SELECTING THE SCOPE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

PURPOSE
This tool discusses the levels or scope of learning outcomes and their relationship to the institution, the program, the course, and the lesson. Since time in a course is limited, it is important to establish how the learning outcomes fit most cohesively into the broader university mission and framework.

DESCRIPTION
When considering the scope of learning outcomes for a course, it is not only important to consider what the students will learn, but why they need to learn it. Generally the why is addressed at higher institutional levels while the what is addressed more specifically in the lessons of a course. These levels and types of outcomes are described below.

- **Institutional.** BYU-Idaho aspires to develop disciple-leaders. The objectives concern what the student will be as a result of the whole experience. Institutional objectives give the overarching ‘why’.

- **Program.** Objectives within a program remain fairly vague. “Students will leave the program with the skills necessary to become effective music directors” or “Students will leave the program being scientists with a small s.” These program level objectives tend to restate institutional objective in terms of the specific discipline, or to state what the student needs to be able to do to succeed in their chosen field.

- **Course.** Outcomes become more concrete at the course level. These outcomes specifically explain how the course will lead to the departmental and institutional outcomes. Course level outcomes not only focus on what students should be able to do, but add to this what they must understand first.

- **Lesson.** Lesson level outcomes, often called learning objectives, focus on what students need to know in order to understand, do and be.

Just as continuity between lessons brings cohesion and purpose to a course, purposeful courses work together to develop a meaningful program. When all levels are aligned, the common threads weave together to provide powerful learning experiences.

Seeing how these levels fit together can assist you in determining the scope of your course outcomes. For example, knowing why we teach something is what helps us decide how to engage it, how to use classroom time, how to assess, what to exclude, etc.

Lesson outcomes (learning objectives) therefore support the goals of the course; the course supports what the program is trying to accomplish; and the program plays its role in the institutional mission.

The sequence of questions that eventually helps us decide upon content is therefore as follows:

1. How does our program help fulfill the university’s mission around disciple leadership?
2. What role does my course play in the program?
3. At what level must my students demonstrate mastery by the end of the course?
4. What must they understand deeply to achieve this?
5. What must they know to gain this understanding?
6. What must I do to help them know, understand, do and be as defined by these outcomes?

Finding the appropriate scope for course and lesson outcomes is not always easy, but it helps to make an additional distinction between two broad types of outcomes:

1. **Terminal outcomes** state what the student will be able to do at the end of your class. For example, “Students will compose a sonata”. Course level terminal outcomes are performance based, meaning that they allow the student some means of demonstrating mastery through performance i.e. actually solving a problem, managing a situation, demonstrating a skill etc. Simple recall of facts is not considered performance.

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2. **Enabling outcomes** are the stepping stones to terminal outcomes. They describe what the student must *know, understand or do* in order to achieve the terminal outcome. For example, “Students will explain the structure of a 2, 3, and 4 movement sonata” would be one of many enabling outcomes needed to reach the terminal outcome.

Again, the power of learning outcomes is in the ability to align them across the entire institution. In the absence of such an alignment, a BYU-I education couldn't be focused on developing disciple leaders, but would be a series of separate and unrelated experiences for every individual.

**EXAMPLES**

**Course and lesson level**

Math 110 is a math course for non-majors. Generally students who take this course are engineering or science majors. In writing the course outcomes, the instructor described how students would be able to solve several common industry problems. To connect to the institutional mission of developing disciple leaders, she made an outline of how students would work together to solve problems in groups. These outcomes lead to several collaborative problem-based activities in the design of the course.

The outlines below illustrate the difference between Terminal Outcomes (TO) and Enabling Outcomes:

- **TO:** Draw a detailed, scientific explanation of the fission process at the atomic level (TO)
- **EO:** Define excitation energy, critical energy, and fissile material (EO)
- **TO:** Interpret in writing, specific Middle Eastern topics at an in-depth level using theories, concepts, and ideas from economics, political science, geography and other social sciences. (TO)
- **EO:** Explain how political boundaries were derived in the Middle East and their impact on stability (EO)
- **EO:** Discuss the impact of oil in Middle Eastern geopolitics (EO)
- **EO:** Explain how water contributes to conflict between states in the Middle East (EO)

**TIPS**

- **Think Performance.** Be sure your terminal and enabling outcomes are geared towards performance. Students should be able to do something to demonstrate mastery.
- **Start with 3-5 terminal outcomes for your course and then drill down into the enabling outcomes.**

**PITFALLS**

- **Point of View.** Instructors sometimes erroneously define what they themselves will do in the outcome instead of what the students will do.
- **Follow through.** Instructors may write good outcomes but then not use them as guidelines for lesson activities or assessments.

**CAMPUS PRACTITIONERS**

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**KEY ARTICLES**


**OTHER RESOURCES**

- Learning Objective Suggestions
- Drafting Learning Outcomes

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