

Writing Learning Objectives for Nursing

When you are writing learning objectives, think of them as being connected to a larger, overarching goal that you want to achieve in your learning. Your learning objectives are the smaller steps (e.g. strategies or actions) you will take to reach your goal. Each **learning objective** then becomes a written statement about an action you will take and should be something that you can measure by doing specific activities within a definite time frame.

Use the **SMART** framework when you are writing your learning objective so that it is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and has a **T**imeframe. In particular, make sure your learning objective clearly states:

- what you want to achieve (e.g. the **specific skill or performance**)
- how you will **measure** your achievement (i.e. the standard or criteria that you will use to measure if you have achieved it)
- the **timeframe** that you have allocated for your future achievement (when you want to be able to do it by e.g. by the end of week 8)

In terms of whether a learning objective is **Achievable** or **Realistic**, it will depend on your role, skills, time and resources. These two elements are important to consider for all parts of the learning objective.

SMART	What does it mean?	Questions to help you think about this:
Specific	A learning objective should relate to a specific skill or performance you want to achieve. Use an action verb to help you measure your performance (see below).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What exactly am I going to achieve? • What strategies have I identified? • Is the objective clear and understandable? • Have I used an 'action' verb?
Measurable	A learning objective should make clear how your performance or skill can be measured .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I know that I have achieved my learning goal? • How can the changes be measured?
Achievable	A learning objective must be possible to achieve in terms of your role as a nursing student and the amount of time on placement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I achieve this objective within my role as a student nurse? • Can I achieve this objective within the stated timeframe? • Have I considered any limitation or constraints?
Realistic	A learning objective must be realistic in terms of your existing skills and abilities and the resources you have available to you as a student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this objective possible to achieve for me? • Can I achieve this objective by using the resources that I have identified? • Do I have access to the resources that I need to achieve this objective?
Timeframe	A learning objective must include a realistic timeframe to measure your progress within the time allocated for your placement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a stated deadline for achieving this objective? • Is the timeframe realistic in terms of your abilities and the length of placement?

Writing learning objectives

Verbs to use

Avoid vague verbs that are hard to measure like: appreciate, become familiar, be aware of, explore further, know about, perceive or realise. Notice how these verbs are about **mental processes**. You cannot really provide evidence that can be measured with these kinds of verbs.

Use **appropriate, clear verbs** that you could use to **measure performance or skill** like:

Administer	Analyse	Apply	Compile	Conduct	Construct	Produce
Demonstrate	Develop	Evaluate	Express	Implement	Incorporate	Organise

Notice how these are mostly **practical actions** that can be observed.

Examples of well written learning objectives using the SMART framework

Remember:

Specific - what **specific skill or performance** do you want to achieve?

Measureable – how will you **measure** your achievement?

Timeframe – what is your **timeframe**?

Overall, is your learning objective **Achievable** and **Realistic** for you and the time, resources and skills you have?

Example 1:

Safely administer medications adhering to venue legal requirements and the 8 rights of medication administration under supervision of an RN throughout the duration of the placement.

Example 2:

Critically reflect on my current learning in areas of existing strengths and weaknesses at the commencement of clinical workshops and at the end of my placement.

Example 3:

Utilise relevant open ended questions during the basic community health assessment to obtain the client's in-depth responses and a detailed picture of their health situation.

Example 4:

Accurately document the client's health assessment during the client interview in a structured and sensitive way according to the guidelines provided in clinical workshops.

Example 5:

Demonstrate ability to maintain a therapeutic relationship with the client according to national standards whilst performing the client health assessment.

Example 6:

Perform a basic health assessment on an individual of the community for my professional placement which practises safe and effective evidence-based nursing care.

Examples of poorly written learning objectives

The following learning objectives do not sufficiently address all required elements and could be improved.

Example 1:

To communicate effectively with team members in order to manage time effectively to provide appropriate evidenced based care.

Comments:

It is not clear how 'effective' will be measured (i.e. what are the criteria for this?). There is also no clear timeframe of how and when the objective and measurement was to take place. It is not clear how communicating effectively is linked to managing time effectively. Finally, 'to provide appropriate evidenced based care' could be the start of a new learning objective.

Example 2:

Conduct an accurate patient handover to the student group in order to further develop the knowledge and skills of myself and others by weeks 3 and 6.

Comments:

It is not clear how 'accurate' will be measured (i.e. what are the criteria for this?). The statement 'to further develop knowledge and skills of myself and others' is too general and could relate to any learning objective – this could be omitted as it does not add anything to the objective.

Example 3:

Wherever possible further develop my knowledge and skills in order to provide effective, evidenced based nursing care for the duration of placement.

Comments:

There is also no clear indication of what knowledge and skills are to be focused on and what area of 'evidenced based nursing care' related to this. 'Further develop' is not useful unless the student makes clear what the starting point is and this objective does not clearly show how the achievement will be measured. A timeframe is provided but it spans the whole placement – does this mean that the judgement is to be made on the last day?

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