

Establishing Learning Targets Guidance Document

The first step in designing professional development is to identify the anticipated outcomes. What will the learners be able to do? How will they know they are successful?

These outcomes are typically documented as learning targets or objectives (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Marzano, 2013; Moss & Brookhart, 2012). In his analysis of meta-analyses, John Hattie found strong impacts on student learning when educators intentionally designed learning outcomes (see [cognitive task analysis](#)) and determined [success criteria](#).

Learning targets describe what participants will learn and the evidence the participants will use to demonstrate knowledge or skills acquisition. Well-developed learning targets guide the design of a professional development session with a focus on the learning and the demonstration of learning. Similar to learning objectives, learning targets help determine the use of presentation time, activities, practice, reflection, and assessment of outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

A professional development session may have one or several learning targets, depending on the intent of the session. The purpose of the learning target is to provide participants with a clear idea of the goals and outcomes, including the expectations of participants. “Stated learning intentions have a priming effect on the learners” (Frey et al., 2018, p. 41).

Learning targets include two parts:

1. The **Learning intention** is a clear description of what the learner will be able to do, often stated in the form “I can / The participant will ...”
2. The **Learning outcome** provides the criteria or evidence of success. The outcome is a clear description of how the learner will know how well they met the learning intention, such as “by completing/demonstrating/creating ...”

Learning intention statements can address all levels of cognitive processing, such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, summarizing, or creating. Learning targets that address higher-order skills include verbs such as “apply,” “analyze,” “evaluate,” or “create.” This [graphic of Bloom’s Taxonomy](#) provides examples of action verbs to engage participants in complex thinking. This summary of [Webb’s Depth of Knowledge](#) also organizes action verbs into levels of complexity and cognitive engagement. Higher-order performance learning intentions may state, for example, “Each participant **will design** performance tasks ...” An example for a workshop on developing individual education programs (IEPs) might include:

- analyze an IEP for compliance and the inclusion of best practices
- develop meaningful and legally complaint Present Level statements for an IEP
- evaluate an IEP to determine if the goals listed are meaningful and measurable
- create an IEP that considers the child’s strengths and interests, outlines baseline data, and includes measurable annual goals.

The **learning outcome** is the success criterion for the learning intention. It clearly states how participants demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge or skill. “Success criteria signal the learner about the destination and provide a map for how they will get there. Further, these criteria empower learners to assess their own progress” (Frey, Hattie, and Fisher, 2018, p. 41). Using the criteria, professional development providers can provide targeted feedback to each participant. The learning outcome may be outlined in guidelines, a rubric, or a checklist that the participant use to determine proficiency.

The **learning target** combines the learning intention with the learning outcome. It generally begins with an “I / The participant will ...” statement, followed by the success criterion. For example:

- I will draft an IEP annual goal *that meets the SMART criterion*.
- Each participant will design a unit plan integrating an academic concept with an interpersonal skill *addressing each of the six instructional criteria*.

Several frameworks can be used to design activities that engage the participants in complex thinking. For example, Bloom's (1956) taxonomy and the revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) provide a hierarchy of cognitive rigor: remember, understand, apply, analyze, create, evaluate (Forehand, 2010; Krathwohl, 2002; Synergis Education, 2018). Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DoK) framework categorizes learning activities based on the depth of cognitive engagement: Level 1, Recall & Reproduction; Level 2, Skills & Concepts; Level 3, Strategic Thinking; and Level 4, Extended Learning (Synergis Education, 2018; Webb, 1997). Research suggests that providing opportunities to engage in complex thinking about the content allows the participants to process the information and apply the content in complex situations (see the discussion in Cañas et al., 2017). As learning facilitators, we need to ensure that we engage participants in complex thinking that guides their application of the content. The goal of professional development is for the participants not only to know about the content but also to become skilled in its application.

For evaluation coaching support, contact any member of the KSDE TASN Evaluation Team or email TASNeval@ku.edu. This resource can be cited as: Gaumer Erickson, A. S., Ault, M., & Monroe, K. (2020). *Establishing learning target: Guidance Document*. KSDE TASN Evaluation. <https://ksdetasn.org/resources/365>

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