Drafting Goal and Learning Outcome Statements

Adapted from: Zerwas and Calliotte, "Re-Opening the Assessment Toolbox", VAG Drive-In Workshop, Spring 2005.

Goal statements…

- are broad statements
- provide the general aims of the program that support the institution's mission
- describe intended outcomes for students/graduates of the program in very general terms
- must list intended outcomes dictated by the mission statement.

Goal vs. Outcome statements:

Goal statement examples:

- The goals of the MAT in Theatre Education center on preparing teachers for having a deep understanding of the demands of the profession and of themselves so that they understand how to show up for and serve the needs of their diverse learners.

- The overall goal of the Undergraduate International Business Program at the Darla Moore School of Business is to produce graduates who are prepared for dynamic international markets.
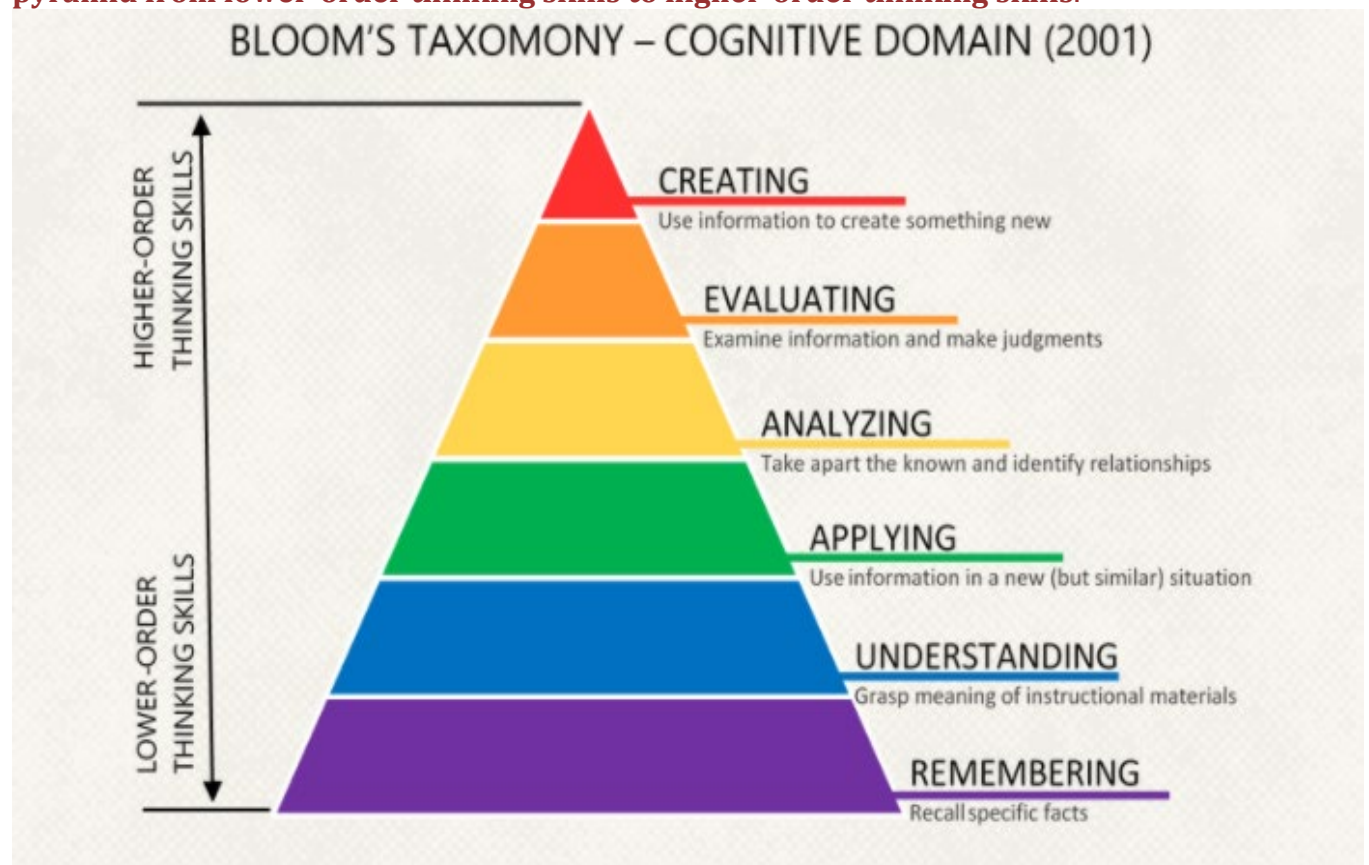
Learning outcomes are much more specific than goal statements. Learning outcomes describe the measurable skills, abilities, knowledge, or values that students should be able to do or demonstrate upon completion of the academic program.

How do I draft a well written learning outcome?
Step 1: Consult Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1948, a group of educators began classifying educational goals and outcomes. The original Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, was created by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 and is commonly referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom outlined six main categories of cognitive learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In 2001, the category names were revised from nouns to verbs.

Diagram showing the Bloom's Taxonomy for the cognitive domain arranged as a pyramid from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills.

BLOOM'S TAXOMONY – COGNITIVE DOMAIN (2001)

HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

CREATING
Use information to create something new

EVALUATING
Examine information and make judgments

ANALYZING
Take apart the known and identify relationships

APPLYING
Use information in a new (but similar) situation

UNDERSTANDING
Grasp meaning of instructional materials

REMEMBERING
Recall specific facts

LOWER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

When writing student learning objectives and ensuring academic rigor, it's helpful to refer to Bloom's Taxonomy. Referring to various learning levels from Bloom's Taxonomy will ensure that you are addressing the appropriate level of learning in your learning outcome statements.

Source: University of Florida Center for Instructional Technology and Training

Step 2: Use the SMART Model

Learning outcomes should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-focused, and **T**ime framed.

Acronym	Definition	Example
Specific	• Tells what students should be doing to pursue the outcome. • Should include an <u>action verb</u> indicating what the learner will be able to do • Should be something that can be seen or heard	Instead of, "Demonstrate writing", or "write better", try, "Write an essay"
Measurable	• Make the outcome quantifiable so that it can be measured • Where applicable, indicate whether change is expected	"Write a 300-500 word argumentative essay with fewer than 10 mechanical errors."
Attainable	• The outcome must be able to be accomplished in the proposed time frame with the available resources and support. • Must fit in with the scope of the work in the course or activity. • Use short statements and avoid including multiple skills or tasks in one outcome statement.	"As the final exam, the students will be able to write in 90 minutes a 300-500 word argumentative essay with fewer than 10 mechanical errors."
Results-focused	• The outcome should provide a connection between the program's goal and the assignment. • The task must be relevant and have an impact on the program's goal.	"Students will be able to apply Communications and Interpersonal Effectiveness competencies (Domain 3 in MHA Program Competency Model) to health services organizations."
Time-framed	• The learning outcome must include the time frame in which the work is to be done.	"Program participants will be able to apply all five elements of the SMART learning outcomes model with no mistakes by the end of the program."

Step 3: Always include an action verb

Action words are well suited for drafting clear learning outcome statements that incorporate SMART model components. After deciding on the level of learning the program wants students to demonstrate, use the following list of action words that are aligned with the categories in Bloom's taxonomy that were previously discussed.

Action Verb List (partial)

Remember:	Understand:	Apply:	Analyze:	Evaluate:	Create:
Arrange	Classify	Apply	Analyze	Appraise	Arrange
Define	Convert	Change	Appraise	Argue	Assemble
Describe	Defend	Choose	Categorize	Assess	Combine
Identify	Distinguish	Compute	Compare	Conclude	Compose
Label	Explain	Demonstrate	Contrast	Defend	Construct
List	Estimate	Dramatize	Criticize	Evaluate	Create
Match	Interpret	Employ	Diagram	Judge	Design
Outline	Infer	Illustrate	Differentiate	Justify	Develop
Recognize	Paraphrase	Manipulate	Discriminate	Support	Formulate
Recall	Summarize	Modify	Distinguish	Value	Generate
Repeat	Translate	Operate	Examine		Plan
Reproduce		Practice	Experiment		Synthesize
		Produce	Question		Write
		Solve	Model		

For additional action verbs, please see this list of Bloom's Action Verbs: