

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals

Assessment for and as learning requires that students and teachers share a common understanding of what is being learned. The learning is articulated in student-friendly language as a learning goal. They may also be referred to as ‘learning intentions’, ‘learning objectives’, or ‘learning aims’. Learning goals can be applied to a lesson, a series of lessons, a term, a unit of work, etc. For example a long term goal might be to write an effective persuasive text, whereas a short term goal might be to write an effective introduction for a persuasive text.

Learning can be expressed in terms of:

- knowledge (know)
- understanding (understand)
- skills (do).

Knowledge is factual information, for instance the parts of a plant, key events of World War One, etc. Understanding typically concerns concepts, reasons or processes (the need for a healthy diet, the difference between convection, conduction and radiation, etc.). Skills are proficiencies, dexterities or abilities acquired through training or experience (for example applying techniques, drawing conclusions based on evidence, using a multiplication grid, collaboration, etc.).

Learning goals are most effective when they focus on the learning rather than the learning activity.

When writing learning intentions it is best to:

- separate the task instructions from the learning intention
- be clear about what you want students to learn.

By separating the learning intention explicitly from its context, students are able to see the connections: that learning intentions can often be applied to a number of different contexts.

BEFORE: Learning goal unclear	AFTER: Learning goal	Context
To present an argument for and against euthanasia	To present a reasoned argument ‘for’ and ‘against’ positions	Euthanasia debate

Success criteria

Success criteria describe in specific terms what successful achievement of the learning goal looks like. They help students recognise if they have been successful in their learning.

The most significant benefits of success criteria are that they can help to cultivate independent learners, provide effective feedback and create confident students who contribute to activities.

When students have success criteria at hand, they are more informed about how they will be assessed. Consequently, they are better able to assess their own and others' work to identify successes and areas for improvement.

Success criteria also allow you and the students to give accurate feedback – they keep you both focused on the criteria that the work will be assessed against. Best practice suggests that you discuss and agree to success criteria with the students in advance of the learning experiences.

Success criteria can be used to develop an assessment tool such as a checklist, rubric, etc.

Example: Geography Year 10

Learning objective	Context	Success criteria
To know ways of controlling drought	Savannah grassland	What I am looking for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">List the different causes of droughtExplain how these could be reducedList your recommendations for how people can cope and live with droughtMake comparisons with drought in Australia

Example: English Year 7

Learning objective	Context	Success criteria
Write persuasively using different techniques	Letter to local MP regarding culling of kangaroos	What I am looking for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A statement of your viewpointA number of reasons for this with evidenceA number of reasons from an alternative standpointAttempts at striking up empathy with the recipientRecommended alternative actionA summaryReasoning connectives

From Clarke, S. (2005). *Formative Assessment in the Secondary Classroom*. London: Hodder Murray.