

**Course Goals vs. Student Learning Outcomes (modified from:
http://www.uaf.edu/files/provost/Assessment_Resources/HowtoWriteProgramOutcomes.pdf)**

Overview

Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are similar in that they describe the point of taking a course. Goals are a statement of general aims and purposes—what you, the instructor, broadly intend to accomplish. They are how you see the course and its value. In contrast, SLOs are brief, clear statements that describe the specific skills, values, and (or) attitudes students will exhibit as a result of successfully completing the course. They are statements which describe the significant and essential learning that students will have achieved and can reliably demonstrate. SLOs identify what the learner will know and be able to do by the end of the course. In other words: Goals are what you intend to accomplish; SLOs are what the students actually achieve.

Goals are typically written in terms of teaching intentions and usually indicate the subject content to be covered. SLOs are student-centered and describe what the student can do. They are more precise, specific and measurable than goals. Questions which SLOs address include:

- (a) What knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes...will the successful student demonstrate?
- (b) How will they be able to demonstrate such?

Structure of a useful SLO statement

- An action word that identifies the characteristic to be demonstrated.
 - A statement that specifies what aspect of that characteristic will be demonstrated.
 - A statement of the criterion or standard to be met.
- In general: SLOs need to be (a) specific and (b) measurable.

Example:

(poor): **Students should know the historically important systems of psychology.**
Criticism: It's vague ('should' =?; 'know' = ?; 'historically important' =?).

(better): **Students should know the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.** Criticism: One of the 3 items from above is now clear. 'Should' and 'know' are still vague.

(best): **Students will be able to recognize and articulate the foundational assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.** Criticism: OK, it's a mouthful. But it clearly expresses specific, measurable abilities the successful student will have acquired.

Another example:

(poor): **Students will be practiced in design skills.**
(better): **Students will demonstrate design principles; use fundamental engineering techniques, skills, and tools for engineering practice; and analyze and interpret data to produce meaningful conclusions and recommendations.**

Final example:

(poor): **Students will develop an appreciation of cultural diversity in the workplace.**
(better): **Students will summarize in writing their feelings about cultural diversity in the workplace.**