

How to Write Learning Objectives for Training

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Learning Objectives are the most important aspect of developing training. They describe what attendees will gain from the training and the skills they will be able to perform as a result. All Level 1 and 2 courses submitted for approval must include at least one clear, measurable objective. Here are some tips to ensure that your learning objectives meet the standard for training approval. **NOTE:** If your organization is sponsoring training that will be delivered by an outside trainer, ask the trainer to provide learning objectives that meet the following criteria before you submit the course for Growing Futures approval.

Focus on the Learners

Learning objectives describe the skills and competencies that attendees will have gained by the end of your training. Remember, the purpose of training is to help real people learn real skills they need to do their jobs more effectively. If your training does not do that, then don't do the training.

Start with the End in Mind

Write the learning objective *before* you create the rest of the training course. What is it that people will learn as a result of the training? What will they be able to do at the end of the training? What are the real-world job skills that people will gain by attending the training? By answering those questions, you will define your learning objectives. Once you have defined the learning objectives or goals of the training, you can then:

- **Write your course description** to inform attendees what the purpose of the training is right from the beginning. It answers the question, "What's in this for me?" and allows them to decide if the training really meets their needs and applies to their work.
- **Create the training content and learning activities:** Once you've defined what people should know or be able to do at the end of the training, then you can plan how to make sure they achieve that goal. What are the best ways to help them learn the content and perform the skills competently? Focus all the content and learning activities on achieving the stated objectives.
- **Create assessments:** How will you know if attendees are able to do what you set out to teach them? Every training needs to include some way to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. However, when submitting a Level 2 training for approval, you must describe the exact ways in which you will assess attendee's ability to perform the learning objective and provide an assessment rubric to show how you will evaluate their performance.

Address Knowledge, Skills, or Attitudes (KSAs):

Learning objectives focus on attendee's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. If your training is about safe diapering procedures, then your objective might define what you want attendees to **know** such as the proper steps for safe, sanitary diapering; **skills they can perform** such as carrying out those diapering steps with an infant or demonstration doll; and **attitudes they can hold** such as the importance of proper diapering and sanitation procedures. Think of it this way: knowledge = *what* to do; skills = *how* to do it; and attitude = *why* it's important.

Be SMART:

Learning objectives must be **SMART**, which stands for:

- **Specific** – clearly stated and the meaning is apparent to everyone who reads it. Say exactly what the attendee should learn and be able to do after the training.
- **Measurable** – everyone could agree if the attendee satisfied the objective or not. The point of a learning objective is to determine if the attendee can meet, perform, or satisfy it, and that means it has to be an action you can observe.
 - Don't use words like "know" or "understand" because you can't observe if someone knows something in their head. Instead, use words for behaviors you can observe, such as "define," "build," "arrange," and "demonstrate."
 - Write the objective so that anyone who observed the attendee's performance would agree that they had met the learning objective.
- **Achievable** – attendees have a reasonable chance of achieving the objective. Be careful not to make your objective too difficult or too easy. It must be something that most attendees will be able to do with the information and time you've given them.
- **Relevant** – the objective is important to the work that the attendees do with children. Only teach what is important to the attendees and what they will use on the job.
- **Time bound** – attendees know what they need to do and when they need to do it to meet the objective. Do not present things that attendees will not use back on the job – they will forget what you told them if they don't use it immediately.

Include Four Parts

A learning objective usually has four parts, which you can remember with the letters **ABCD**. While you might not always need to include the C and D parts, every learning objective must include A and B.

- **A** = actor or the person who will perform the objective. Sometimes you might describe the actor as "attendee" or "learner." Or you might describe them by their role, such as "lead teacher."
- **B** = behavior that the person must perform. Every learning objective should state something the attendee must do and should directly relate to a task the person will need to perform on the job.
- **C** = conditions or circumstances under which the person must perform the behavior. For example, you might say, "*Given a collection of items*, the learner will select the items that are required to be included in a first aid kit." Or "*Using a chart of infant developmental stages*, the learner will identify one appropriate toy for each stage."
- **D** = degree to which the person must perform the behavior. This is the part of the learning objective that explains *how well* the objective must be done. Examples are "in less than ten minutes," or "with at least 75% accuracy," or "three out of five."

Put It All Together

The following examples of learning objectives are learner focused and incorporate KSAs, SMART strategies, and the ABCD elements (color coded):

- *Learner (A) will demonstrate the diapering procedure (B) with a mobile infant (C), completing each step correctly and in the proper order (D).*
- *Learner (A) should be able to identify at least four warning signs of possible child abuse (B) from a family member's interview (C) that contains five signs (D).*
- *Using the licensing regulations for a childcare center (C), the director (A) will create a floorplan for preschool room (B) that correctly incorporates the licensing square footage requirements (D).*

Writing good learning objectives is not hard but it does require that you think about your training in a more focused way. As a trainer or training sponsor, the starting point of effective training – and training approval – is creating learning objectives that are related to the real-world work that your attendees do with children, and that define observable, measurable knowledge, skills, and attitudes attendees will gain at your training.

Learning Objectives Worksheet

The Learning Objective is a description of what attendees will be able to do at the end of the training as demonstrated by objectively measured behavior.	
Planning information for writing the learning objective	
What is the “big idea” of your training content?	
Who is the intended audience?	
What standards support your training content? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ND Childcare Licensing Regulations • ND Core Competencies • ND Early Learning Standards • National CDA Competencies • Other (specify) 	<i>List all standards that apply, including the text of the standards (not just the number or code)</i>
Why is this content important to the intended audience? How does it relate to the tasks they need to perform on the job? How will it help them perform those tasks more effectively?	
What KSAs does your content foster?	Knowledge: Skills: Attitudes:
How will attendees be expected to demonstrate their KSAs related to the training content?	Knowledge: Skills: Attitudes:
What is the time span you have for presenting the training content and is it appropriate and sufficient to teach the KSAs you expect attendees to demonstrate?	
SMART Review	
Use the SMART protocol to determine that your learning objective has the right size, detail, and depth necessary. Check all that apply.	Your learning objective is: _____ Specific –focused on the big idea and content standards. _____ Measurable – able to be observed and quantified _____ Achievable – while ambitious, it is achievable for both trainers and attendees, during the time span given _____ Relevant – important to the work attendees do with children and families on the job _____ Time Bound – defines what attendees need to do and the time they have to do it. Also, defines something they will be able to apply immediately on the job.

Rubric for Approving Learning Objectives

Purpose of this Rubric: This rubric is used by Growing Futures to evaluate the Learning Objectives submitted as part of the course approval process. We suggest that trainers/training sponsors assess their learning objectives using this rubric before submitting their course for approval to avoid having the course returned for revision.

	Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Insufficient
<p>Learning Objective: A description of what attendees will be able to do at the end of the training as demonstrated by objectively measured behavior.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Needs Improvement <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient</p>	<p>Appropriately identifies and thoroughly describes an important and meaningful learning objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The big idea and the standard(s) clearly align to learning objective • A clear link between the learning objective and effective performance of the attendee's job • A clear description of the how attendees will demonstrate KSAs related to the training content in an identified time span • Specifically outlines WHO will perform what BEHAVIOR under what CONDITIONS and to what DEGREE (ABCD) • Objective is observable and measurable • Follows the SMART protocols 	<p>Generally identifies and describes an important and meaningful learning objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The big idea and standard(s) minimally align to the learning objective • There is some link between the learning objective and performance of attendee's job • A general description of how KSAs related to the training content • Provides some but not all information about WHO will perform what BEHAVIOR under what CONDITIONS and to what DEGREE (ABCD) • Objective may not be observable or measurable • Follows some SMART protocols 	<p>Identifies and describes a learning objective that is vague, trivial, or unessential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The big idea and standard(s) do not align with the learning objective • Lack of clear link between the learning objective and performance of attendee's job • Little information about how content relates to KSAs • Provides little to no ABCD information • Objective is not observable or measurable • Does not follow SMART protocols
RESULT	Approved	Returned for revision	Returned for revision