

Definitions of Behavioral Verbs for Learning Objectives

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Behavioral verbs are nothing less than the heart of learning objectives, which are in turn the core component of effective lesson plans. If defined and used consistently, such verbs are a highly effective way to indicate, and communicate to others, specific, observable student behavior. Behavioral verbs describe an observable product or action. Teachers and others constantly make inferences about student learning on the basis of what students do or produce. Valid inferences can only be made when there is little or no doubt regarding what is intended.

It follows then, that one way to define curriculum is in terms of intended student behavior. Learning objectives based on a set of verbs that have some measure of agreement as to meaning can provide a useful vehicle for the purpose of developing performance-based curriculum. In education, there is no substitute for clarity, specificity, and a professional vocabulary. Consistent use of defined behavioral verbs in composing, rewriting or selecting learning objectives can lead to improvement in efforts to change and reform education in general and curriculum in particular.

The following verbs and their definitions can be helpful when composing learning objectives. These are general definitions that describe only the observable behavior and do not include linkages to any specific content. These definitions are provided for those who seek a basis for a technical vocabulary regarding student performance. To see examples of these verbs used in specific content areas, [click here](#).

APPLY A RULE: To state a rule as it applies to a situation, object or event that is being analyzed. The statement must convey analysis of a problem situation and/or its solution, together with the name or statement of the rule that was applied.

ASSESS: To stipulate the conditions by which the behavior specified in an objective may be ascertained. Such stipulations are usually in the form of written descriptions. For obvious reasons, assess is rarely used as a verb in learning objectives at the elementary school level.

CLASSIFY: To place objects, words, or situations into categories according to defined criteria for each category. The criteria must be made known to the student.

COMPOSE: To formulate a composition in written, spoken, musical or artistic form.

CONSTRUCT: To make a drawing, structure, or model that identifies a designated object or set of conditions.

DEFINE: To stipulate the requirements for inclusion of an object, word, or situation in a category or class. Elements of one or both of the following must be included: (1) The characteristics of the words, objects, or situations that are included in the class or category. (2) The characteristics of the words, objects, or situations that are excluded in the class or category. To define is to set up criteria for classification.

DEMONSTRATE: The student performs the operations necessary for the application of an instrument, model, device, or implement. NOTE: There is a temptation to use demonstrate in objectives such as, "the student will demonstrate his knowledge of vowel sounds." As the verb is defined, this is improper use of it.

DESCRIBE: To name all of the necessary categories of objects, object properties, or event properties that are relevant to the description of a designated situation. The objective is of the form, "The student will describe this order, object, or event," and does not limit the categories that may be used in mentioning them. Specific or categorical limitations, if any, are to be given in the performance standards of each objective. When using this verb in an objective, it is helpful to include a statement to the effect of what the description, as a minimum, must reference.

DIAGRAM: To construct a drawing with labels and with a specified organization or structure to demonstrate knowledge of that organization or structure. Graphic charting and mapping are types of

diagramming, and these terms may be used where more exact communication of the structure of the situation and response is desired.

DISTINGUISH: To identify under conditions when only two contrasting identifications are involved for each response.

ESTIMATE: To assess the dimension of an object, series of objects, event or condition without applying a standard scale or measuring device. Logical techniques of estimation, such as are involved in mathematical interpolation, may be used. See MEASURE.

EVALUATE: To classify objects, situations, people, conditions, etc., according to defined criteria of quality. Indication of quality must be given in the defined criteria of each class category. Evaluation differs from general classification only in this respect.

IDENTIFY: To indicate the selection of an object of a class in response to its class name, by pointing, picking up, underlining, marking, or other responses.

INTERPRET: To translate information from observation, charts, tables, graphs, and written material in a verifiable manner.

LABEL: To stipulate a verbal (oral or written) response to a given object, drawing, or composition that contains information relative to the known, but unspecified structure of these objects, drawings, or compositions. Labeling is a complex behavior that contains elements of naming and identifying.

LOCATE: To stipulate the position of an object, place, or event in relation to other specified objects, places, or events. Ideational guides to location such as grids, order arrangements and time may be used to describe location. Note: Locate is not to be confused with IDENTIFY.

MEASURE: To apply a standard scale or measuring device to an object, series of objects, events, or conditions, according to practices accepted by those who are skilled in the use of the device or scale.

NAME: To supply the correct name, in oral or written form for an object, class of objects, persons, places, conditions, or events which are pointed out or described.

ORDER: To arrange two or more objects or events in accordance with stated criteria.

PREDICT: To use a rule or principle to predict an outcome or to infer some consequence. It is not necessary that the rule or principle be stated.

REPRODUCE: To imitate or copy an action, construction, or object that is presented.

SOLVE: To effect a solution to a given problem, in writing or orally. The problem solution must contain all the elements required for the requested solution, and may contain extraneous elements that are not required for solution. The problem must be posed in such a way that the student that the student is able to determine the type of response that is acceptable.

STATE A RULE: To make a statement that conveys the meaning of the rule, theory or principle.

TRANSLATE: To transcribe one symbolic form to another of the same or similar meaning.