

Learning Outcomes Video Transcript

Your course Learning Outcomes, which we will refer to as Course-level outcomes, are the cornerstone of your course. They define the significant learning milestones that students should reach by the end of the course. For each course-level outcome, there will naturally be many more discrete outcomes, which we will refer to as supporting outcomes. These are useful for determining the knowledge, skills and attitudes students need and how you will help them develop these to meet the Course-level outcomes.

Course-level learning outcomes are broad statements that describe what a student will be able to do as a culmination of their learning. Because the Course-level outcomes define your expectations for the end of the course, they are directly aligned with your final assessments.

Course-level outcomes not only help plan a course, but they also help situate a course within a program curriculum. They provide a program blueprint because they identify how each course aligns with and builds upon the others within a program.

Supporting outcomes describe what a student will be able to do at the end of a chapter, unit or lesson, depending on how discrete they are. They define narrower and more targeted outcomes that are the building blocks of the Course-level outcomes.

It is good practice to provide formative feedback routinely on supporting outcomes to ensure students are progressing towards the Course-level outcomes successfully. Routine formative evaluations of supporting outcomes can also help you identify what areas to review with your students.

Supporting outcomes define more granular learning targets that align with and build up to the Course-level outcomes. They can be especially useful because they help you map the student's learning progress in the course.

Here are examples of how your outcomes should align so that supporting outcomes develop and scaffold knowledge, skills and attitudes for your students. Especially interesting is the way they develop from smaller, more specific competencies to a larger more complex task at the Course-level:

Let's start at the course-level:

If a course-level outcome is to “write a persuasive essay that includes a clearly articulated position, well-developed arguments with solid rationales, relevant evidence and accurately cited sources”, you should determine how much explicit instruction and practice students will need to build them up to this goal. By deconstructing the course-level outcome, you can identify the more discrete supporting outcomes that would help them progress toward this expectation.

Now let's look at the supporting outcomes to see how they would scaffold learning to enable students to meet this course-level outcome. A supporting outcome at the most discrete level would help students build foundational knowledge. The Course-level outcome of writing a persuasive essay mentioned earlier, would have supporting outcomes that develop a student's ability to “identify distinct positions in a controversial topic” and “identify strong arguments for each side of the topic”, and to “identify appropriate sources that favour each side of a controversy”. It may or may not be necessary to focus on such basic learning goals. This will depend on several different factors, such as where your course is situated within the program (for example whether it is a 200 or 400 level course), or the anticipated prior knowledge of students. As instructor, you will need to determine what level of granularity is necessary for your supporting outcomes.

Besides the foundational outcomes that develop an understanding of key elements of argumentative writing, there would be other supporting outcomes that tackle concepts essential to persuasive writing, such as “constructing a

Learning Outcomes Video Transcript

clear and strong position”, “selecting arguments and related evidence that best support a position”, and “using in-text citations accurately”. Again, there are several factors that will help you decide on your supporting outcomes.

With your supporting outcomes clarified, you are now ready to select teaching content and relevant learning activities. For this example, this would entail selecting resources that present strong arguments, and perhaps include some weaker arguments too. With these resources, you would plan activities to help students analyze & critically evaluate arguments and sources. Formative evaluations during this phase can help you ensure that your students are developing these skills and, if there is evidence of problems, you can address them before any learning gaps widen.

With all of these foundational outcomes in place, students can now tackle the course-level outcome. They will achieve this outcome to varying degrees of success but given more chances to develop their abilities for each supporting outcome, they will certainly improve. This is to say that you should plan to build students toward your final assessments with similar tasks over the semester.

The teaching and learning activities that cover your supporting outcomes could involve a single lesson or several lessons, as the time you need will depend on the complexity of the outcomes, the amount of content you need to expose students to, and the prior knowledge students bring to the work. This is not a set formula per se, but if you have an idea of where your course fits into the program curricula and are taking the pulse of student understanding during instruction, you can use this to guide your planning.

A major advantage of deconstructing your course-level learning outcomes into more discrete supporting outcomes is that, in doing so, you have identified your evaluation criteria. You have now defined the layers of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to meet the depth of learning you are targeting. The supporting outcomes can be used to develop your evaluation criteria to assess student learning in a more transparent and objective manner. You can use this criterion to create a rubric or checklist as a grading tool.

There is no rule for how many outcomes are appropriate, but typically three to five outcomes at any level is good practice. This keeps learning focussed and manageable for students. It also keeps teaching objectives focussed and manageable for you as instructor!

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