

Programme learning outcomes makeover: Before and after

Below are before-and-after examples of programme learning outcomes (PLOs) from a range of disciplines in Master's and Bachelor's programmes. The examples are accompanied by brief commentaries that explain the rationale for the revisions - to ensure the PLOs are specific, demonstrable, attainable, and assessable.

On completion of the programme, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the history and principles behind major economic theories

Commentary: Most aspects of this PLO are specific, but it is not assessable and does not specify

how learning will be demonstrated. It could be more specific (e.g. major economic theories of the 20th century, in neo-classical economics).

Revised PLO: Explain the history and principles of major economic theories and how they informed governmental approaches to key post-WW2 global events

- Describe the various components of nutrition and how they affect health

Commentary: This PLO is concise, but is likely not set at a level appropriate for an undergraduate programme, never mind a postgraduate programme. It could also be more specific.

Revised PLO: Analyse the complex relationship between nutrition and health in low-income contexts using a range of evidence-based approaches

- Plan and develop an independent research project that uses research methodologies that are appropriate to the discipline

Commentary: This PLO is a good example of a project-based module that is an integral element of a programme. It can be used to make connections between multiple courses explicit. It can also be more specific about the research methods.

Revised PLO: Plan and develop an independent research project that draws on key theories of sustainability and uses multivariate analysis techniques

- Write in a clear and engaging style

Commentary: Communication skills are an important transferable skill that should feature among the PLOs of a programme. In most cases, students should have the opportunity to develop and practise not just their writing skills, but also their oral and presentation skills, which can be demonstrated through classroom activities and formative assessment. This PLO needs to be more specific and encompass a wider skillset in order to be appropriate for a Bachelor's or a Master's programme. At the same time, build in some flexibility as to how oral communication skills will be

demonstrated/assessed, if the method is not critical to the curriculum design.

Revised PLO: Communicate disciplinary concepts and processes in a clear and engaging style orally and/or in writing

- Students will learn about the processes of developmental change as they affect small communities in the Global South and in unindustrialized parts of developed countries.

Commentary: This PLO is specific, but not framed using student-centred nor outcome-oriented language, and as a result is not assessable.

Revised PLO: Describe the impact of developmental change on small communities in the Global South and in unindustrialized parts of developed countries

[More information ...](#)