



Assessment Cycle, Step 1: Writing and mapping outcomes

This checklist is about the first step of the assessment cycle: Writing and mapping the outcomes—the outcomes for a course (CLO), an academic program (PLO), or a service (SAO). Outcomes are the foundations: they indicate what a course, degree, service is about; why it is important, unique, needed; and how it demonstrates to contribute to a high-quality educational experience.

(a) Outcomes should be:

1. **Limited in number:**

- 2-4 SAOs
- 3-5 CLOs and PLOs

Because they illustrate the ultimate goals (not tasks or topics) and they need to be assessed every semester.

2. **Broad** so they do not have to be revised as the instructor and discipline change.

3. **Brief** so students/participants can understand them quickly and easily.

4. **Assessable:**

- Each outcome contains **one verb only** (do not stack multiple verbs/outcomes in one sentence because it makes assessment impossible).
- Each outcome addresses a **different verb** (do not repeat the same verb within one list).
- Each outcome begins with a **measurable verb** according to a taxonomy (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy for instruction or Support Outcome Taxonomy for services).
- Each list of outcomes draws from **1-3 domains per Taxonomy**. Let me give you a few examples.
 - ✓ If you write SAOs, use verbs from two layers in the Support Outcome Taxonomy.
 - ✓ If you teach a course at the introductory/beginner level, your CLO verbs can draw from columns 1-2-3 in the Bloom Taxonomy.
 - ✓ If you teach a course at the advanced level, your CLO verbs can draw from columns 4-5-6.
 - ✓ If you teach a course where students move from an introductory to an advanced level, just draw verbs from columns 4-5-6 because you want to focus on the ultimate goals.

5. **Unique** to each course or service (should not appear in multiple lists).

6. **Collectively agreed.**

- Instructors teaching the same course and department liaison agree on course outcomes.
- Faculty of a department agree on program outcomes.
- Staff of a unit agree on service outcomes.

7. **Formatted** so they do not create glitches in the database where they are stored:

- Start with a verb in capital letter (e.g., no bullet point, quotation marks).
- End with a period.



8. Mapped:

- SAOs link to our Core Values.
- Each CLO links to 1-3 PLOs and 1-3 ILOs, and any other “higher outcomes” (e.g., certificate outcome). The linkage is:
 - ✓ EXPLICIT (i.e., the connection is spelled out in the wording of the CLO)
 - ✓ SUBSTANTIAL (i.e., the connection is repeated in the course at least 25% of the time)
 - ✓ CONSISTENT (i.e., the connection is applied across all instructors teaching the course, regardless of designation, focus, and optional activities).

For example: CLO 1 maps to “ILO Quantitative Reasoning—Effectively analyze numerical data, solve quantitative problems, and apply mathematical concepts” because:

- ✓ CLO 1 is about “calculating” (explicit)
- ✓ “Calculating” is taught in many class activities (substantial)
- ✓ “Calculating” is taught by all faculty and lecturers assigned to that course (consistent)

Here we have a great example of mapping:

	ILO1	ILO2	ILO3
CLO1	X		X
CLO2		X	
CLO3	X	X	

Here we have poor examples of mapping due to over-mapping (i.e., each outcome maps to all higher outcomes):

	ILO1	ILO2	ILO3
CLO1	X	X	X
CLO2	X	X	X
CLO3	X	X	X

and under-mapping (i.e., CLO1 is not mapped at all):

	ILO1	ILO2	ILO3
CLO1			
CLO2			X
CLO3		X	

The curriculum map ensures the integrity of the entire degree and institution—students have to learn what is needed in the correct sequence without redundancy.



(b) You can start drafting your outcomes through two lenses:

- Try a “top-down” approach: Think about the outcomes of other courses or services, program outcomes, institution outcomes, campus strategic plan, state requirements for your certifications, national and international trends in your field.
- Try a “bottom-up” approach: Look at your lesson plans, daily tasks and topics, and move up to create the overarching outcomes.

(c) Note a few examples of good outcomes:

- Compare *major perspectives* of political science.
- Explain political institutions *such as* Senate, Parliament, and Supreme Court.
- Apply mediation styles *in different circumstances*.
- Create a safe campus for students, faculty, staff, and community members.

(d) A student’s quote emphasizes the importance of transparent outcomes and curriculum map for students:

“As a first-generation college student, I had no one to guide me. My major seemed like a good fit at first but I had a misconception about what the major was and what jobs could result from my degree. **If I had known the learning outcomes beforehand, I would have chosen a different major** and instead I felt trapped in what I had chosen.

Learning outcomes help students be successful in their learning and they need to be very transparent. **Students need to understand that outcomes are connected beyond the classroom** to their future career goals. Outcomes need to make sense and be integrated across campus, they need multiple touchpoints. Posting outcomes on the website and syllabus, and introducing them once to students, does not help, that’ll not stick. But if there’s **repeated exposure**, repeated saturation to this student, it will be valuable.”

(Christina Ouellette, Bridgewater State University, presented at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment’s Beyond the looking glass: Tenets of meaningful transparency, 2020)”