

Instructional Objectives

Why have objectives?

When planning an educational activity, one of the questions to be asking is: "What do I expect the participants to learn?". Perhaps another question which is just as relevant is "What do the participants expect to learn?". Instructional objectives are partly an answer to the first question. Depending on how they are arrived at, they might also incorporate the second question too.

Instructional objectives are vital to the planning process in several ways:

- To help to clarify the purpose of the educational event
- To communicate the intent of the educational event to others (the participants, those funding the course, any accrediting body)
- To provide a basis for evaluation of the effectiveness of the course.

Robert Mager, an educationalist based in the Los Altos Hills of California wrote very clearly on the subject of writing instructional objectives. He put it well:

"An objective is a description of a performance you want learners to be able to exhibit before you consider them competent. An objective describes an intended *result* of instruction, rather than the *process* of instruction itself."

Classifying objectives

In order to help our thinking about objectives to be structured and clear, a number of frameworks for classifying them have been proposed. The technical name for a framework like this is a **taxonomy**.

Benjamin Bloom led some pioneering work on taxonomies in the 1950s, and proposed a broad division into three **domains of learning**:

- Cognitive domain (often referred to as simply "knowledge")
- Psychomotor domain (often referred to as simply "skills" - remembering that these are both physical and mental skills)
- Affective domain (often referred to as "attitudes" or "values")

In a taxonomy, each domain is subdivided into a number of hierarchical categories, with each successively more complex category building on the foundations of those beneath it.

References:

Bloom BS (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* David McKay, New York

Gronlund NE & Lin R (1990) *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (in *Measurement and evaluation in teaching*, Macmillan Publishing)

Mager RF (1975) *Preparing Instructional Objectives (2nd Edition)* Fearon Publishers, Belmont, California