

DEVELOPING LEARNING OBJECTIVES: A GUIDE FOR CME PLANNERS

What is a Learning Objective?

A learning objective is a specific educational objective that pertains to each subject or topic. It is a statement of what the presenter expects to accomplish and what the participant is expected to know at the conclusion of a learning experience. Do not confuse learning objectives with the conference goals or objectives. A conference goal/objective pertains to a series of lectures or topics, such as an ongoing activity or daylong symposium.

What is the purpose of Learning Objectives?

The development of learning objectives serves four functions:

- (1) assist sponsors in planning, designing and implementing educationally effective activities,
- (2) assist faculty in preparing their presentation,
- (3) offer a standard for the evaluation of the CME activity, and
- (4) assist prospective participants determine whether or not the activity meets their needs and interests.

Who develops Learning Objectives?

Objectives are constructed by both the physician planner and the faculty (presenter) working in cooperation to assure that planning is specific, organized and sequenced relative to subject matter of the proposed educational activity and the target audience.

How many Learning Objectives should be stated?

Whatever number that will be consistent with the content, format, time and scope of the CME activity. Objectives should relate to the identified needs. Such objectives should be clear and concise but need not be overly detailed.

Where do Learning Objectives appear?

Learning objectives must be listed in all promotional materials, including brochure, syllabus, flyer, web site listing, announcement, etc. (AMA requirement), and should appear in correspondence with presenters.

How do I write Learning Objectives?

DO involve prospective audience and faculty members as much as possible when developing objectives, so that their commitment to the program is enhanced and their level of performance and competence is improved. Communicate objectives through invitation letters, brochures, agendas, etc.

DO use words that impart knowledge, skill and attitude.

DO use phrases containing action verbs to describe what the learner will accomplish (see attached list of Verbs for Learning Objectives).

DO eliminate unnecessary words or phrases. Include a statement of conditions or criteria for performance only if it clarifies the objective.

DON'T confuse a learning objective, which is student oriented, with a teaching objective, which describes a process. The objective should describe a student outcome rather than what will be taught.

DON'T make your learning objective merely a description of the course.