

Writing SMART Objectives¹

Effective program development and implementation depends on the clear articulation of goals and objectives. While goals provide a vision and overall description of the program, objectives chart expected outputs and outcomes. In writing meaningful objectives, many program developers have found a set of criteria, summarized by the acronym SMART, to be helpful. A SMART objective is:

Specific - Describes an action, behavior, outcome, or achievement that is observable.

Measurable - Details quantifiable indicator(s) of progress towards meeting the goal (e.g., 70% of participants..., five or more...)

Audience - Names the audience (e.g., workshop participants, community members) and describes outcomes from the perspective of the audience (i.e., what the audience will be able to do).

Relevant - Is meaningful, realistic, and ambitious; the audience can (given the appropriate tools, knowledge, skills, authority, resources) accomplish the task or make the specified impact.

Time-bound - Delineates a specific time frame.

Specific action words that describe what the learner will be able to do as a result of participating in the program are used in writing SMART objectives. Action words can help to categorize types of learning in a hierarchy ranging from simple to complex. For example, analysis is a different level of learning than is application. One of the best known tools for developing objectives is the 1956 publication *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I. Cognitive Domain* by Benjamin Bloom and a team of educational psychologists. The *Taxonomy* categorizes six levels of learning that commonly occur in education settings: knowledge, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate. (See the following table for some of the verbs that could be associated with each of the six levels of learning.)

Examples of Action Words Used to Help Set Objectives for Different Levels of Learning					
KNOWLEDGE	COMPREHEND	APPLY	ANALYZE	SYNTHESIZE	EVALUATE
define	discuss	demonstrate	distinguish	design	appraise
record	explain	employ	debate	construct	assess
list	differentiate	illustrate	calculate	create	judge
name	identify	translate	diagram	propose	predict

¹ From NAAEE. 2004. *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence*. Washington, DC: Author.