Writing SMART Objectives

Well written objectives clearly define how you intend to achieve project or program outcomes. This job aid will help you write a SMART objective for an outcome.

SMART objectives contain the following characteristics:

Specific – Use specific verbs that describe observable changes in the outcome as a result of the project. The chart below suggests specific verbs.

Measurable – Add a numerical target to the objective—something that can be counted.

Audience- or issue-directed – Focus the objective on changes that will occur within the audience, or to the issue being addressed.

Realistic and ambitious – What is the plausible change within the time frame? Use the target population assessment and the organization's SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to ensure that the objective is attainable yet challenging.

Time-bound – Set a time limit for achieving the objective.

Action Verbs for Writing Objectives in the Cognitive Domain

Increasing Levels of Knowledge, Skill, or Ability →

Level	Know	Comprehend	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Use action verbs when writing objectives, because they are observable and measureable	Define Memorize Repeat Record List Recall Name Restate	Restate Discuss Describe Recognize Explain Express Identify Locate Report Review Tell	Translate Interpret Apply Employ Use Demonstrate Dramatize Practice Illustrate Operate Schedule Shop Sketch	Distinguish Analyze Differentiate Appraise Calculate Experiment Test Compare Contrast Criticize Diagram Inspect Debate Inventory Question Relate Solve Examine	Judge Appraise Evaluate Rate Compare Value Revise Score Select Choose Assess Estimate Measure	Compose Plan Propose Design Formulate Arrange Assemble Collect Construct Create Set Up Organize Manage Prepare

Write the outcome here:

_____

Answer the questions below, and transfer your answers to the statement at the bottom of the page.

1 **S**pecific_____.
What action or change needs to take place to achieve the outcome? Use the cognitive domain verbs to describe the desired change. In the audience-directed example below, the audience is being taught to describe research results. Choose words from the *Comprehend* column, such as describe, discuss, recognize, or explain.

2 **M**easurable_____.
What can be counted that will assist with measuring the change? Use numbers or percentages when possible. In the audience-directed example below, select an appropriate number of participants that will succeed based on the information from the assessment, 90%. If nothing can be counted, use a proxy measure for the desired change. In the issue-directed example below, the emergent native species are the proxy for the invasive species: By December, emergent native species will cover 50% of the treated area.

3 **A**udience or Issue_____.
Who is the audience, or what is the issue you are trying to affect? Use the name of the audience or describe the issue. In the audience-directed example below, the audience that is learning to describe research results is the outreach staff; in the issue-directed example, the issue is invasive species.

4 **R**ealistic and Ambitious_____.
What is the plausible change to the issue or the audience that can be expected in the time frame, based on the assessment of your target population, the organization's niche from the SWOT analysis, and other baseline information? In the audience-directed example below, based on the skill level of the outreach staff and the data to be analyzed, it is plausible that participants will be able to describe research results after they have attended the training.

5 **T**ime-bound_____.
When is the change expected, based on knowledge of the current state? In the audience-directed example below, if the outreach staff attends a training to learn how to describe research data, it is plausible that participants will be able to demonstrate their knowledge at the conclusion of the training, which will be at the end of September.

Insert answers from the questions above into the statement below to create the SMART objective:

5	2	3	1	4
By_____,	_____of the	_____will be able to	_____(plausible change)	_____.
Time-bound	**M**easurable Change in the	Audience	Specific Action	**R**ealistic

By the end of September, 90% of the participating outreach staff will be able to describe research results and correctly interpret them.

Examples of Outcomes Used to Develop Objectives

Audience-directed Example

In this example, the outreach staff at the reserve is the audience. Outreach staff members communicate research results to stakeholders, but they struggle to understand the research well enough to translate it effectively. An internal workshop is being held for the outreach staff members to teach them how to understand and interpret results from current research.

Outcome: *The outreach staff can understand and interpret reserve research data.*

SMART Objective: *By the end of September, 90% of the participating outreach staff will be able to describe research results and correctly interpret them.*

Specific = *describe* is a word from the Comprehend column in the chart above and *interpret* is from the Apply column.
Measurable = 90% of the participants and correctly
Audience- or issue-directed = outreach staff
Realistic and ambitious = the needs assessment shows that 50% of outreach staff understand research results and 37% correctly interpret it. It is plausible that after attending three trainings, 90% of the participants will be able to correctly interpret the results. Trainings will be completed in September.
Time-bound = by the end of September (the conclusion of the training)

Issue-directed Examples

Outcome: *Impacts from invasive species in the freshwater marshes will be reversed in the reserve.*

1. SMART Objective: By December, 75% of the treated invasive species will not be present in the freshwater marsh.

Specific = not present
Measurable = 75%
Audience- or issue-directed = invasive species
Realistic and ambitious = based on the research, once the plants are removed and the area treated, the species will not recur. The stewardship staff has secured a contract to have the plants removed and the area treated in January, with a follow-up treatment in August. Any surviving plants will be detectable in December.
Time-bound = December

2. SMART Objective that uses emergent native species as a proxy measure for the invasive species: In May, eighteen months after the initial treatment of invasive species, emergent native species (that are no longer outcompeted) will cover 50% of the treated area.

Specific = cover
Measurable = 50% of the treated area
Audience- or issue-directed = emergent native species as a proxy for invasive species
Realistic and ambitious = based on the research, once the invasive plants are removed and the area is treated, native species that can successfully compete will begin to emerge. The stewardship staff has secured a contract to have the invasive plants removed and the area treated in January, with a follow-up treatment in August. Emergent native species will begin to establish themselves the following spring.
Time-bound = Eighteen months after the initial treatment, May