

WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Second Edition

**A Practical Guide
and Workbook**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
STEP 1: Identify Organizational Unit Objectives	3
STEP 2: Determine On-The-Job Behaviors	8
STEP 3: Write Learning Outcomes	12
What Next	27

Introduction

What does it mean to design and run an effective training program? In a workplace setting, I would suggest that an effective program is one that by and large satisfies the following four criteria:

- I. imparts useful knowledge, attitudes and skills to training participants
- II. satisfies genuine organizational needs
- III. gives participants the confidence to use the new learnings in their job
- IV. uses the minimum of organizational resources to achieve the program's objectives

Anything extra the program achieves is icing on the cake. Many training programs I see run serve no useful purpose for the organization. In many cases, these programs fail because of poorly defined program objectives and learning outcomes. The result is not only a waste of scarce organizational resources, but such fruitless programs also leave in their wake demoralized employees and cynical managers.

This guide and workbook is designed for trainers, facilitators, instructional designers and training managers who want to get more out of the training programs they design and conduct. Whether you are working as an external consultant or contractor, or as an employee internal to the organization, following this guide will help you get more mileage from your programs and engender greater credibility from your clients.

This book is relevant to all types of training programs and organizational settings. It will help you create greater value from your programs whether you are working for a small non-profit organization or a multinational business. The principles and practices used in this book also apply to the spectrum of training types; real and virtual classrooms, online learning and other forms of distance learning, technical and soft-skill programs alike.

With step-by-step instructions throughout, this guide is designed to be a practical resource. In addition, the learning outcomes templates used in the various examples are included in a separate Microsoft Word document packaged with this guide. Use these templates to customize them to your exact needs.

The central core of this book is that effective workplace training focuses on required performance on the job. Focusing on job performance begins with the analysis and design phases of the program. If focusing on what the employee is required to *do* following the training is not clarified and encapsulated in the initial phases of the training project, trying to build it in during the course development and delivery stages will prove to be a frustrating and unrewarding experience.

The construction of a well-written learning outcomes statement is the culmination of the capturing of required on-the-job behaviors into the high-level program design. In this respect, the completion of this task marks an important milestone in the project. If stated learning outcomes are not clearly linked to organizational objectives and required on-the-job behaviors, the course development phase will be at best untied to real organizational needs and at worst an indulgence.

What I term here "learning outcome" is variously named "learning objective" and "learner objective". Sometimes the term "student" or "participant" is used in place of "learner". In any case, a "learning outcome" is what the training participant has actually learned at the conclu-

sion of the training program. “Learning” encapsulates new beliefs, new attitudes and new practical skills and the unlearning of outmoded beliefs, attitudes and skills.

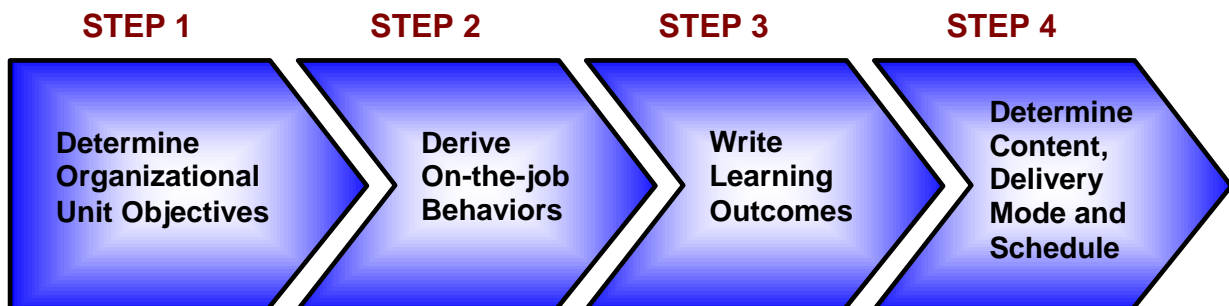
The benefits of defining and articulating a well-constructed learning outcomes statement are important and various. The most significant of these are:

- forms the basis for sequencing and chunking program content and activities
- determines the relevance of program design features and content
- allows learner assessment tasks to be validated for relevance and completeness
- participants’ managers are assured that training addresses organizational goals
- trainers focus on the key deliverables of the training program
- learners focus on what is important to their actual workplace performance

The above list of benefits highlights the central role that learning outcome specifications play. Learning outcome statements serve to guide the activities of all of the people involved in the development and delivery of the program; course designers and developers, participants’ managers, trainers and the learners themselves.

How can you ensure that your learning outcomes statement will have the desired impact? The path I recommend is to follow the correct process. I see effective training program needs analysis and high-level design consisting of four basic steps (see *Figure 1* below).

Figure 1: Phases of training program analysis and design



The first step will help you work with client managers to determine the organization's purpose for the training. This purpose will be stated in organizational terms and not in training terms. In **Step 2**, you will expand the organizational unit's objectives in order to clarify what it is employees will need to be able to do following the training for the organizational unit to be able to achieve its stated objectives. The behavior statements you documented in **Step 2** will then be converted into the language of training in **Step 3**. This step culminates in a document specifying behavior-based learning outcomes for the program. In the final step, the designer determines the basic course design and delivery parameters.

This guide will walk you through the first three of these steps, laying a solid foundation for you to progress to **Step 4**. As you complete each step in the process that follows, write the results for your particular training project in the workbook templates provided. When you have finished working through this workbook, you will have a complete set of documented learning outcomes for your project.