

Goals and Objectives for Medical School Courses

Goals determine the final outcomes of a course. For example, an appropriate learning goal for a clinical diagnosis course might be: at the end of the course the medical student will formulate an appropriate differential diagnosis for his/her patient.

Objectives specify the steps needed for the learner to achieve a goal – e.g., to formulate a differential diagnosis. What should learners be able to do at the end of the course or learning experience?

A well-written learning objective represents a clear statement of instructional intent. Objectives should use verbs that describe (1) an observable action, (2) the conditions under which the action takes place and (3) the acceptable performance level to be achieved.

Objectives are often grouped in three domains: cognitive, affective and skill acquisition.

Cognitive objectives use words such as *demonstrate* and *explain*. Affective objectives use terms such as *appreciate* and *understand*. Skill acquisition utilizes active words such as *perform*, *create*, and *assess*.

Keep in mind that the clearer the objectives, the easier it will be to design the course and assess student success in reaching course goals.

The Instructional Model: goals → objectives → teaching/learning methods → assessment

Example of cognitive, affective, skill acquisition learning objectives:

Cognitive: The student will

ask the patient appropriate questions concerning his/her health history
transmit interview information into a succinct patient chart note

Affective: The student will

address the patient in an appropriate, non-threatening way
convey to the patient the importance of good nutrition and a healthy life style

Skill Acquisition: The student will

demonstrate the appropriate use of the stethoscope in examining the patient

Gronlund, N.E. (1995) *How to write and use instructional objectives*. Fifth Edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Quick Flip Questions for Critical Thinking (1997) California: Edupress, Inc.

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