# Guidelines for Effective Program Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes **make explicit what _graduating_ students from the program should know or be able to do.**

- They are **student focused** ("Students will be able to…").  Students are always the grammatical subject of a learning outcome.
- They are **post-program focused**, aimed at the knowledge, skills, values, or dispositions you want your program graduates taking out into the world _as a result of the program's course of study._
- They use **carefully selected <u>verbs</u>** (_identify, describe, interpret, analyze, apply, design, etc._) that reflect the specific level of cognitive complexity desired. They _avoid_ vague verbs like "understand" or "know" or discuss, or even "demonstrate."  See <u>these examples</u> of verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy and other sources.
- They are **empirically measurable or observable.**  Learning outcomes with phrases like "become more familiar with" or "develop a deeper understanding of" are difficult to measure, observe, or evaluate consistently, and should be avoided in learning outcome statements.
- They are **discrete and narrowly defined** (don't combine multiple content areas or skills into the same outcome).
- They **reflect the _full_ range of learning and values faculty expect** from students graduating from their program. For example, if your program offers courses, opportunities, or experiences related to UWS Shared Learning Goals 4 or 5 (Intercultural Knowledge and Competence and Individual, Social and Environmental Responsibility), **are they addressed in your Program Learning Outcomes?**
- They reflect the **distinctive** nature of your program. While the UWS Shared Learning Outcomes can be a guide, your PLOs should **not** simply be restatements of them. They should translate those broad goals in the distinctive forms of knowledge, skills, and activities in your program.
- For undergraduate programs, they are **clearly mapped** to the <u>UWS Shared Learning Goals</u> where appropriate.

All UWM PLOs should follow this format:

> **STUDENTS** graduating from the _____ program will be able to **VERB** followed by **CONTENT**.

_Note:  Programs in which the wording of learning competencies or outcomes is specified by their program's accrediting body should use the learning outcome language their accreditor has approved._

Examples of a poorly written outcome being revised into a well-written learning outcome:

| Graduating students will be able to: | Quality of Outcome: | Explanation: |
|---|---|---|
| **Understand** the principles of composition.<br><br>*What does this mean?* | Very Poor | Vague, extremely difficult to assess consistently. |
| **Describe** the composition of a painting.<br><br>*Are you sure you only want description here?* | Poor | The verb is more specific here, but is at a very low level of cognitive complexity. Is description all we want students to achieve for this outcome? |
| **Analyze** the composition of a painting.<br><br>*Could this be less ambiguous or defined even more clearly?* | Better | The verb is now a bit more specific and asks for a higher level of cognitive complexity. But analyze can still mean different things to different people. This verb only works well if everyone in your program has an identical understanding of "analyze" in your disciplinary context. |
| **Distinguish** between discrete elements of the composition of a work of visual media and **critique** their effectiveness in the specific contexts of the piece. | Good | This outcome now breaks down "analyze" into its desired components (distinguish and critique) and is now more narrowly and specifically written. It eliminates any confusion about what "analyze" means in this context. |

**Example Program Learning Outcomes:**

Students graduating from the Folklore, BA Program will be able to:

- **Identify** and **describe** common forms of folklore and folklife.

- Accurately **describe** the ideas and impact of historical figures that influenced the field of Folklore Studies.

- Accurately **identify, explain, and contrast** the uses and limits of folkloristic approaches, including structuralism, functionalism, structural functionalism, and performance theory.

- **Plan** and **carry out** ethnographic research projects, including choosing an appropriate research subject, engaging in participant observation, interviewing informants, and keeping field notes.

- **Compose** and **present** effective ethnographic texts in print, film, or digital formats.

- Explicitly and responsibly **reflect** on the ethical dimensions, and their implications, of their own ethnographic research projects and ethnographic writing.

- **Apply** folkloristic theories and perspectives to **create** arguments about the meaning and significance of specific cultural traditions.

- **Investigate** and **create** arguments about the roles of specific traditional, informal, or expressive cultural activities from several different cultures in shaping identities, beliefs, and communities.

Students graduating from the **Folklore, PhD Program** will be able to:

- **Summarize, synthesize, and critique** relevant literature to develop critical understandings of the history, theory, concepts, and debates in at least two major areas of folkloristic research.

- **Develop and complete** an original research project that pursues a significant research question in the field of Folklore Studies.

- **Ethically conduct** ethnographic research, including methods, analysis, and writing.

- **Develop and use** professional oral and written communication skills suitable for professional conference presentation, academic publication (print or digital), applications for grants, awards, and fellowships, and other forms of professional discourse.

- **Embody** professional expectations for ethics, collegiality, service, and engagement with the discipline by attending and presenting at national conferences, engaging in collaborative projects, writing grant proposals, and other professional activity.

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