

# How to Write Objectives for CPE Activities

## Objectives (learning outcomes)

Identifying and properly stating the objectives (learning outcomes) is arguably the **most important step** in the planning of the educational activity. Objectives convey the content of the educational activity and are written in specific statements of **what the participant is expected to be able to do at the end of instruction**. Statements describing what the instructor or presenter plans to do or accomplish are not instructional objectives. A clear objective will communicate its intent so effectively that there will be no question about the expected learning outcome of the instruction.

Most behavioral objectives begin with the phrase “The participant will be able to...” Note that the focus is on the learner not the instructor.

## Components of an Objective

1. Observable/measurable action (What is to be done)
2. Conditions under which the objective is measured (How it is done)
3. Measurable criteria (How well it is done)

However, for most continuing education activities, conditions and measurable criteria can be omitted. They should only be included if needed to improve the clarity of the stated objective.

**Writing an Objective** Behavioral verbs are the heart of the objective. Since the participant’s action/performance should be observable and measurable, objectives should be written using verbs that describe an observable performance (action) that can be accepted as evidence that the desired learning has occurred. Begin each objective with an “action verb” such as:

- list
- describe
- write
- explain
- apply
- formulate
- demonstrate
- interpret
- evaluate
- identify
- define

Although commonly used, verbs such as “know” or “understand” or “learn” do not describe an observable behavior; they describe events that take place inside the learner and are not observable or measurable.

**Examples:** Upon completion of this educational activity, the participant will be able to:

Incorrect	Correct
understand the uses of contrast media	list the uses of contrast media
learn the appropriate indications for sonohysterography	describe the appropriate indications for sonohysterography
learn the proper administration of contrast media	demonstrate the proper administration of contrast media

A properly written objective will identify **who**, **what action**, and **result of the action**. For example:

The participant will demonstrate the  
                   *who*                  *what*  
**proper administration of contrast media.**  
                                   *Result*

A clear learning objective states what the learner will be able to do upon completion of a continuing medical education activity, in terms of behavioral change. A clear objective identifies the terminal behavior or desired outcome of the educational offering.

When writing objectives, follow these 3 steps: **Step 1**

Learning objectives begin with the phrase:  
 “At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to...”

### Step 2

Connect step one with an action verb which communicates the performance by the learner. Use verbs which describe an action that can be observed and that are measurable within the teaching time frame (e.g., via a post-test).

### Sample verbs

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
define	classify	apply	analyze	arrange	assess
identify	compile	calculate	calculate	assemble	compare
label	conclude	demonstrate	categorize	compose	critique
list	discuss	develop	classify	construct	decide
match	describe	interpret	criticize	design	determine
name	explain	locate	compare	develop	establish
recall	express	operate	contrast	diagnose	evaluate
recognize	give examples	perform	determine	manage	judge
record	identify	practice	differentiate	organize	justify
relate	interpret	predict	distinguish	plan	measure
repeat	recognize	present	examine	propose	rate
select	summarize	report	outline	relate	recommend
state	translate	use	test	summarize	select

### Step 3

Conclude with the specifics of what the learner will be doing when demonstrating achievement or mastery of the objectives. Stress what the participant will walk away from the activity with.

### Words to Avoid

appreciate	improve
approach	increase
become	know
believe	learn
grow	understand
grasp the significance of	