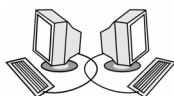


Chapter VII

Writing Instructional Objectives



Making Connections

In the last chapter we discussed learner-centered instruction and gave you an overview of systematic instructional design. One of the first considerations after determining the needs of your audience, the potential learners, and the content to be delivered is to formulate instructional objectives. Instructional objectives are written by the instructor to guide the design process, and must consider distance education delivery strategies and principles of adult learning. Often these objectives will be negotiated with the learner so that they will meet their individual needs (e.g., learning contracts). Keeping in mind that learners have diverse learning needs and preferences, it is important to understand the three major domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Helping you to do so are guideposts to ensure that the instructional objectives are written so that they measure the intended outcomes. How do you write instructional objectives that are specific and measurable? Why is this important?

Introduction

Effective instruction begins with the establishment of instructional goals and objectives (Brahier, 2000). Goals describe learner outcomes expected upon completion of a course or instructional unit. Instructional goals should be general, observable, and challenging. *To develop a greater appreciation for using geometry to solve real-world problems* is an example of an instructional goal. Instructional goals should be directly related to the content being taught and the competencies being developed (Newcomb, McKracken, Warmbrod, & Whittington, 2004).

Many instructors confuse the terms “instructional goals” and “objectives,” believing them to be synonymous. They are not. An instructional objective is a statement describing a proposed “change” of what the learner can do when he or she has successfully completed a learning experience. Objectives should be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timed (SMART)**. An objective is specific or precise so that the instructor and learner can determine whether the objective has been met. If the objective is measurable, the instructor should be able to observe the action or change and thus provide feedback for improvement if needed (Mager, 1997). When writing objectives, instructors make decisions about the content and establish parameters to help define and limit the content (Newcomb et al., 2004). For example, *Given a scalene triangle, students will be able to prove that the sum of the measures of the angles of a triangle is 180* is an example of an instructional objective. Note that the three characteristics of a good, defensible behavioral instructional objective are present in the statement of this objective. First, the terminal behavior expected and accepted as evidence is identified by name, namely, “students will be able to prove that the sum of the measures of the angles of a triangle is 180.” Second, the important conditions under which the behavior will be expected to occur are described to define further the desired behavior, namely, “Given a scalene triangle.” Third, a criterion of acceptable performance is included or implied that describes how well the student must perform to be considered acceptable, namely, “students will be able to prove” (student either can prove or cannot prove). Goals are general; objectives are specific.

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