Standards, Goals and Objectives: The Difference Between Goals and Objectives

Standards

Standards are goals for what students should learn and thus establish what teachers should teach. The word standard is used in several ways. "Content standards" define what every student should know and be able to do. "Performance standards" explain how students will demonstrate their proficiency in order to establish that a standard has been achieved. It is important to understand that performance standards are indicators of more general goals and not the goals themselves.

Standards are written on many levels of detail. On the national level, professional organizations establish general goals. Benchmarks define a general standard according to a system describing what should be accomplished by the end of grade level intervals - e.g., k-2, 6-8, 9-12. States and often local school districts interpret these standards and benchmarks. A "curriculum framework" specifies the knowledge and skills to be acquired and relates these goals to general instructional processes and assessment techniques.

Goals and Objectives

In educational programming, both goals and objectives can be defined as statements that reflect what learners will be able to do at the end of an instructional sequence; however, there are significant differences between the two. A goal is an abstract and general umbrella statement, under which specific objectives can be clustered. Objectives are statements that describe—in precise, measurable, and obtainable terms—defined and desired learner outcomes.

Educational Objectives

The three common types of objectives are:

- Learner objectives – reflect what the learner should know or be able to do at the end of the learning period
- Instructional objectives – reflect what the instructor intends to accomplish
- Behavioral objectives – reflect what the learner might be expected to do differently (e.g., change in behavior) as a result of what has been learned.

In general, learner objectives are more effective than instructional objectives. In other words, it is much more effective to state activity objectives in terms of what learners should be able to know or do at the end of the learning period, rather than what the instructor plans to do in the process of presenting the course.

Learning objectives are intended to serve a number of purposes:

- Make clear to instructors and learners what is to be achieved in each activity.
- Provide a baseline to define how learners’ changes in performance should be assessed.
- Provide a basis for part of the evaluation.
- Give a clear sense of direction to the educational process and indicate possible teaching methods.

Writing Educational Objectives

When writing objectives, it is necessary to avoid using ambiguous verbs such as “learn” or “know,” and verbs that express the instructor’s view, such as “inform” or “teach.”
Appropriate verbs are action verbs written from the learner’s perspective (see attached List of Verbs for Formulating Educational Objectives).

For each goal remember the ABCD’s:

• Identify the appropriate AUDIENCE.
• Consider the BEHAVIOR that the learner must be able to perform at the end of the activity in order to attain the overall goal.
• Identify the CONDITIONS or knowledge that the learner must gather, or be provided with during the activity in order to attain the objective. (Use only if the condition truly clarifies the objective.)
• Consider the DEGREE to which the behavior must be performed, or criteria/standards of correct performance.

Think of how you would test the learners in the different skills and knowledge so that you would be able to tell if they have achieved what you wanted them to achieve. For each test you should describe the relevant ABCDs. These ABCDs should then be tied together to construct objectives (see example below).

It is important to remember that the identified behavior is the essence of the objective.

**Checklist for Educational Objectives**

_____ Related to a goal.
_____ Answers the question “What will the learner be able to do at the end of the activity?”
_____ Stated in precise, observable, measurable terms.
_____ Realistically obtainable during the activity.

Reference