WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Every decision you make about your lecture/workshop should depend on the learning objectives for your intended audience. Learning objectives should be clearly stated for each learning activity, to inform your audience about what they should expect. Thus, the success of your lecture/workshop will be measured by how well you achieve these objectives.

A learning objective should be specific, short-range, and relatively concrete. It is not a mere description of the content of your presentation, but instead outlines what a learner will be able to *do* differently (what learner behaviour will change) if they attend your presentation.

One good way to state learning objectives is to begin with the phrase "At the end of this lecture/workshop, the learner will be able to…" This phrase is followed by an "action" verb that describes what the learner will be able to *do* differently.

Learning objectives can focus on **knowledge, skills, attitudes**, and **practice** (long-term future behaviour). For objectives relating to knowledge, "action" verbs could include: list, describe, explain, identify, categorize, document, etc. If the objectives are loftier, aiming for an ability to critically analyze knowledge, the verbs could include: debate, critique, distinguish, compare, evaluate, etc. For objectives relating to skills, the verbs could include: solve, demonstrate, operate, supervise, diagnose, etc. For objectives relating to attitudes, the verbs could include: accept, value, support, resist, consider, manifest care or concern about, etc.. For objectives relating to practice, the verbs are similar to those for skills, but the focus is on long-term behaviour.

It is also useful to specify the expected performance levels and conditions for each objective. For example, a brief workshop on psychotherapy would unlikely lead to a complete mastery of skills. However, it might lead to an awareness or appreciation of the skills, or competence in a specific component or skill.

Here are some examples of effective learning objectives written for a recent conference on "Maintaining Professional Boundaries":

1. …participants will be able to identify at least four types of sexual misconduct.

2. …participants will be able to describe transference, countertransference, and least three bases for the power differential in the psychotherapy relationship.

3. …participants will be able to describe administrative safeguards which can limit the risk of unprofessional conduct.

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