PREPARING INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES


- An objective is a collection of words, symbols, and/or pictures describing one of your important intents.

- An objective will communicate your intent to the degree you describe what the learner will be *doing* when demonstrating achievement of the objective, the important conditions of the doing, and the criterion by which achievement will be judged.

- To prepare a useful objective, continue to modify a draft until these questions are answered:
  - *What do I want the learners/students to be able to do?*
  - *What are the important conditions or constraints under which I want them to perform?*
  - *How well must students perform for me to be satisfied?*

- When the main intent of an objective is covert, an indicator behavior through which the main intent can be detected is added.

- Indicator behaviors are always the simplest, most direct behaviors possible, and they are always something that every trainee already knows how to do well.

- To prepare an objective:
  - Write a statement that describes the main intent or performance expected of the student.
  - If the performance happens to be covert, add an indicator behavior through which the main intent can be detected.
  - Describe relevant or important conditions under which the performance is expected to occur. Add as much description as is needed to communicate the intent to others.
THE QUALITIES OF USEFUL OBJECTIVES

Three Characteristics to Include

The format includes three characteristics that help an objective to communicate an intent. These characteristics answer three questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Performance of Learner</td>
<td>What should the learner be able to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conditions for Performance</td>
<td>Under what conditions do you want the learner to be able to do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Criteria for Acceptable Performance</td>
<td>How well must it be done?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Performance of Learner.** An objective always states what a learner is expected to be able to do and/or produce to be considered competent.

   **Example:** Be able to ride a unicycle.  
   *(The performance stated is **ride**.*

   **Example:** Be able to write a letter.  
   *(The performance is **writing**; the product of the performance is a **letter**.)*

2. **Conditions for Performance.** An objective describes the important conditions (if any) under which the performance is to occur.

   **Example:** Given a product and prospective customer, be able to describe the key features of the product.  
   *(The performance is to occur in the **presence of a product and a customer**; these are the conditions that will influence the nature of the performance, and so they are stated in the objective.)*

3. **Criterion for Acceptable Performance.** An objective describes the criteria of acceptable performance; that is, it says how well someone would have to perform to be considered competent.

   **Example:** Given a computer with word-processing software, be able to write a letter. **Criteria:** All words are spelled correctly, there are no grammatical or punctuation errors, and the addressee is not demeaned or insulted.  
   *(In this case the criteria of acceptable performance are labeled as such; often they are not.)*

Sometimes there will be no special conditions to include, and sometimes it is impractical or useless to include a criterion (as when the criterion is obvious). But the more you say about your desired intent, the better you will communicate.
Characteristics That Should NOT Be Included in Objectives

While it would be possible to add other features to objectives, such as instructional procedures, descriptions of the target audience, or format requirements, these features should not be added to objectives.

Instructional procedures

It would be possible to include a description of the procedure by which the objective will be accomplished, as in:

*Given six lectures on the subject of ...*

This feature would not serve a useful purpose, and it could be extremely limiting. What about an instructor who could accomplish the objective with only two lectures? Or with no lectures at all? Or could succeed by some other means? And what about the students who need no instruction at all?

The objective should mention only outcomes, so that those charged with accomplishing those outcomes will be free to use their best wisdom and experience in doing so.

Imagine what would happen if industrial blueprints included information about how the products described should be manufactured. Aside from cluttering the blueprints and making them difficult or impossible to read, it would hamper those who had better ways to proceed than those described in the blueprint.

Target audience

Some people also describe the target audience for which the objective is intended, as in:

*First-line supervisors will be able to interview applicants ...*

Such a feature would also get in the way. While it may be true that first-line supervisors need to be able to interview applicants, that might also be true for other groups. Should you have a different objective for each group, even though each of those objectives would say exactly the same thing?

In attempting to answer that question, I remember a school system whose teachers were required to write classroom objectives, course objectives, school objectives, district objectives, and county objectives. All those objectives described exactly the same performance, but the teachers went nuts trying to make them look different. In short, the answer is no.

Format

It would also be possible to insist that all objectives conform to a specific form or format. For example, one could expect all objectives to be written in a single sentence, or to begin with the conditions, or to not exceed a certain number of words. This again would be lunacy, as it would be another way to defeat the purpose of the objective, which is to describe a desired outcome.

I once visited a school in which teachers were expected to write their objectives on a form printed by the principal. His form had a line printed every two inches down the page, the implication being that every objective was no more than seven inches long and two inches high. Would you be surprised to learn that the teachers were hostile to the idea? But you are not looking for objectives that are a particular size and shape. You are looking for objectives that are clear, that say what you want to
say about your instructional intents as concisely as possible. And that is all. So, anybody who says that an objective must be no more than two inches high and seven inches wide or who says an objective must or must not contain certain words should be reminded that the function of an objective is to communicate. If it does, rejoice. If it doesn't, fix it! You don't work on an objective until it matches someone's idea of "good looks"; you work on it until it communicates one of your instructional intents, and you write as many objectives as you need to describe ALL instructional results you think are important to accomplish.