

# VIEWS



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## Roadmap for Professional Development: How to Write Achievable and Measurable Learning Objectives

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In the beginning, there was no CMP. “What?!,” you may ask. Hard as it may seem for those of you who have been members of RID for only the last decade and a half, however, the truth is that maintaining certification by documenting continuing education was instituted as a formal requirement as recently as the 1993 RID Convention. Since then, lifelong education has become a pursuit of RID members, and it is the goal of RID approved sponsors to ensure that the educational opportunities offered will be more than just “seat in a chair” hours.

One of the keys to planning a successful class or workshop is setting appropriate educational objectives. In many cases, activities are planned by individuals who are master interpreters but who have not had education or experience as teachers. As a result, “educational objectives” are often taken to mean a list of things that will be done during the activity. This interpretation, aside from failing to provide accurate information, deprives the workshop sponsor of valuable information that can lead to a successful activity and a satisfied audience.

Broadly speaking, well-written educational objectives will accomplish three things:

1) give you, the planner and/or presenter, a comprehensive viewpoint of what you are trying to accomplish (e.g. are you trying to achieve too much?, are you using the appropriate format for the time frame allotted?, are you aiming at an appropriate level of instruction for the audience?);

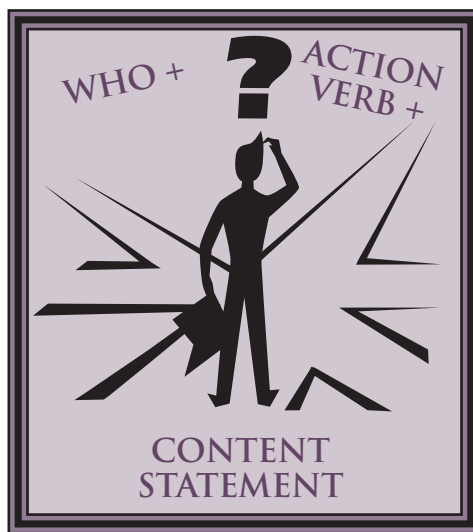
2) give the potential participants an idea of whether the presentation/workshop is appropriate for them and their skill level, the result of which is that the group that attends will be the one in which you have planned; and

3) help you to plan the activities and materials needed to impart the information as well as to develop the method by which you will know whether you have been successful.

So, do you need a degree in education to be able to write good educational objectives? Not at all. When you first start thinking about developing a workshop or class, you already have thoughts about what it is you want participants to glean from your presentation, whether that is new knowledge or new skills. The objectives you write are simply a list of basic sentences that focus on those new

or improved abilities or knowledge. These sentences should follow a specific format. They must start with “who,” and “the who” should be the participants, not the instructor. “The who” should be followed by an action verb, then the sentence will end with a content statement. The statements must be observable and measurable, which is why they require “action” verbs.

*For example*, have you presented a workshop on preparation for the NIC test? If your educational objective is - “Participants will better understand the process of the new NIC test” - how will you know you have succeeded? How can you observe or measure “better understanding?” That statement is vague and hard to measure.



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Instead, try these objectives which help to maintain more focus and achievable goals: Participants will be able to:

1. state the full name of the initials NIC
2. state the number of portions there are on the NIC
3. describe the portions of the NIC
4. indicate the date the NIC was first given.

With these more streamlined goals, you are better able to determine whether the participants have learned the information and to what extent they have mastered it.

Similarly, if you hope to improve someone's ability to perform a given task, the objective should not be "participants will improve their ability to remember information" but rather how many words they will be able to remember in a memory test, or how much longer they will be able to interpret in a practice video or whatever the task or goal for improvement you are seeking to be the end result of your workshop.

Words like "understand," "know" or "improve" might give a vague sense of accomplishment to the participants as well as the presenter, but they do not provide feedback to instructors and allow them to adjust the teaching or the curriculum for optimum success. Additionally, they do not allow sponsors to make good decisions about choosing instructors for future offerings.

As you read this article, you may think that this information does not really apply to you. Actually, the same strategy for nar-

rowing the focus of educational objectives can be very useful in multiple situations. First, it can help you to assess whether a specific workshop or course meets your needs. Additionally, specified learning objectives also can help you organize your own learning. If you decide to design your own independent study plan for earning CEUs, your sponsor will want to know your specific objectives and how you will accomplish these goals and evaluate your success in the project.

For example, suppose you have agreed to mentor a non-certified member who is preparing for the NIC performance test. Such an activity may lend itself to an Independent Study Plan. As you design that plan, the format mentioned above for crafting objectives still applies, however, "the who" in this instance will be you; the mentor. What will you learn from this experience that will enhance your professional growth?

Your objectives should include more specific action verbs such as "describe," "state," "list" or "explain" rather than the more vague action verbs such as "understand" or "know."

The action verb will be followed by a very specific content statement. For example, statements such as, "the vocabulary associated with high school math" or "the ethical challenges of the mental health intake procedure" are vague and not appropriate for "the who." A more improved content statement would be "effective language for giving feedback," "formats for evaluation sheets" or "types of classifiers and their grammatical function."

Remember, objectives in this case are related to what you are studying in preparing to mentor, not what the mentee will do or learn.

In short, well-written educational objectives, which are simple sentences using action verbs that are observable and measurable, can work for everyone, including event planners, instructors and participants. They are crucial to the success of the event and play an important role at all stages of planning including before, during and after any educational activity. They are not difficult to write once you get accustomed to the idea that the event should have a more focused and specific set of goals to achieve. This will ensure greater success in the participants be able to demonstrate the new knowledge and/or skills they have attained as a result of attending your educational workshop.

Take these steps to ensure your next presentation will be one in which the participants will do more than just fill a seat. ■



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**Below is a sampling of observable action verbs:**

Identify	Demonstrate	Recall
List	Perform	Specify
Describe	Defend	Distinguish
Compare/contrast	Justify	Produce
Classify	Dispute	
Analyze	Explain	

If you need assistance, the Professional Development Committee can help get you on the right track. Go to <http://rid.org/aboutRID/leadership/index.cfm/AID/128> for contact information and a list of committee members.