

# Writing Effective Learning Outcomes

## Learning Outcomes

A learning outcome is a broad, general statement of what the students will be able to do as a result of what they have learned in the course. Outcomes use language that allows the faculty member to *observe* and *measure* what students have learned based on what they can do. If you can't observe what students can do to demonstrate their mastery of course content, how can you measure it? If you can't measure what students can do, how can you assess it? This is why incorporating action verbs in outcome statements is so important. You can observe and measure *calculate* and *identify* and *critique*, but how can you observe and measure *understand* or *know* or *appreciate*?

Below are examples of weak learning outcome statements and their strong learning outcome counterparts:

Weak Learning Outcome Statement	Strong Learning Outcome Statement
The student will <i>understand</i> the importance of cell growth and reproduction	The student will be able to <i>explain</i> the importance of cell growth and reproduction
The student will <i>know</i> about hydraulic break systems	The student will be able to <i>service</i> hydraulic break systems
The student will <i>demonstrate knowledge of</i> a work of 20 <sup>th</sup> century British sculpture	The student will be able to <i>analyze</i> the form and content of a work of 20 <sup>th</sup> century British sculpture

The element that distinguishes a weak outcome from a strong outcome is **the verb used**. Consider this: as a faculty member, you can observe and measure *explain*, *service*, and *analyze*, but what does *understand*, *know*, or *demonstrate knowledge of* look like?

## Fuzzy Outcome Statements:

Circle the fuzzy verb and rewrite:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how to solve an algebraic equation
  
2. Students will appreciate a poem
  
3. Students will be familiar with terms and vocabulary
  
4. Students will know about the nutritional needs of older adults
  
5. Students will demonstrate knowledge of business ethics

Look at one of your course outcomes and identify its verb. Write that verb in the left column below. In the right column, write two or three verbs that make student attainment of that outcome more observable and measurable.

Original Outcome Verb	Three Alternative Verbs
1.	1. 2. 3.