Writing learning objectives

Relationship between people
Англійська мова, 9 клас

World Book and Copyright Day

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Іноземні Мови
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ЗМІСТ

WRITING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Людмила ЖАРІКОВА, старший викладач кафедри методики мов та літератури Інституту післядипломної педагогічної освіти Київського університету імені Бориса Грінченка

What is a learning objective?

• A learning objective **answers the question:** *What is it that your students should be able to do at the end of the class session and course that they could not do before?*

• A learning objective **makes clear** the intended learning outcome rather than what form the instruction will take.

• Learning objectives **focus on student performance**. Action verbs that are specific, such as *list, describe, report, compare, demonstrate, and analyze,* should state the behaviors students will be expected to perform.

Well-written learning objectives can give students precise statements of what is expected of them and provide guidelines for assessing student progress. Our goal for students is learning and if students don't know what they should be able to do at the end of class then it will be difficult for them to reach that goal.

Clearly defined objectives form the foundation for selecting appropriate content, learning activities, and assessment measures. If objectives of the course are not clearly understood by both teacher and students, if your learning activities do not relate to the objectives and the content that you think is important, then your methods of assessment, which are supposed to indicate to both learner and teacher how effective the learning and teaching process has been, will be at best misleading, and, at worst, irrelevant or unfair.

Think about the lesson you will be teaching. What would you like for each student to know and be able to do when he/she has completed the lesson?

Learning objectives are specific statements describing what you and your students intend to achieve as a result of learning that occurs both in class and outside of class. At English classes we speak mostly about **cognitive objectives**, which emphasize *knowing, conceptualizing, comprehending, applying, synthesizing, and evaluating.* These objectives deal with students' knowledge of the subject matter, and how students demonstrate this knowledge. Sometimes we also deal with attitudinal objectives – specific statements about attitudes, values and emotions that students will have as a result of taking part in class activities.

What learning objectives emphasize

1. Learning objectives emphasize observed activity

The only way you can determine whether or not a student has learned something is to observe some kind of behavior that indicates learning has taken place. This behavior may range from correctly answering multiple-choice questions to requiring that the student actually demonstrate a skill.

Example

Given a thesis statement in class, the student will write 3 topic sentences for paragraph development of the given statement.

2. Learning objectives emphasize student activity

Teachers sometimes state objectives in terms of their activities. However, learning objectives focus exclusively on student behaviors, not on the behaviors of the instructor.

Example

The student will be able to write 10 sentences on the topic using narrative tenses with 80 % accuracy.

3. Learning objectives emphasize student outcomes

Instructors often state objectives in terms of process or procedure while learning objectives refer to the end results of instruction. A good learning objective states what a student will know or be able to do at the end of instruction.

Example

The student will be able to identify specific detail in an article and talk about volunteering at a sport event.

Advantages of using learning objectives

The writing of learning objectives focuses attention away from content and onto the students. This re-focusing often produces revisions in teaching methods.

1. Planning instruction: Once you have developed learning objectives for a course you can more rationally sequence instruction, allot time to topics, assemble materials, prepare outlines and booklists, etc. Learning objectives can also be used as a guide to teaching, as when you plan different instructional methods for presenting various types of content based on the desired learning outcomes (e.g., small-group editing of reports to give students experience in evaluating content logic and correct usage).

2. Facilitating evaluation: Learning objectives can facilitate various evaluation activities, evaluating students, evaluating instruction, evaluating the curriculum. They can form the basis for grading or for determining levels of competence in a mastery learning system. They can also be used to demonstrate effective teaching by matching student learning, as measured by exams, etc., to the desired outcomes.

3. Aiding in communication with others: There is a need to communicate learning objectives to others: between instructor and student, with other instructors. For example, exchanging learning objectives within departments is the most specific way to communicate to one's colleagues what you really cover in your course.

4. Improving instruction: If you intend to improve instruction in a particular lesson or course, you usually begin with the learning objectives for that lesson or course.

5. Producing new insights: The process of clarifying objectives may produce major changes in those who engage in the effort. For example, instructors who spend time developing learning objectives are said to acquire increased understanding about what is a feasible goal. When more general goals are explicitly identified, many specific sub-goals emerge. Since it may not be possible to reach all the sub-goals, a hierarchy or "trade-off system" of goals must be produced.
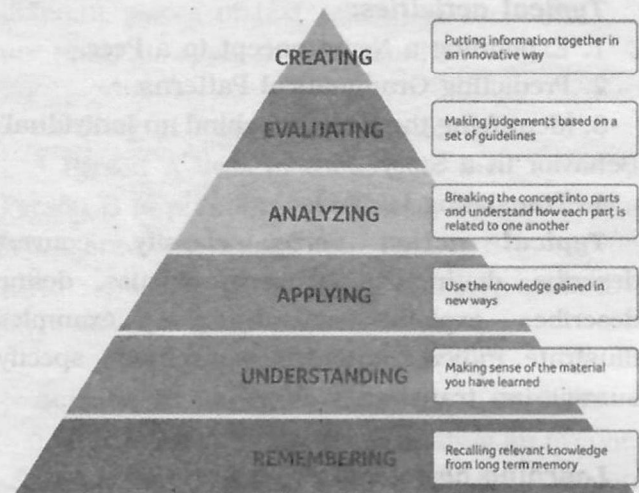
Writing learning objectives using Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy of the cognitive domain, or thinking skills, can be helpful in constructing course learning objectives. Bloom and colleagues found that over 95% of exam questions required students to activate low-level thinking skills such as recall (1956). In addition, research has shown that students remember more content when they have learned a topic through higher thinking skills such as application or evaluation.

Bloom's Taxonomy is a hierarchy of six cognitive skills arranged from less to more complex.

Higher-level cognitive skills

Level	Description
CREATING	Putting information together in an innovative way
EVALUATING	Making judgements based on a set of guidelines
ANALYZING	Breaking the concept into parts and understand how each part is related to one another
APPLYING	Use the knowledge gained in new ways
UNDERSTANDING	Making sense of the material you have learned
REMEMBERING	Recalling relevant knowledge from long term memory

Lower-level cognitive skills

Remembering (Knowledge)

Knowledge is the first building block of Bloom's Taxonomy. You find the 'knowledge' stage of thinking a lot of times in beginner-level classes or when new information is first being introduced in more advanced-level classes. Students are asked to recall, recite, repeat, or write down information.

Typical activities:
1. Flashcards.
2. Fill-in-the-Blank or Multiple Choice Worksheets.
3. Reading-Comprehension Questions.
4. Underlining Adjectives in a Reading Passage.

Typical action verbs: arrange, cite, choose, define, identify, label, list, match, mime, name, point, pick, repeat, recite, recognize, reproduce, select, state, underline.

Learning objectives examples:
• The students will list indoor and outdoor sports.
• The students will be able to define active vocabulary on the topic.

Understanding (Comprehension)

The next level of thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy is comprehension. This level is also often found in beginner-level classes, reading classes, or practice

sessions after new information is learned. Students working within the comprehension stage of thinking will often be asked to restate information in their own words or interpret the meaning behind something.

Typical activities:
1. Explaining a New Concept to a Peer.
2. Predicting Grammatical Patterns.
3. Identifying the Reason Behind an Individual's Behavior in a Story.
4. Translating Language.

Typical action verbs: classify, convert, describe, distinguish between, discuss, define, describe, explain, extend, give examples, illustrate, indicate, interpret, paraphrase, specify, summarize, translate.

Learning objectives examples:
• The students will summarize the main events of a story in grammatically correct English.
• The students can distinguish between Past Simple and Present Perfect Tenses.

Applying (Application)

The application stage of Bloom's Taxonomy is usually where a lot of ESL classes, especially beginner-level ones, stop. This stage is often found at the end of a unit or lesson as a take-away point, assigned as homework, or as an independent practice session. Classes that emphasize the application level will often have students apply what they've learned to a practical life situation or use the material to solve a problem.

Typical activities:
1. Role-Playing a Communicative Interaction.
2. Practice Writing a Resume.
3. Creating a Demonstration.
4. Writing a Story About a Secondary Character.

Typical action verbs: apply, arrange, communicate, compute, construct, demonstrate, develop, discover, edit, model, modify, operate, practice, predict, prepare, produce, relate, report, show, solve, use.

Learning objectives examples:
• The students will apply previously learned rule to fil in the gaps in the story.

• The students will be able to communicate on the topic using suggested collocations.

Analysing (Analysis)

Right after the halfway point of Bloom's Taxonomy is the analysis level of thinking. This is where things start to get more complex. This level is often found in bigger projects, essays, or academic ESL classes, though it isn't confined to those particular situations. Students are often asked at this stage to compare/contrast information or categorize it to better help them understand the different components involved.

Typical activities:
1. Explaining the Difference Between Two Positions.
2. Analyzing Prefixes and Suffixes to Better Understand Meaning.
3. Sequencing a Story.
4. Exploring the Reason Behind Cultural Traditions.

Typical action verbs: analyze, associate, categorize, contrast, determine, diagram, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, estimate, examine, explore, infer, investigate, order, outline, point out, separate, subdivide.

Learning objectives examples:
• The students will point out the positive and negative points presented in the article.
• The students will be able to explain the difference between Ukrainian and English cuisine.

Evaluating (Evaluation)

The next level of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is the evaluation stage. Evaluation is not only for the advanced levels, as it can be found in editing activities, when discussing opinions, and throughout writing classes. Students at this level are asked to not only judge the information that they have previously analyzed, but to support their opinions as well.

Typical activities:
1. Pitching a New Business Idea.
2. Debating a Controversial Position.
3. Discussing Opinions of a Book or Movie.
4. Writing a Restaurant Recommendation.

Typical action verbs: appraise, assess, compare, conclude, consider, contrast, criticize, debate, discriminate, evaluate, judge, justify, prioritize, question, recommend, support, verify, weigh.

Learning objectives example:

The students will compare two stories, giving reasons for their positive evaluation of one over the other.

Creating (Synthesis)

The final stage of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy is synthesis. While usually reserved for more advanced-level classes, synthesis can also be found in creative writing activities, research projects, and business ESL classes. At this level students are asked to gather information in order to form a brand new idea, product, or perspective. It's all about creative thinking.

Typical activities:

1. Proposing a Solution to a Business Problem.
2. Creating an Advertisement for a Specific Audience.
3. Writing a Response Letter to a Magazine Editor.
4. Discussing Alternate Endings to a Story.

Typical action verbs: combine, compile, compose, construct, create, design, develop, devise, formulate, generate, illustrate, integrate, manage, modify, organize, plan, produce, propose, rearrange, reorganize, revise, rewrite, tell, write.

Learning objectives examples:

• The students will write a different but plausible ending to a short story.

• The students will be able to write a review of an event.

How Does It Apply to ESL Classroom?

So, how does Bloom's Taxonomy specifically apply to ESL classroom? Use Bloom's Taxonomy when writing lesson plans. It really is a great way to center our scrambled teacher brains and focus on creating activities that will gradually stretch your students. Try mapping your activities against the taxonomy. Use it as a road map.

It is better to focus on 3–4 levels of learning in a single lesson, but you can focus on more or less, depending upon your students. With that in mind, do a quick reflection on how your students have previously encountered the material, and where that would place them on the taxonomy.

Let's set up an example. Imagine a class of learners who are nearing the end of a unit on vocabulary and language related to urban settings. They have already learnt the vocabulary, read different pieces of text related to the topic, and are ready to apply the information.

Activity 1: Role-Play – Application

• Person A lives in the city of their choosing. Person B is planning on visiting, but is nervous. What are some things that Person B is nervous about and why? How can Person A calm their fears and get them excited to visit?

Activity 2: Compare/Contrast – Analysis

• Students work in pairs to analyze an overview of two different cities. They must compare and contrast the cities, as if they were considering relocating. They must pay attention to job opportunities, transportation, housing, weather, and recreational activities.

Activity 3: Create a City – Synthesis

• Students work in small groups to create their own perfect city. They must discuss what is important to them as a group and make decisions accordingly. This is a great segue to a presentation or debate, which can lead to an evaluation-level activity.

While this may seem like a pretty complex or advanced class, it can work really well on more simple terms for a beginner-level class. Just add in some more help from you, the teacher, be sure to go over the vocabulary they will need, and take it slower.

Bloom's Taxonomy is a great tool for when you are lesson planning and are just not sure where to go with your topic or concept. It can be difficult to know how to push your students towards higher levels of thinking and more complex tasks, but using this as a guideline can be really helpful.

Based on the materials excerpted and adapted from the following web sites:
http://www.utexas.edu,
https://everydayesl.com