

Writing Articulate Goals and Objectives

Effective, useful evaluation begins with solid goals and objectives. Carefully defining your goals and objectives upfront can make your work easier in the long run and lead to more positive results in your program. Please consider the following:

Goal:

A goal refers to the overall change expected in a school group or population as a result of a program. Goals describe the overriding purpose of a program and are written as concise, general statements, not immediately measurable.

Example: To increase phonological awareness among pre-K children.

Objective:

Objectives are the intermediate steps or milestones that need to be achieved in order to meet your goal. Objectives are written as specific intended outcomes. They are what you hope your target audience will know, feel or be able to do at the conclusion of your program.

Elements of an Objective:

Key elements of an objective can best be identified by answering the following question: Who will do how much of what by when:

WHO	(Who is your target population?)
HOW MUCH	(How much change do you hope to see?)
WHAT	(What is your intended outcome?)
BY WHEN	(By when will your objective be met or measured?)

Example: Three months after participating in a reading circle, 60% of pre-K participants will be able to describe the letters, sounds and words in two Book of the Week books.

Who:	Pre-K children participating in a reading circle
How much:	60% of participants
What:	Describe the letters, sounds, words in two Book of the Week books
When:	Three months after participating

Characteristics of a Well Written Objective: SMART

Another rule of thumb for writing good objectives is to see if they are SMART. Once you draft an objective, check it against the following criteria to see how it stands up.

S=Specific: Objectives should be specific and use only one action verb. Objectives with more than one verb are difficult to measure. Also, avoid verbs that may have vague meanings to describe intended outcomes (e.g. “understand,” “know”) because they are too hard to measure. Instead use verbs that allow you to document action (e.g., “At the end of the session, students will list three books they have read.....” Remember, the greater the specificity, the greater the measurability.

M=Measurable: It is impossible to determine whether or not you meet your objectives unless you can measure them. A benchmark from which to measure change can help. For example, if you found in your evaluation that 20% of high school students fail to pass reading, you might write an objective that strives to decrease that percentage to 10%. Thus you will have an objective with a benchmark from which to measure change and one which is specific enough to be evaluated quantitatively.

A=Appropriate: Your objective must be appropriate (e.g. culturally, developmentally, socially, linguistically) for your target population. To insure appropriateness, objectives should originate from the needs of your target audience and not from a preconceived agenda of program planners. Conducting a solid needs assessment (e.g. holding in-depth interviews with members of the target population helps to ensure that your objectives will be appropriate. For example, an objective focusing on reading strategies for an elementary school population may be inappropriate for a high school population.

R=Realistic: Objectives must be realistic. Countless factors influence human behavior. If program planners set their sights too high on achieving changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills or behavior, they will likely fall short of reaching their objectives. While a program may have been successful, it may not appear that way on the surface because the objectives were too ambitious. The following is an unrealistic objective:

- After reading three Take-Me-Home books a week and spending 20 minutes a day on the computer, 100% of the pre-school students in the classroom will attain phonological and phonemic awareness.

A more realistic objective could be written as follows:

- After reading three Take-Me-Home books a week and spending 20 minutes a day on the computer, 85% of the pre-school students in the classroom will be able to successfully identify 24 of the 30 words in the book.

T=Time specific: It is important to provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured or a time by which the objective will be met. Including a time frame in your objectives helps in both the planning and the evaluation of a program.

- Within two months of beginning the individualized software program “Explore Words” 60% of pre-K children will demonstrate the capacity to listen and record their speech.