



For the Division of Health Sciences

GUIDE TO WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A **learning objective** is a statement that makes explicit a measurable achievement resulting from specific learning activities within a definite time span. When you write a learning objective it needs to contain **3 main elements**. It needs to state clearly the:

- Performance - what is to be achieved?
- Criterion - standard to be achieved.
- Conditions including time span.

Use the **S.M.A.R.T.** framework so that your learning objective is **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**ealistic and has a **t**imeframe.

S PECIFIC	A learning objective should specify clearly WHAT you want to achieve. A learning begins with an action verb like:	Questions to help you think about this: <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 (examples below)?• Is it clear what needs to happen?• Is the outcome clear?• Will this objective lead to the desired result?
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M EASUREABLE	A learning objective should be about developing new knowledge and make clear how your progress can be measured.	How will I know that I have achieved my learning goal? How can the changes be measured?
A CHIEVEABLE	A learning objective must be possible to achieve both in terms of your role (student nurse) and the amount of time on placement.	Can I achieve this objective within the stated timeframe? Have I considered any limitation or constraints? Can I achieve this objective by using the resources that I have identified? Is this objective possible?
R REALISTIC	A learning objective must be realistic in terms of the resources you have available to you as a student.	Do I have access to the resources that I need to achieve this objective? Do I need to review my learning needs or adjust my learning objective? Is this objective possible to achieve?
T IMEFRAME	A learning objective must include a timeframe for when a measurement can be taken to show progress and it must take account of the timeframes possible during your placement.	When will this objective be accomplished? Is there a stated deadline for achieving this objective? Is this objective achievable in the timeframe stated?

Formulating a learning objective

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

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

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

Examples of well written learning objectives with the 3 elements

Example 1: To administer medications **in a competent and safe manner** for all allocated clients by week 2 of placement.

<i>Learning objective elements</i>	<i>Student example 1</i>
Performance or skill	To administer ** medications
Criterion or standard	in a competent and safe manner
Conditions, including timeline	for all allocated clients by week 2 of placement

Example 2: To 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.**

<i>Learning objective elements</i>	<i>Student example 2</i>
Performance or skill	To safely administer** medications
Criterion or standard	adhering to venue legal requirements and the 8 rights of medication administration under supervision of an RN
Conditions, including timeline	throughout the duration of the placement

** **Active** verb

Comment: These examples fit the SMART framework – the student can easily demonstrate that she/he administered medications by being observed and having these activities documented by the RN by week 2.

Examples of poorly written learning objectives

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

Comments:

Performance / what is to be achieved is provided but there is not an appropriate active verb

Criterion / standard to be achieved is not provided

Conditions including time span are not provided

Overall, there is no measurable way (criterion) shown for demonstrating 'effective' communication and there is no clear indication of how and when the measurement was to take place. There is not a clear link between managing time effectively and communicating effectively. Finally, 'to provide appropriate evidenced based care' could be used as the first few words of a new learning objective.

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:

Performance / what is to be achieved is provided

Criterion / standard to be achieved is not provided (how will 'accurate' be judged?). The conditions are vague and expressed as a reason rather than an outcome.

Conditions including time span is provided

Overall, there is no measurable way (criterion) shown for demonstrating 'effective'

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

Comments:

Performance / what is to be achieved is provided but it is not clear what area of knowledge and skills are to be the focus. To say 'further develop' is not useful unless the student makes clear what the starting point is.

Criterion / standard to be achieved is not provided

Conditions are not clear but there is a time span of the whole placement – does this mean that the judgement is to be made on the last day?

Overall, there is no clearly measurable way (criterion) shown for demonstrating 'development'. There is also no clear indication of what knowledge and skills are to be focused on and what area of 'evidenced based nursing care'.

4. **Develop and conclude effective therapeutic relationships** with patients presenting with mental health issues to aid in preventing agitation and aggression, in consultation with a registered nurse by week six.

Comments:

Performance / what is to be achieved is provided but there is not an appropriate active verb

Criterion / standard to be achieved is not provided

Conditions including time span are not provided

Overall, there is no measurable way (criterion) shown for demonstrating the 'effectiveness' of therapeutic relationships. What will be demonstrated is not specific.

How to use your Learning Objectives in your Learning Plan

Your Learning Plan must be presented as a table (see below). Your Learning Objectives are listed in the first column of that table. Use the headings below for the other columns.

Learning Objective	Resources, Strategies, Activities	Course objectives/ANMC competencies	Agency, Date, Time	Evidence
What are you going to learn?	How do you plan to learn it?	To which course objective/s ANMC competencies does your learning objective relate?	When and where do you plan to learn?	How will you demonstrate your learning? What evidence will be included in your portfolio?

Acknowledgement: This resource was developed by the Language & Learning Advisers (2012) in the Learning & Teaching Unit, UniSA and is based on material compiled by A. Gardner (2011).