

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT GUIDE TO WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES



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Learning objectives describe the knowledge or skill that learners should be able to apply to their practice by the end of an educational program. Learning objectives should be tied to the knowledge or skill gap identified in the needs assessment phase of program development. Focused learning objectives help health care professionals' practice by providing clarity and direction during the learning process.

Benefits and Purpose of Learning Objectives

- Let participants know what to expect from a session and what is expected of them.
- Help participants understand the applicability of the knowledge/skills to be gained.
- Help participants select sessions to attend based on their needs.
- Guide program development and the selection of instructional strategies and materials.
- Help program planners measure the effectiveness of the program and improve future sessions.
- Guide how assessments are developed.

Characteristics of Strong Learning Objectives

Learner Centered	Write learning objectives from the perspective of the learner. Explain what the learner will be able to do.	Example: By the end of the session, participants will be able to: Avoid: This session focuses on...
Specific & Actionable	Provide a specific and actionable description of what participants will be able to do in practice after the program.	Example: Participants will be able to create a personal learning plan with three goals to achieve by next year's annual meeting. Avoid: Participants will understand...
Measurable	Clarify how the participant or facilitator will know that the knowledge or skill has been successfully learned.	Example: Participants will be able to develop a patient care plan... Avoid: Participants will explore...
Put in Context	Explain the context in which the skills or knowledge will be applied.	Example: Participants will be able to apply active listening strategies when communicating with palliative care patients and their families.



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When writing learning objectives, remember:

- ✓ Learning objectives are not an agenda or list of topics that will be covered in an educational session.
- ✓ Learning objectives are not a description of what the presenter or facilitator will do in the session.
- ✓ Learning objectives should each have only one verb; do not combine multiple learning objectives into one.

Examples

AVOID	IMPROVED
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand Parkinson’s disease.• Review the pathophysiology of Parkinson’s disease.• Learn about treatment plans for Parkinson’s disease.	<p>At the end of the session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the features of the pathophysiology of Parkinson’s disease.• Diagnose Parkinson’s disease in a patient presentation/clinical setting.• Design a treatment plan and communicate this effectively to the patient.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk about psychological safety and provide effective feedback to learners.	<p>At the end of the session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define psychological safety.• List strategies for providing effective feedback to learners in the clinical setting.

Questions to Ask Your Planning Committee When Writing Learning Objectives

- What are the essential things that learners should know after the session?
- What are essential things that learners should be able to do after the session?
- What knowledge or skills will be new to the learners in this module/session/program?
- How does this knowledge and/or these skills contribute to the learner’s practice and professional life?
- What context will the learner apply the knowledge or skills?
- How will the knowledge or skills contribute to patient outcomes?
- How do the goals of the session align with CanMEDS Roles?



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Align Learning Objectives to CanMEDS Roles

Connect learning objectives to the CanMEDS roles described below. [Read the full descriptions at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada website.](#)

Communicator	Apply therapeutic communication strategies with patients and family members to provide effective, patient-centered care.
Collaborator	Collaborate effectively with other health care professionals to provide safe, high-quality, patient-centered care.
Leader	Demonstrate collaborative leadership and management skills in interprofessional and interdisciplinary health care teams.
Health Advocate	Contribute expertise and influence in partnership with communities or patient populations to improve health.
Scholar	Demonstrate a lifelong commitment to excellence in practice through continuous learning and by teaching others, evaluating evidence, and contributing to research.
Professional	Develop a professional identity centered on ethical practice, high personal standards of behaviour, and accountability to the profession and society.
Medical Expert	Integrate all of the CanMEDS roles, applying medical knowledge, clinical skills, and professional values in the provision of high-quality and safe patient-centered care.

