



Article #2: Writing Behavioral Objectives

By Kevin B. Frey, CST, M.A.

The following provides updated information based upon the first article.

Behavioral objectives, learning objectives, instructional objectives, and performance objectives are synonymous terms that refer to a description of observable student behavior or performance. Behavioral objectives are statements that describe what learners are doing while they are learning. An educational behavioral objective is a clear and unambiguous description of planned educational expectation(s) for the learner that specifies what behavior a student must perform or demonstrate in order for a teacher to infer that learning took place. Teachers need to describe the desired behaviors to avoid misinterpretation by students and colleagues. A properly worded objective lets students know what is expected of them. Equally important, it allows the instructor the ability to measure the effectiveness of their work. Without behavioral objectives, it is difficult to determine exactly what the outcomes of a particular learning experience is supposed to achieve.

The following table summarizes the different levels of behavioral objectives.

Comparison of Levels I, II, and III Behavioral Objectives

Level	Description	Formation	Accomplish
Level I	Broad statements	Formed at the school district or school board level	Rarely revised
Level II	Still general statements, but more detailed than Level I	Formed at school or department level	Outline of process to accomplish the Level I objectives
Level III	Specific, behaviorally stated objectives	Formed by teams in the same department or by a single instructor	Describe expected student outcome, method of assessing outcome, and level of performance. Often revised.

When writing behavioral objectives, a particular content or informational group should be defined. Behaviorally stated objectives contain three essential elements:

1. The actions to be observed and measured must be given a name to indicate that learning has occurred.
2. The conditions under which the behavior and learning is expected to occur should be described.
3. The criteria for acceptable performance should be specifically described.

Wiles and Bondi (1998) described development of the A, B, C, and D method. “A” is for audience, “B” is for behavior, “C” is for condition, and “D” is for the degree of completion. A behavior objective that contains all of these components will be a complete objective that has the potential of being well written. The following is an example:

- A. The student will (audience)
- B. successfully complete the surgical scrub (behavior)
- C. during lab period on day 10 of the second semester (condition)
- D. scoring a 100% (degree)

The instruction that leads to the behavior is not, nor ever should be included in the actual objective. The condition of performance should concentrate only on describing the conditions under which the desired learner behavior is performed.

Critics of the above method believe it is simplistic and causes the objectives to be focused on training and not education. However, instructors just beginning in the learning process of writing behavioral objectives are actually writing objectives focused in the lower levels of cognitive behavior. As experience is gained through in-service training, instructors can master the skill of writing behavioral objectives leading to psychomotor and affective learning.

Kizlik, R. *How to write behavioral objectives* [On-line]. Available Internet: <http://members.spreed.com/teach2prime/objectives.htm>

Wiles, J., & Bondi, J. (1998). *Curriculum development a guide to practice* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.