

*This handout is for instructors who want to review their course learning outcomes and consider how best to create aligned assessment.*

## Defining Learning Outcomes

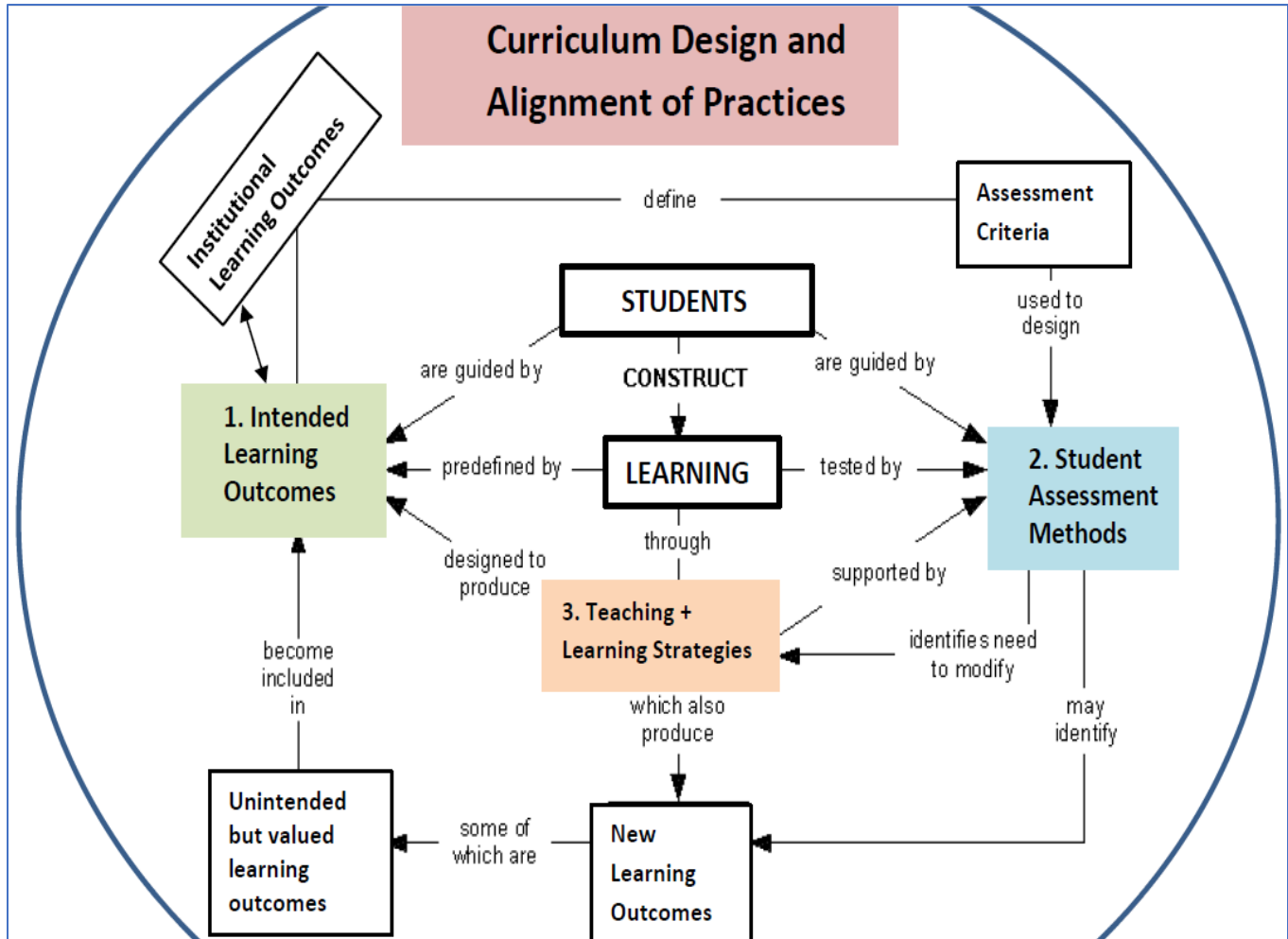
Learning outcomes:

- Are direct statements about intended/anticipated student learning
- Include the depth of learning expected by the end of a course / program
- Reflect the fact that learning is not predictable
- Are guideposts
- May adapt / change over period of a course / program
- Include the knowledge, skills and values required by students to demonstrate learning of core concepts
- Are often presented in the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains
- Are often described in terms of the 3 H's: the habits of the head, the hand and the heart

## Learning Outcomes versus Learning Objectives

Learning Outcomes	Learning Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are statements about anticipated achievements from students</li> <li>• Are more student-centered and describe what the learner should learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are often written from a teacher's perspective</li> <li>• Are typically written in terms of an instructor's teaching intentions</li> <li>• Indicate what content a teacher intends to cover through instruction, curricula, programs or activities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning outcomes</b> are what is hoped students will learn along their journey and are often precise, specific, and measurable.</p>	<p><b>Learning objectives</b> are focused on specific types of performances that students are expected to demonstrate.</p>
<p><b>Examples of Learning Outcomes</b></p> <p>By the end of this course students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically evaluate the connection between human rights and legal definitions of what is meant by 'being human'</li> <li>• Describe four dimensions of culture and analyze the effects of those dimensions on communication</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples of Learning Objectives</b></p> <p>This course will present different perspectives through the exploration of historical data and presentations by guest speakers, to explore concepts across time and space of what it means to be human.</p> <p>This course will introduce key dimensions of culture and explore how these dimensions influence communication.</p>

## Designing Aligned Courses



To design aligned courses, the learning outcomes should be connected to and influenced by program and institutional learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes should define the assessment criteria used to design student assessment methods, i.e., the connection between what the students need to know, do and value by the end of the course, and how they will demonstrate / you will observe the learning of these outcomes.

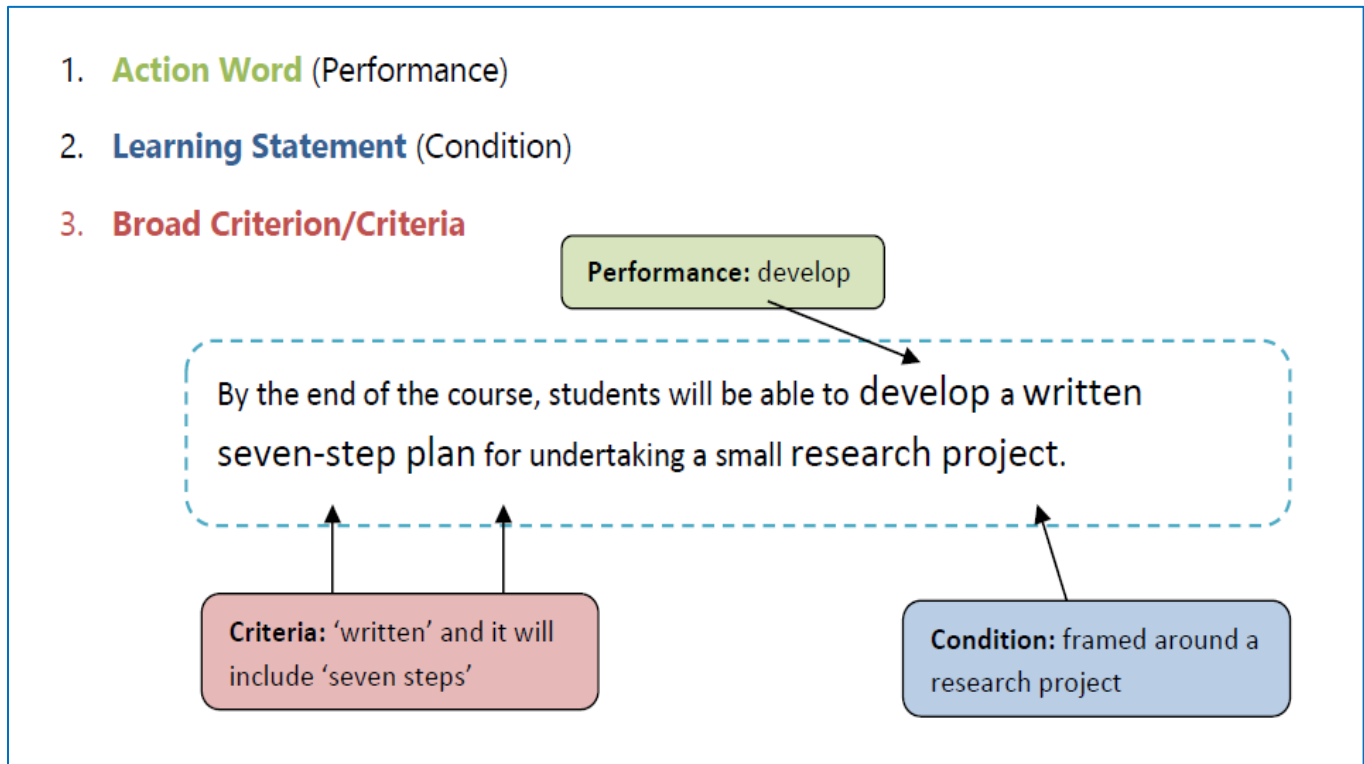
Learning outcomes should inform the design of appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

**Note:** The assessment methods may uncover new learning outcomes (intended or unintended), which may or may not be included in the overall course outcomes.

## Elements of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are comprised of three parts:

1. An action word (performance) that is both measurable and observable – e.g., evaluate, analyze, identify
2. A learning statement (condition) that describes the learning to be demonstrated – e.g., in a written report, evidence based
3. Broad criterion / criteria that give context / criteria for an acceptable performance - e.g., four dimensions of, the connection between



## How to Construct Well-Written Learning Outcomes

Course design should ideally begin with writing the learning outcomes.

Throughout the process of writing / editing, it is important to keep the students in mind.

Well-written learning outcomes are clear and concise. They avoid vague and ambiguous words (e.g., knows, understands, is conscious of). They are also realistic in terms of relating to the 'real world' and achievable within the timeframe of the course.

When writing learning outcomes, it is important to ensure that a balance is achieved and that they reflect the level of the course, i.e., level / complexity of the knowledge, skills or values to be developed.

## Learning Outcomes, Engagement and Assessment

Students should be given multiple ways of engaging with core concepts and content, and to apply what they've learned to demonstrate they can meet the course learning outcomes.

The assessment used should give students an appropriate opportunity to demonstrate if / how they have met the learning outcomes.

In planning teaching strategies, consider a variety of activities / modalities to engage and assess how students are meeting the learning outcomes.

Teaching strategies could include case studies, problem-based group projects, team-based learning, interviews, discussions with guest speakers

Assessment could include presentations, peer / self-assessment, simulations, role-plays, reflections, assignments, exhibitions

## Resources

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A Taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman.

Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. New York: D. MacKay.

Fink, L. D. (2013). *A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning*. Retrieved online: <https://www.deefinkandassociates.com/GuidetoCourseDesignAug05.pdf>