

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COURSE MAPPING: **HOW TO AVOID DETOURS AND SLOW-DOWNS**

As a faculty member, crafting learning outcomes isn't usually at the top of the priority list. We get it! You're working on content development, lectures, locating resources, and all the responsibilities that go into successful course delivery. But when you do get a moment to breathe, it's worth revisiting the learning outcomes for your course. A solid set of learning outcomes allows you to create a course map—an invaluable tool for streamlining your course design and delivery, which ultimately makes the daily work of teaching more efficient. This article offers tips on crafting outcomes and creating a course map.

Even seasoned educators get a bit overwhelmed when it is time to craft outcomes for a course. So, let's break this task down into manageable chunks. First, let's talk about terminology. *Learning outcomes* are also referred to *learning goals*, *performance outcomes*, or *learning objectives*. All of these describe what learners will be able to do upon completion of a course or instructional unit. Your program may also address *competencies*, which are broader than learning outcomes. A competency may have several specific learning outcomes, so a course may have more learning outcomes than competencies. Now let's consider a sample learning outcome:

**BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO
OUTLINE VARIOUS STAGES OF DESIGN THINKING.**

Outline is the action verb in this outcome: it provides clear measurement of mastery. Examples could be *define*, *evaluate*, *create*, or *illustrate*. The key—and the hardest part of writing good outcomes—is to use verbs that are measurable. You can't measure a student's *understanding* of content, but you can measure their ability to *recall*, *locate*, or *recognize*. Bloom's Taxonomy is our ever-enduring resource for this task. The taxonomy levels are like stair steps: each cognitive level represents a move from a lower-order thinking skill to a higher-order one. *See figure 1.*

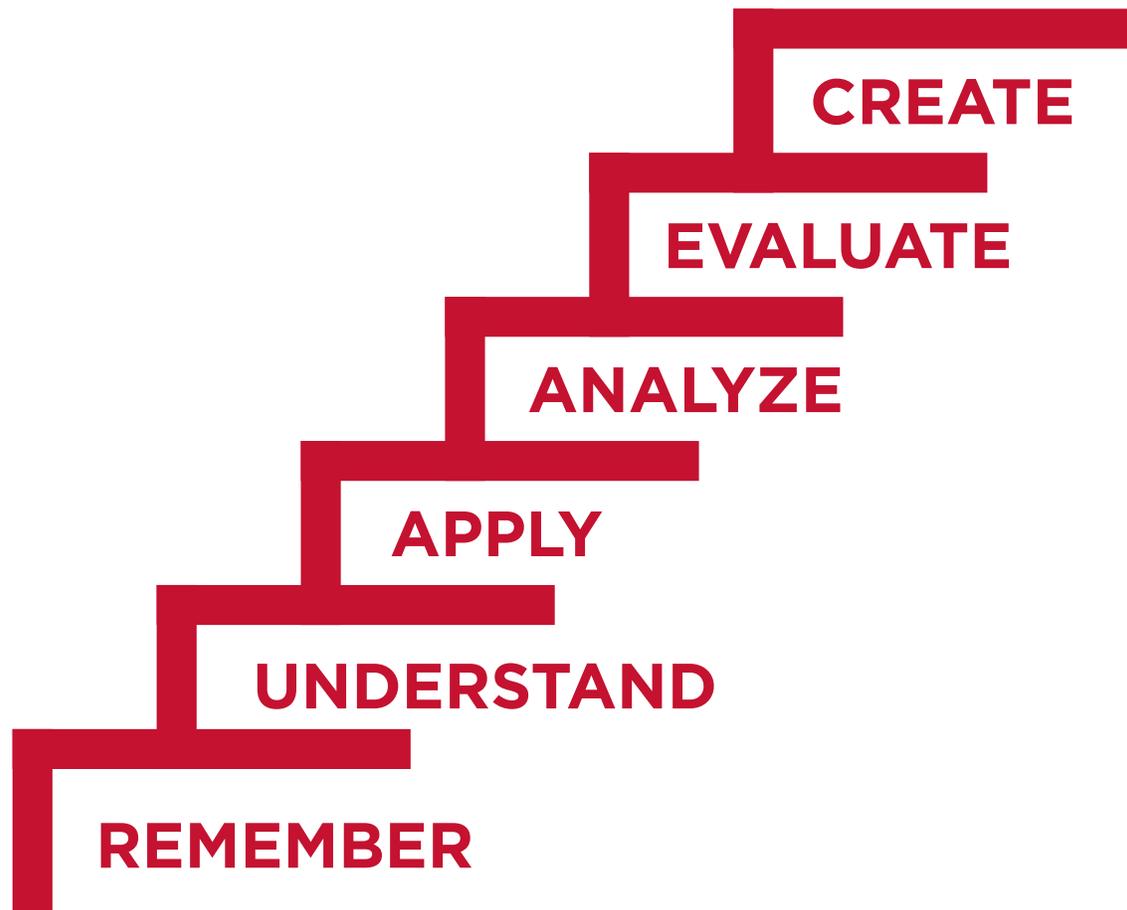


Figure 1.

HERE ARE A FEW GUIDES FOR MORE INSPIRATION:

- [Bloom's Levels to Assessment of Learning](#)
- [Complete Bloom's Taxonomy Resource](#)
- [Educationise.com Resource](#)

The example outcome above relates to the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy, but Bloom's also includes performance standards related to the psychomotor and affective domains. If your course has goals that can be measured on these scales, [here](#) is a great resource with examples to follow.

**“EDUCATION IS THE MOST
POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU
CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”**

- Nelson Mandela

THE COURSE MAPPING PROCESS:

At Miami Online, we suggest creating a [course map](#). This is not a quick task, and you won't be able to complete your course map all in one sitting: think of it as a living document that you will continually revise while developing your course. You will find that it is a useful visual tool that represents how you intend to approach and assess each of your learning outcomes. A finished course map also provides an interesting analysis.

It can indicate that a particular learning outcome isn't being addressed, that more resources are needed to support the learning outcome, or that an existing assessment is unnecessary. Many professors find that the course map streamlines the process of teaching by helping to cut work that does not serve the true purpose of the course. Like any good map, it eliminates wrong turns and wasted time.

The course map includes the following steps:

1. DEVELOP COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Ask yourself: what do my students need to know or do to master the course?
- Consider your verbs: what action will demonstrate achievement of each outcome?

Example: After successfully completing the course, the learner will be able to create basic cascading style sheets to control the presentation of a web page or web site.

2. DEVELOP UNIT/MODULE LEARNING OUTCOMES

These smaller goals feed your course learning outcomes. They are touchpoints that allow you to check students' progress.

- Follow the same process outlined above: remember to include measurable action verbs.
- For a new course, try developing module learning outcomes first, then creating one module per outcome.
- When revising a course, look at your existing unit structure and consider what outcome(s) each unit would serve. Decide whether all module learning outcomes feed the course learning outcomes. If not, consider revising so you can focus on what's most important.

3. DEVELOP ASSESSMENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Assessments measure students' achievement of the module learning outcomes. Activities allow students to practice—and engage—before they are assessed. Instructional materials provide the necessary content and context.

- When developing a new course, try working from the top down. Decide which assessments fit the verbs of each module learning outcome.
- Decide what practice (activities and engagements) students will need to prepare for assessments. Then decide what content (readings, videos, lectures, etc.) students will need to equip them for practice and for assessment.
- When revising a course, consider working from the bottom up. Gather the instructional materials you already use, and assess how well they prepare students for activities and engagements. Then decide whether those activities and engagements prepare students adequately for assessments, and whether assessments fit the verbs of your module learning outcomes. Make adjustments to ensure that your students are well supported—and to make sure you aren't grading extraneous work!

Even though the course map may seem like another task, using it can make the course development process more manageable and effective. A course map is especially helpful when you are moving a course to online delivery. Revisiting outcomes can help you reflect on assignments, determine where [formative](#) assessments can be incorporated, identify gaps in the course, and assist in identifying areas where you can offer more choice to learners. An investment of time up front will save you effort and frustration while delivering your course in the future.

