choosing Effective Action Verbs

Use verbs that describe observable behaviours. Bloom's Taxonomy is a helpful guide.

- **Remember:** define, list, identify
- **Understand:** explain, summarize, describe
- **Apply:** use, solve, demonstrate
- **Analyze:** compare, differentiate, examine
- **Evaluate:** justify, critique, defend
- **Create:** design, compose, develop

*Avoid vague verbs such as understand, learn, know, or appreciate.*

### Examples

**Weak Outcome:** Students will understand photosynthesis.

**Stronger Outcome:** Students will be able to **explain** the process of photosynthesis and **identify** its key inputs and outputs.

**Strong Outcome with Criteria:** Students will be able to **analyse** a short story by identifying a theme and supporting it with at least two textual examples.

### Checklist for Reviewing Learning Outcomes

Before finalizing, ask:

- Is the outcome student-centred?
- Is the action observable and measurable?
- Does it align with assessments?
- Is it appropriate for the learners' level?
- Is the language clear and concise?

### Final Tip

Limit the number of outcomes per lesson or unit. Fewer, well-crafted learning outcomes are more effective than long lists that dilute focus. Well-designed learning outcomes are the foundation of effective teaching and meaningful learning.