# Why and How to Write Learning Outcomes

Carefully written LO's are the foundation of a successful course.

**Clear LO's help you achieve the following:**

⇒ **motivate students by creating visible, meaninfgul learning targets.**
⇒ **focus students' attention and efforts.**
⇒ **focus your purpose as a teacher.**
⇒ **select relevant content.**
⇒ **select appropriate teaching methods.**
⇒ **establish the criteria and standards to be used in evaluation.**

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**What is a course learning outcome?**

**A learning outcome is what you plan to measure as students exit the course, to determine how much progress they have made toward the BIG CHANGES you want to see in their thinking and behaviour.**

*A learning outcome is not what students will do IN the course, but what they will be able to do AFTER the course is done.*

The learning outcomes of your course are NOT the same as the knowledge or "content" that will be transferred to students. While the course content is an essential part of a course, what students can DO (on their own, after the course) with that content and how they think as a result of your course are even more important.

***Students should be able to predict or infer the nature of major assessments (graded assignments or exam tasks/questions) based on your course learning outcomes.***

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**Start drafting your course learning outcomes by asking yourself, <u>"In what ways do I want students to be PERMANENTLY DIFFERENT as a result of my course?"</u>**

1. *What are the anticipated deep changes in students' ways of acting in given situations, confronted with given challenges?*
2. *What kinds of judgments and decisions will they be more effective at making, as a result of your course?*
3. *What new skills, processes and procedures will they have mastered, as a result of your course?*
4. *What perspectives and attitudes do I want to be part of every student's world view, as a result of my course?*
5. *What essential concepts or key disciplinary ideas do I want students to be able to use, as a result of my course?*

Course learning outcomes should be expressed in **active langauge**, in order to help students **visualize** for themselves how they will be newly empowered by your course.

**Here are some sample action-learning outcomes from various disciplines.**
1. History: interpret primary sources; evaluate arguments and evidence
2. Biology: detect patterns of permutation in DNA; assess the impact of a given environment on a given species
3. Economics: evaluate interpretations of data; predict the impact of a given phenomenon on a given market;
4. Nursing: select responses based on presented symptoms; assess the effectiveness of treatment plans
5. Chemistry:  evaluate hypotheses that attempt to explain variations in molecular configurations
6. Business: estimate, anticipate, or predict a given market's potential reaction to a given event or condition

**Here are additional examples of action-based course learning outcomes from actual courses:**

Political Science (The Canadian Welfare System)

At the end of this course you will be able to…

…EVALUATE statements and claims made in public debates about the role of government in citizens' well-being
…PREDICT the potential impact of specific government policies on poverty.
…CONSTRUCT your own arguments for and against newly proposed welfare policies.

History (1860-present)

At the end of this course students will be able to

INTERPRET primary documents with consideration of their historical context.
APPLY knowledge of Canada's past to explaining current social and political realities.
LOCATE and USE DATA to support assertions about causes and effects in history
EVALUATE arguments on the responsibility of Canada's founders for current political and social conflict.
WRITE coherent, persuasive, evidence-based arguments in support of historical interpretations.

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