

Guidelines for Writing Course Learning Requirements



PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

What do program standards and PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) have in common? They both focus on what has been learned rather than how long it took to learn, or where or how the learning took place. Both require that the essential learning expected in each course be clearly articulated. This learning is expressed as course learning requirements. These guidelines were prepared to support faculty as they work to identify and write course learning requirements.

COURSE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

Course learning requirements (CLRs) describe learning that integrates knowledge, skills and attitudes (values) that learners have achieved at the end of a course or unit of study. These written statements identify the performances that must be demonstrated and verified in order to receive credit for a course or unit of study. Characteristics of course learning requirements are listed below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COURSE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

As Figure 1 below shows, effective course learning requirements are compiled, or built, based on seven broad characteristics.

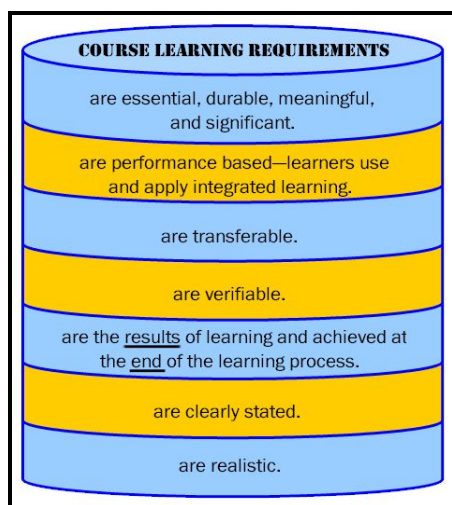


Figure 1: The characteristics of course learning requirements

Course learning requirements (CLRs) describe learning that is **essential, durable, meaningful** and **significant**. They describe learning that "really matters in the long run" and that contributes to the achievement of one or more program learning outcomes.

They are **performance based**. They focus on integrated learning rather than the listing of discrete skills and facts. They describe performances that require learners to demonstrate that they can **use and apply integrated learning**. In this context, the term "performance" does not need to be interpreted to mean only a physical or psychomotor performance. It includes any demonstration of learning that requires learners to apply learning. As much as possible, course learning requirements should emphasize this concept of integrated and applied learning.

They describe learning that is **transferable**. The learning reflected in these statements should, to the greatest extent possible, assist the learner to adapt to change by being applicable in a variety of work and/or life contexts.

Course learning requirements are **verifiable**. Learners must be able to demonstrate that the course learning requirement had been achieved. Qualitative and/or quantitative assessment approaches may be used to verify that course learning requirements have been achieved.

They represent the **results** of learning and are achieved at the **end** of the learning process. They are clearly distinguished from "inputs" such as teaching strategies, learning activities, content samples or specific facts and theories that are used as vehicles to help learners achieve the course learning requirements.

They are **clearly stated** so that they can be understood by learners, educators, employers and the public.

Course learning requirements are **realistic** in that they describe learning that is achievable.

INSIDE

- Resources.
- The goal of course learning requirements.
- Hints for developing course learning requirements.
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).
- Checklist for course learning requirements.
- Pitfalls to avoid when writing learning requirements.

PLEASE NOTE:

These guidelines are transitional and intended to lead us towards a standards-based education environment. They link the educational future with where we are now.

The Goal of Course Learning Requirements

Ideally, a "design down" process would be used to derive course learning requirements from the standards established for programs. Course learning requirements should be directly linked to Essential Employability Skills learning outcomes, vocational program learning outcomes and/or to general education themes. This ensures that the curriculum at the course level is clearly focused on helping learners to acquire, practice, and demonstrate significant learning expressed in the program learning outcomes. Outcomes for Essential Employability Skills and most vocational programs have been developed. We need to update our course outlines and ensure that the significant, essential learning that is to be achieved by learners at the end of the course is clearly stated.

RESOURCES

Individuals looking for more information may find the following resources useful:

- The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities College Diploma and Certificate Program Standards Site:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/college/progstan/intro.html>
- The Professor's Resource Site:
<http://elearning.algonquincollege.com/profres/>

HINTS FOR DEVELOPING COURSE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

Consider the contribution that the course makes to the total program. Identify the program learning outcomes or general education theme area(s) that it supports. If program learning outcomes are not available, use what information is available to determine the purpose of the course in the total program. Consider, also, other courses that are related to this one. What aspects of the program standards/learning outcomes should be addressed in each course or unit? Is the current curriculum structure (current courses, labs, work experience etc.) the best way to deliver the program in a standards-based environment? Are existing courses being adjusted to ensure a "fit" is made between course learning requirements and program standards? How should they complement and support each other?

Consider the learners who are likely to be enrolled in the course. They will probably be a diverse group, and they may have had some common experiences so you may be able to predict some common characteristics or

interests. Use this information to help assign learning requirements to specific courses and to plan learning experiences.

Keep in mind how the course contributes to the total program. Consider the essential learning students should have achieved when they have successfully completed the course. If you are revising an existing course, consider what significant knowledge and skills students must acquire. Create a list.

Revise your list by

1. *Grouping items together:* Can some of the items be grouped together so that they express how students will integrate knowledge and skills into a performance? Are some of the items subsets or stepping stones to others?
2. *Prioritizing items:* Are all items essential? Will they be important three years from now? Would everyone teaching a similar course agree that they are important?

Refine your list by eliminating unnecessary items, adding forgotten items, or combining related items.

Draft course learning requirements. Preface the statements with the phrase: "*When you have earned credit for this course you will have demonstrated the ability to*". They should describe a single performance and should be written in one or two sentences that clearly describe the significant, essential learning required for students to successfully complete the course. A hint — verbs are important. There is a direct link between the choice of verbs and the success of the course learning requirements. Choose verbs that describe what learners should be able to do with the information or skills they have learned.

Check your course learning requirements by using the checklist found in this guide. Make any revisions necessary.

Meet with your colleagues to review all course learning requirements in the program and ensure that your course learning requirements contribute appropriately to the total program.

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Why use course learning requirements?

With provincial program standards, we have to be able to articulate the integrated learning that students must have achieved in order to graduate from a program. Statements which describe course learning requirements should represent performances or things that students can do in order to demonstrate that they have acquired knowledge, learned skills and understand how, where, and when they may be applied. They ensure that our courses enable

PROFESSOR OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The content of this Lifesaver is related to the following Professor of the 21st Century Teaching Competency:

7. Designing Courses and Programs.

learners to meet the exit standards of the college program in which they are registered.

How do course learning requirements differ from objectives?

Objectives were written to reflect specific content and discrete skills; learning requirements describe the integration or synthesis of this learning. Objectives were steps towards the terminal or final objective; learning requirements focus on the end results. Objectives included the specific context in which the learning was to be taught and evaluated; learning requirements describe the transferable learning that can be demonstrated in several different contexts. Objectives, because they were discrete, were assessed individually and credit was granted for achieving an acceptable percentage of the objectives; learning requirements describe the essential learning; therefore, students earn credit for the course based on their achievement of course learning requirements.

Course Learning Requirements are		Behavioural Objectives (TPO's)
Performance specifications: they describe performances demonstrated in authentic contexts.	not →	Design specifications: they describe inputs such as topics to be covered or specific skills to be practiced during the course.
Adult life/work role expectations.	not →	Job-specific or task-specific skills.
Essential outcomes which represent exit standards for a course or module.	not →	Preferred outputs which are measured at specific intervals throughout the course.
Results of integrated learning, expressed as role performances.	not →	Intentions that drive curriculum design.
Transferable abilities based on integrated learning applicable in many contexts.	not →	Directly observable behaviours that are specific to context, content, and time.
Learner-centred and performance-based.	not →	Discipline/subject centred or content-based.

How will using learning requirements affect the way I teach?

Teachers are distinguished from laypersons by their ability to understand and articulate the stepping stones to the achievement of a significant, meaningful transferable performance. Identifying these stepping stones enables teachers to guide students toward the information they need, develop assignments to help them convert information into knowledge, design practice activities which encourage students to apply knowledge, and plan assessment strategies which provide efficient means for monitoring the progress of individual students. This planning allows the teacher to provide helpful feedback and to promote achievement at each step leading to the course learning requirement.

How will learning requirements affect the way I evaluate?

Course learning requirements will anchor the evaluation process. You will need to design different types of evaluation tools that allow students to demonstrate achievement of course learning requirements.

CHECKLIST FOR COURSE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

Consider each course learning requirement to ensure that it

- is clearly stated
- is verifiable
- describes learning that is durable, meaningful and significant
- describes learning that is transferable
- describes learning that is performance-based
- describes learning that is achieved at the end of the course and is respectful of diverse learning environments
- describes learning that is essential for successful completion of the course
- is free of cultural or gender bias
- supports one or more program learning outcomes/standards

Consider the learning requirements collectively to ensure that they

- are manageable in number
- reflect a balance between practical and theoretical understanding as appropriate to the course
- do not overlap

QUESTIONS??

For more information, contact Learning & Teaching Services.

PITFALLS TO AVOID WHEN WRITING COURSE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

Some common errors made when writing course learning requirements are listed below.

PITFALLS <i>Statements are</i>	UNACCEPTABLE <i>The student will</i>	IMPROVED <i>When you have earned credit for this course you will have demonstrated an ability to</i>
written to reflect specific content .	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. describe the levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. 2. list and describe the signs and symptoms of heart failure. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. use theories of motivation to interpret human behaviour in non-stressful situations. 2. link signs and symptoms of heart failure to pathological processes.
not written as an outcome but as a goal or a process .	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. engage in learning about the role of experience in learning. 2. appreciate the importance of personal responsibility in mature human sexuality. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. prepare a personal portfolio that identifies specific learning acquired through experience. 2. explain clearly the relationship between personal values and attitudes and mature human sexuality.
not realistic .	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. list the chemical symbol and valencies of all the known elements. 2. list all the regulations that relate to child care delivery services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. write and interpret equations to represent chemical reactions that maintain acid base balance. 2. access and accurately interpret legislation related to typical problems that occur in child care programs.
too narrow so that learning is not sufficiently transferable.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. deliver a presentation on the merits of equity legislation. 2. describe the functions of MS Word 2003 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. make presentations that address different perspectives on equity issues. 2. use word-processing software to prepare reports and correspondence.
trite or inconsequential and do not describe significant learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. outline the contribution of Stanley Burke to Canadian broadcasting. 2. make accurate calculations of revenues versus expenditures for small business bookkeeping. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. draw accurate conclusions about the roles of charisma and personal agendas in Canadian broadcasting. 2. display balance sheets that provide accounting information that is accurate and easy to read.
descriptive of learning which is not verifiable .	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. promote customer service as the key to effective marketing. 2. improve his or her understanding of the laws of electricity. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. plan specific marketing strategies that emphasize customer service. 2. use the laws of electricity to explain the viability of particular circuitry in specific applications.
dependent on the teaching process or the way the material is taught.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. report on the results of an experiment conducted to demonstrate the effects of inadequate insulation. 2. prepare a defensible argument to support one of the positions taken on euthanasia in the film "A Time to Die." 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. choose and apply the appropriate sealing agents to ensure optimal air circulation. 2. present arguments on both sides of the euthanasia issue.
dependent on the environment in which the learning occurs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. administer and record medications according to the policy of the Civic Hospital. 2. defend the service and warranty policies and practices of Northern Telecom. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. administer and record medications safely respecting legal guidelines. 2. explain the relationship between costs and risk factors and service and warranty policies of technological industries.