Course Goals and Outcome-Based Objectives

A **course goal** is a general expectation, often written in broad, overarching, student-achievement terms (Trice 2000). For example, one might identify the following: *The goal of this course is to gain an appreciation of the roots of popular music.*

Goals are measured using **student learning objectives**. An objective (also sometimes referred to as an outcome) is a specific expectation written so as to be clear about an action a student will be able to perform as result of instruction (Tice 2000). An objective should address only one, specific area. Here is an example: *At the end of the course, given a list of musicians, a successful student will correctly identify 9 of the 12 musical icons of the late 1990's.*

Objectives should be written in such as way that one can assess a student's success or failure at meeting the objective, using the following criteria (Mager 1997):

1. Performance (what is expected of the student)
2. Conditions (as related to the performance)
3. Criterion (acceptable/successful level of performance)

Examples:

1. Given a compilation CD of popular songs from the 1990's, correctly identify the song title and writer with at least 80% accuracy.
2. Given two of the songs discussed in the class, write an essay for each describing the social-political references made in each of the songs. Essays must correctly describe at least three of the socio-political references discussed in class and should exhibit proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

The following represent common mistakes found in (outcome-based) learning objectives:
- Using performance not stated in measurable terms:
  - *Examples: "develop an understanding;" "develop an appreciation;" "know"* (i.e., "Develop an appreciation for rock music of the 1990's). <u>See the first example above for a good way to restate these types of objectives</u>.
- Using criteria to describe a task that does <u>not</u> prove one's mastery of the task:
  - *Write a 5 page essay on the theory of music.* The number of pages is the sole criteria. Is the essay's length really the key to this objective? <u>See the second example of the objective restated</u>**.**
- Using instructional objectives rather than learning objectives:
  - *Be able to discuss the main points of chapter 5.* Discussion is the instructional method, but what is the student performance for this objective? <u>Try restating the objective</u>: *Given the topic of a chapter, correctly identify 80% of the main points.*
- Using improvement in learning instead of a performance standard:
  - *"Increase knowledge of"* or *"Increase skill in"* (i.e., "Increase one's skill in typing"). <u>Reword using a performance criterion</u>: *Type 45 words per minute with no more than X errors.*

The following table lists some verbs commonly used in creating student learning objectives.

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
Recall	Abstract	Apply	Analyze	Build	Assess
Identify	Convert	Carry out	Classify	Design	Check
Recognize	Extrapolate	Explain	Compare	Organize	Evaluate
Acquire	Interpret	Generalize	Distinguish	Produce	Measure
Distinguish	Transform	Plan	Identify	Theorize	Rank
	Translate	Repair	Recognize	Write	Test

--adapted from Bloom 1956

On a syllabus, one can list student learning objectives as a bulleted list of only the performance components and save the more detailed objective when discussing or describing the individual assignments:

By the end of the semester, the successful student will be able to:
- *Identify the writers and titles of popular songs from the 1990's*
- *Describe the socio-political references in the songs*
- *Write an analytical essay that exhibits proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling*