

Course Assessment Glossary

This document will provide you with an understanding of the basic assessment terminology as applied in our documents in the College of Arts and Sciences at USD. The basic model of assessment can be applied at course, program, and institutional levels. In this document, we will focus on the course assessment process. The assessment cycle consists of four stages at the course level: identify course outcomes; gather the evidence; analyze the evidence, and make improvements in the course design. Each of these phases is described below:

1. **Identify course outcomes.** Learning outcomes can be derived by considering what kinds of knowledge, understanding, skills or abilities, habits of mind, ways of thinking, and valuing you believe students should achieve by the time they have completed your course.
 - a. Course outcomes should be aligned with program-level outcomes, or institutional-level outcomes if you are teaching a core class or an internationalized course. If program outcomes are unknown to you, you can consult your department chair or your department webpages where they are published for every department in the College of Arts and Sciences. You can find the institutional-level goals and outcomes at: <http://www.sandiego.edu/core/uggoals.php>.
 - b. Course outcomes should reflect the appropriate developmental level of learning based on Bloom's taxonomy. Courses in the 100- and 200- levels should have outcomes pitched at the lower levels of the taxonomy, and 300- and 400-level courses should reflect higher levels. The taxonomy is reflected in the table below and should provide you with some ideas for constructing assignments based on the corresponding verbs; for example, asking students to critique two theoretical points of view is obviously pitched at a higher level than asking them to summarize those perspectives.

Level	Type of Activity or Question	Verbs Used for Outcomes
Lowest level	Knowledge	define, memorize, repeat, match, record, list, recall, name, relate, collect, label, specify, cite, enumerate, recite, tell, recount
	Comprehension	restate, summarize, differentiate, discuss, describe, recognize, explain, express, identify, locate, report, retell, review, translate, paraphrase
	Application	exhibit, solve, manipulate, interview, simulate, apply, employ, use, demonstrate, dramatize, practice, illustrate, operate, calculate, show, experiment
Higher levels	Analysis	interpret, classify, analyze, arrange, differentiate, group, compare, organize, contrast, examine, scrutinize, survey, categorize, dissect, probe, create an inventory, investigate, question, discover, inquire, distinguish, detect, diagram, chart, inspect

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Synthesis	compose, set up, plan, prepare, propose, imagine, produce, hypothesize, invent, incorporate, develop, generalize, design, originate, formulate, predict, arrange, assemble, construct, create
Evaluation	judge, assess, decide, measure, appraise, estimate, evaluate, rate, deduce, compare, score, value, predict, revise, choose, conclude, recommend, determine, criticize, test

- c. Keep in mind that course outcomes should reflect what students know when they complete your course. Your course fits into a larger scheme via the curricular map for your department; it's important that you understand how your course fits into this larger picture. Program outcomes should reflect what students are learning by the time that they graduate from your program (higher order knowledge, skills, values, and performance), and your understanding of the overall scheme will help them see the connections.
- d. Sometimes, it may be difficult to distinguish your course outcomes from the general program outcomes, especially if you are teaching an upper-division capstone or research seminar. However, in most instances course outcomes will include a level of specificity and application not found at the program level.

Here's an example based on Psychology Department at University of Nevada at Reno:

Program goal: Acquire discipline-based knowledge.

Program outcome: Students should be able to: understand and explain major theories in psychology in the following areas: physiology of the brain and nervous system, cognition, learning, child psychology, abnormal psychology, and animal behavior

Course outcome: Students will be able to describe key principles of the major stimulus-response theories and their respective applications in educational and therapeutic settings, and will be able to site relevant research to support their positions.

- e. Your list of course outcomes may also reflect outcomes specific to the course and its unique focus that are not included at the program level. A good source for the explanation and application of outcomes at multiple levels comes from one of Amy Driscoll's latest books:

Driscoll, A., & Wood, S. (2007). *Outcomes-based assessment for learner-centered education: A faculty introduction*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

2. **Gather Evidence (course alignment):** The next step in assessment is to decide how your program outcomes are distributed across your course assignments and exams. You can use a grid or matrix to illustrate the distribution. It should help you identify all methods for evaluating evidence, such as any rubrics or scoring systems used in the evaluation process. Evidence must include direct forms of evidence and may include

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indirect forms of evidence (see handouts posted on the CAS Assessment webpage on [Direct Assessment Methods](#) and [Indirect Assessment Methods](#)).

Direct Evidence	CLO1	CLO2	CLO3	CLO4	CLO5	CLO6
1. Assessment of Course Exams	X	X	X	X	X	
2. Assessment of Initial History Essay				X		X
3. Assessment of Historians' Methods Research Paper				X	X	
Indirect Evidence						
4. Course Evaluations	X	X	X	X	X	

3. **Analyze the Evidence:** It is important to identify how the student work was evaluated.

- a. The simplest form is to find and use an existing rubric, or to create and use a rubric based on your existing grading or evaluation criteria. The purpose of a rubric is to articulate how students will perform at various levels of learning related to the selected outcome.
- b. Rubrics can be modified to fit any outcome and relevant assignments, exams, capstone projects, etc. Each rubric specifies outcome dimensions and performance levels along these dimensions. There are many online resources for rubrics, including everything from constructing a rubric from scratch to directories of links to existing rubrics; here are a couple to explore:

[Developing and Applying Rubrics](#) (on our CAS assessment pages an overview by Mary Allen)

<http://www.winona.edu/AIR/rubrics.htm>

http://business.fullerton.edu/centers/CollegeAssessmentCenter/RubricDirectory/other_rubrics.htm

The trick is to develop one that works specifically for your outcomes and assignments.

- c. The alternatives to using rubrics generally include percentages of correct scores across multiple exam items, stand-alone external measures such as field tests in various disciplines, or independent measures such as Halpern's critical thinking inventory. We recommend these methods for broad assessment of student knowledge, but encourage you to consider rubrics in evaluating skills like inquiry and analysis in research papers.
- d. When you've established your evaluation or grading criteria as a rubric or in another form for each outcome, you will be able to assess the various levels of

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learning. You should be able to tell by the end of your course how successful students were at achieving the desired outcomes. That feedback will enable you to make improvements.

4. **Make improvements.** One of the most important aspects of effective assessment is ensuring that the results are interpreted and used to improve your course. This is called “closing the feedback loop” in assessment. Many faculty report thinking much more intentionally about the design of the course (outcomes, lectures, activities, readings, assignments, tests, evaluation criteria) once they have been through a complete assessment cycle.

It takes practice to develop good course design elements identified in this set of steps. Watch for CEE assessment-related workshops and contact the College A-Team for additional help.

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