

# Measurable Objectives

Based upon “Stylistic Considerations in Writing Course Outlines of Record,” a publication of  
The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Spring, 1998

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this section is to convey the learning objectives expected of students. The format typically begins with the phrase “Upon completion of this course the student will be able to:” with a list of those expectations following. These are sometimes referred to as “behavior objectives.” There are several challenges to writing the Objectives section. First, the hundreds of specific learning objectives of the course must be distilled down to approximately ten or, at most, twenty. The key is grouping individual items into sets which share commonalities. For example, a sociology course might have many detailed items for students to learn in the area of cross-cultural comparisons, but the collective statement in the Objectives section might be “Compare and contrast traditions and behaviors in a variety of cultures.” Or a chemistry class might take two or three weeks to discuss the properties of states of matter (gas, liquid, solid) but the combined learning might be summarized as “Describe the properties of the states of matter, use appropriate equations to calculate their properties, and explain those properties on the molecular level.” Note that each statement is really a collection of objectives rather than a single objective.

Degree applicable credit courses are required to demonstrate critical thinking. The incorporation of critical thinking must be evident throughout the course outline but particularly in the Objectives, Methods of Instruction, and Methods of Evaluation. It must be clear that students are *expected* to think critically, are *instructed* in how to do so, and are held *accountable* for their performance. The manner in which the Objectives section reflects critical thinking is in the higher cognitive expectations expressed in this section. A useful way to evaluate the cognitive level of an objective is to use Bloom’s taxonomy, a summary of which appears on the next page. Basically, critical thinking involves *active* higher cognitive process which analyze, synthesize and/or evaluate information. This contrasts the more *passive* activities such as recognizing, describing, or understanding information. Note that not ALL objectives need to reflect critical thinking. Certainly recognizing, describing, and understanding are valuable skills. It should be clear, however, that higher thinking skills are an essential component of the course. Note also that it is not sufficient for such higher skills to be listed in the Objectives. The course outline must demonstrate that students are taught how to acquire these skills and must master them to pass the class. (See the following sections on Methods of Instruction and Assignments and Methods of Evaluation.) When reviewing the specific learning items and writing collective objective statements, keep in mind the cognitive levels expected of students in each area.

## Useful Verbs for Developing Objectives

Critical Thinking					
Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
define	translate	interpret	distinguish	compose	judge
repeat	restate	apply	analyze	plan	appraise
record	discuss	employ	differentiate	propose	evaluate
list	describe	use	appraise	design	rate
recall	recognize	demonstrate	calculate	formulate	compare
name	explain	dramatize	experiment	arrange	value
relate	express	practice	test	assemble	revise
underline	identify	illustrate	compare	collect	score
	locate	operate	contrast	construct	select
	report	schedule	criticize	create	choose
	review	shop	diagram	set up	assess
	tell	sketch	inspect	organize	estimate
			debate	prepare	measure
			inventory		
			question		
			relate		
			solve		
			examine		
			categorize		

Many existing course outlines have objectives which do not reflect the “active verbs” conveying critical thinking. It is usually the case that the course itself is *taught* in a way which incorporates critical thinking but that the course outline itself does not *reflect* those objectives and methodologies. Bringing the objectives into line is primarily a matter of reflection on the part of the faculty who teach

the course upon those objectives which require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Some “before and after” examples are shown below.

**BEFORE:** Know the significant art achievements of Renaissance through Modern Europe.

**AFTER:** Compare and contrast the art works in the same historical period with art works from other historical periods to ascertain their stylistic aesthetic and historical relationships.

**BEFORE:** Have learned skills in performing and in working with others to create a theatrical event for children.

**AFTER:** Analyze a text in preparation for rehearsals, including the choice of style, language, and pace.

Critique their own performances and rehearsals using a collectively decided upon matrix.

Share these critiques with members of the ensemble in appropriate, culturally sensitive ways.

It is often the case, as above, that a single broad objective which has not been well described actually consists of several objectives, of which some involve critical thinking and some do not.