

## Writing Performance Objectives

Performance objectives become the basis for the remainder of the steps in the instructional design process. Their importance cannot be overstated. Because of their importance considerable effort should be exerted in preparing precise objectives in behavioral terms. Sound performance objectives describe learning outcomes that are:

- Behavioral – They address something that learners will be able to do by the end of the training. Even if an objective focuses on what learners will know, it still must be expressed in behavioral terms.
- Attainable – They are within the learner’s reach, given the time available, and they are under the both the trainer’s and learner’s control.
- Goal-oriented – They clearly relate to the overall goal of the training, which should in turn relate clearly to the objectives of NRCS.
- Measurable – They are quantifiable, or at least observable. They address how successful performance will be assessed.

Performance objectives should begin with the following sentence fragment or some variation of it: “At the end of this training the learner will be able to ....” This sentence fragment is followed by the performance component, which begins with an action verb and describes what the learner will be doing when demonstrating mastery of the objective. The next part of the objective describes how well the learner must perform in order to be considered acceptable. This part must be measurable.

Example: At the end of this training you will be able to correctly identify 12 out of the 15 plants NRCS recommends for stream bank erosion control.

One all-to-common error made in writing performance objectives is to use words such as know or understand as the performance component. These words are too vague in their meaning to be useful.

**Poor objective** – At the end of this training you will understand how to develop a nutrient management plan.

**Sound objective** – At the end of this training you will be able to list all the steps required by NRCS in developing a nutrient management plan.

## **What the experts say about vague language in performance objectives.**

Preparing Instructional Objectives - (p. 24) "Thus, the most important and indispensable characteristic of a useful objective is that it *describes the kind of performance* that will be accepted as evidence that the learner has mastered the objective. Whatever else a statement may do, if it doesn't state a performance, it isn't an objective."

Mastering the Instructional Design Process (p. 137) - "Do not use vague language. Words and phrases such as 'understands,' 'demonstrate familiarity with,' or 'know' should usually be avoided because they are vague."

Instructional Design - (p. 84) - "Nebulous objectives such as 'the learners will be aware of metric measurements' or 'the learner will understand the importance of the three branches of the U.S. government' do not give much guidance ... as to what the learners should actually know...."

Conducting Training Workshops (pp. 19-20) - "Action verbs such as *write, solve, and identify* communicate the intent of the training much more clearly than words such as *know, understand, or appreciate.*"

The ASTD Reference Guide to Professional HRD Roles and Competencies (p. 239) - "The objective should avoid that which cannot be observed - language such as 'understand,' 'know,' 'be aware of,' or 'appreciate.'"

Technology-Based Training (pp.67 & 99) - "Objectives should be short, specific, and testable.... What is always included, however, is the most important criteria for a valuable objective: a written indication of the behavior using measurable or observable verbs."

Designing Powerful Training (p. 88) - "In other words good objectives describe training outcomes that are behavioral, attainable, goal-oriented, and measurable."