

Lesson Planning and SMART Learning Outcomes

Putting the Learner at the Heart of Our Lessons and Courses

Dr. Mark James Bartholomew

Advisor, Quality Assurance

Daffodil International University

The Classroom is a Place for Learning, Not Teaching

“Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner; put yourself in his (sic) place so that you may understand . . . what he (sic) learns and the way he (sic) understands it.”

Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855)

“Learning is something students do, NOT something done to students.”

Alfie Kohn (b. 1957)

Learning Outcomes

- All lesson plans are – or should be – about what students are learning in those lessons, not what teachers are teaching. For this reason, the aims of the lesson are termed ‘learning outcomes’.
- Learning outcomes written without proper consideration mean that students have no clear idea of teachers’ expectations. Maybe the teachers are not so clear about these either. So, the lesson lacks focus.

SMART – what does it stand for? Why is it important?

SMART is an acronym. It stands for:

S for Specific

M for Measurable

A for Achievable

R for Relevant

T for Time-bound

SPECIFIC

Learning outcomes need to be specific or there will be confusion, come the end of the lesson, about whether they have been achieved or not.

A learning outcome, such as: 'By the end of the lesson, students will have learnt the present perfect aspect' is so impossible a task as to be almost useless. Why? It's simply not specific enough! Nobody could hope to cover the huge range of this aspect in 80 minutes!

MEASURABLE

For a teacher really to know if learning outcomes have been achieved, she should focus on some form of production, where students demonstrate that they have now understood and can use the targeted lexis or syntax or literary device.

That's why learning outcomes phrased with verbs like 'know; are not useful. We need to see IF they know.

Teachers often ask questions like "Alright?" or "Understand". But it's a brave student who shouts back "No!"

ACHIEVABLE

Sloppy learning outcomes are often unachievable because they cover too much ground and students have no realistic prospect of mastering the material, so that they can use it themselves. It doesn't become their own.

Learning outcomes that expect too much of students can also damage their confidence because they cannot understand or remember the points made.

RELEVANT

At first glance, this seems an obvious outcome and one easy to achieve. Is it in the syllabus? If so, it must be relevant. But as teachers we do not only aspire to impart knowledge. We might also want our students

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to think critically about a subject and challenge it

to research independently

to explore areas that really grab their interest

to apply what they learn to other areas of their lives

outside the University classroom walls ... and so on

TIME-BOUND

No learning outcome is complete without some reference to time. Otherwise, it could not be specific!

Time is an area that many teachers find challenging. It's so hard when students work in groups together because some are more discursive, able, focussed, and involved than others.

Always have more material than you need . Always set deadlines!

And remember: sometimes the best thing is to let them carry on ...

Are these learning outcomes ok?

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- I will teach Ohm's Law and how we can calculate voltage by using current and resistance.
- After attending the session the students will be able to recognise the syllable pattern of Haiku.
- Students will be able to repeat the formula describing photosynthesis.
- Students will learn the present perfect aspect with 'since' and 'for'.
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- In the session Indian Family Laws will be discussed in groups.
- By the end of the session, students will know what 'opportunity cost' is and how it affects economic decisions.
- Students will work together to consider the challenges that a highly valued currency poses for the economy and design a presentation to explain this to their classmates by the end of the session.

Some Learning Outcomes

Are they useful?

1. By the end of the lesson, I will have presented a brief biography of D.H. Lawrence and discussed how his relationship with his mother influenced his writing.
2. By the end of the week, students will know the differences between 'which', 'who' and 'that' in relative clauses.
3. Students will be able to contrast uses of similes and metaphors and identify these in Stevie Smith's poetry.
4. Students will be able to discuss the drawbacks of staging drama on the radio by the end of these three sessions and illustrate these in their essays with reference to Ibsen.

What should a lesson plan include so that a teacher unfamiliar with a class could teach it?

What information would you like to have about a class and a lesson if you were going to teach it blind?

What should we include in lesson plans? Some ideas

Materials Required

Timings

Anticipated Challenges – what might go wrong?

Sequencing of Activities

Interaction – Teacher to Students? Student to Student?

Class Size

Gender Balance

Preceding Lesson

Following Lesson

Classroom Equipment & Furniture

Practice with Lesson Planning

Sherlock Holmes

Here are three letters written to Sherlock Holmes. Taken separately, they seem nonsensical; taken together, it's possible for Holmes to answer three questions:

1. Who stole the diamond?
2. What was in the box on top of the wardrobe?
3. Who died and how was he killed?

How would you arrange this class? Write a lesson plan to show us.

Assignment

Taking a topic that you are currently working with in a class, write a lesson plan that puts students firmly at the centre.

Let us know when we might come and watch you teach it.

And thanks very much for coming today and participating!