

# Writing objectives you can actually assess

A worksheet for building a course backwards

The usual order for building a course is: gather the content, organise it into modules, then write some questions at the end. It produces training that covers a lot of material and certifies very little.

This worksheet does it the other way round. Fill in the assessment column first. If you cannot, the objective is not yet an objective.

## Step 1 — State what someone must be able to DO

An objective describes an observable action performed by the learner, under stated conditions, to a stated standard. Three parts, all of them necessary.

| NOT AN OBJECTIVE                    | WHY                              | AN OBJECTIVE                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Understands the safety requirements | You cannot observe understanding | Classifies a laser system and names the required control measures for it        |
| Is familiar with the intake process | "Familiar" has no standard       | Completes an intake record from a client call with no missing mandatory fields  |
| Knows the code                      | Knows what, to what depth?       | Locates the applicable code section for a given installation within two minutes |

## Step 2 — Verbs that work, and verbs that do not

If the verb describes something happening inside the learner's head, you cannot assess it. Replace it with the thing they would do that shows it.

### USE THESE

Identify · Classify · Calculate · Demonstrate · Complete  
· Inspect · Select · Locate · Assemble · Document ·  
Diagnose · Prioritise

### AVOID THESE

Understand · Know · Appreciate · Be aware of · Be  
familiar with · Grasp · Learn about · Comprehend ·  
Value · Recognise the importance of

## Step 3 — The worksheet

One row per objective. Fill the assessment column before the content column. The discomfort of not being able to is the point of doing it this way.

| OBJECTIVE (OBSERVABLE ACTION) | HOW YOU WOULD ASSESS IT | CONTENT THIS REQUIRES |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
|                               |                         |                       |
|                               |                         |                       |
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|                               |                         |                       |
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|                               |                         |                       |

Step 4 — The three questions that settle most arguments

- ☐ **Does every assessment item map to a stated objective?**  
Anything that does not is testing something you never said you would teach.
- ☐ **Does every objective have at least one assessment item?**  
An objective nobody tests is a claim the certification cannot support.
- ☐ **Does every piece of content serve an objective?**  
Anything that does not is reference material. Move it out of the four hours you have — do not delete it, relocate it.

Doing this first is uncomfortable, because it exposes that half the existing material maps to nothing. That discovery is painful in week one and far more painful in month six.

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