

NURSING &
MIDWIFERY

A Guide to Writing Learning Outcomes for Practice Placements

Date of publication: November 2022



Bord Altranais agus
Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann
Nursing and Midwifery
Board of Ireland

The Education Body (EB) and its Associated Health Care Providers (AHCPs) work in partnership to select, develop and provide appropriate practice placements for students. Learning opportunities are provided to ensure the student gains the breadth of experience and to develop the competencies required for registration (NMBI, 2022).

Clearly written up-to-date learning outcomes appropriate to the practice placement environment must be available and accessible to ensure optimal use of valuable practice placement experience. These learning outcomes should be relevant to the practice setting and should be applicable for **each** year of the programme to guide students' practice-based learning. In the case of specialist areas and placements for years 2 and 3 of the programmes, it is recognised that the same level of assessment applies so one set of learning outcomes is acceptable.

Representatives from the EB and AHCPs should work in collaboration to develop these learning outcomes to ensure that students maximise the learning available in respective practice placement sites.

Writing Learning Outcomes for Nursing and Midwifery

When you are writing learning outcomes, think of them as being connected to a larger, overarching goal that you want the student to achieve. It is vital to consider the National Competency Assessment Document (NCAD) as the central point of assessment for students. Learning outcomes are the smaller steps (e.g., strategies or actions) a student needs to take to achieve their goal. It is advisable that there should be on average **5** learning outcomes available for students per placement. Avoid long lists that appear desirable but can distract a student from the main learning opportunities.

Each learning outcome then becomes a written statement about an action they will take, and the learning outcome should be something that you can measure by doing specific activities within a definite time frame.

Use the **SMART** principles when writing learning outcomes so they are:

- Specific,
- Measurable,
- Achievable,
- Realistic,
- Timed.

Make sure the learning outcomes clearly state:

- what you want to achieve (e.g., the specific skill or performance)
- how you will measure the achievement of the outcome (i.e., the standard or criteria that you will use to measure if the student has achieved it)
- the timeframe that you have allocated to achieve the outcome (when you want the student to be able to do it by e.g., by the end of week 4)

In terms of whether a learning outcome is Achievable or Realistic, it will depend on the role, skills, time and resources. These two elements are important to consider for all parts of the learning outcome.

| SMART | What does it mean? | Questions to help you think about this: |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Specific | A learning outcome should relate to a specific skill or performance you want the student to achieve. Use an action verb to help you measure the performance (see below). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What exactly is the student going to achieve? • What strategies have been identified? • Is the outcome clear and understandable? • Have I used an 'action' verb? |
| Measurable | A learning outcome should make clear how the student's performance or skill can be measured . | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I know that the student has achieved the learning outcome? • How can the changes be measured? |
| Achievable | A learning outcome must be possible to achieve in terms of the role as a student and the amount of time on placement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can this learning outcome be achieved by the student on placement? • Can this outcome be achieved within the stated timeframe? • Have I considered any limitation or constraints? |
| Realistic | A learning outcome must be realistic in terms of the existing skills and abilities and the resources that are available to the student. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this outcome possible to achieve for the student? • Can this outcome be achieved by using the learning opportunities identified? • Does the student have access to the resources needed to achieve this outcome? |
| Timeframe | A learning outcome must include a realistic timeframe to measure the progress within the time allocated for the student's placement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a stated deadline for achieving this outcome? • Is the timeframe realistic in terms of the student's abilities and the length of placement? |

Writing learning outcomes

Verbs to use

Avoid vague verbs that are hard to measure like: appreciate, become familiar, be aware of, explore further, know about, perceive, or realise. Notice how these verbs are about mental processes. It is difficult to provide evidence that can be measured with these types of verbs.

Use **appropriate, clear verbs** that you could use to **measure performance** or a skill like:

| | | | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Administer | Apply | Analyse | Compile | Conduct | Construct | Demonstrate |
| Develop | Evaluate | Express | Implement | Incorporate | Organise | Produce |

Notice how these are mostly practical actions that can be observed.

Blooms 'Cognitive Hierarchy' also offers a selection of commonly used verbs that provide a useful 'vocabulary' to draw upon and indicates the relationship between the different levels. The skills in each level provide a foundation for the development of skills in the next level. This is useful when trying to differentiate between the various stages of the nursing and or midwifery programme.

Blooms Cognitive Hierarchy

| Level | Skills | Verbs typically associated with this level of learning |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Knowledge (least complex) | Ability to recall or recognise previously learned material | State, define, describe, list, label, identify, name, recall |
| 2. Comprehension | Ability to grasp meaning of material | Calculate, explain, relate, discuss, compile, give examples, summarise |
| 3. Application | Ability to use knowledge in new and concrete situations | Apply, use, select, solve, compare, interpret, present |
| 4. Analysis | Ability to break down material to demonstrate understanding | Analyse, order, predict, interpret, justify, contrast, determine, differentiate, distinguish |
| 5. Synthesis | Ability to put together to form new wholes, to think imaginatively and creatively | Synthesise, design, propose, reconstruct, compose, construct |
| 6. Evaluation (most complex) | Ability to make judgements based on definite criteria | Judge, evaluate, justify, develop, diagnose, propose, discuss critically |

Examples of well written learning outcome using the SMART principles

Remember:

Specific - what **specific skill or performance** do you want the student to achieve?

Measurable – how will you measure their achievement?

Timeframe – what is the timeframe?

Overall, is the learning outcome **Achievable** and **Realistic** for the student and the time, resources and skills they have?

Example 1:

Safely administer medications adhering to relevant legislation/PPGs and the 10 rights of medication administration under supervision of an RGN throughout the duration of the placement.

Example 2:

Critically reflect on my current learning in areas of existing strengths and weaknesses at the commencement of clinical workshops and at the end of my placement.

Example 3:

Utilise relevant open-ended questions during the basic pre-operative health assessment to obtain the client's in-depth responses and a detailed picture of their health situation.

Example 4:

Accurately document the client's health assessment during the client admission in a structured and sensitive way according to the guidelines provided.

Example 5:

Demonstrate ability to maintain a therapeutic relationship with the client according to the Code of Professional Conduct (NMBI, 2021) whilst performing the client health assessment.

Example 6:

Perform a basic health assessment on an individual for my practice placement which practises safe and effective evidence-based nursing care.

How to improve learning outcomes

The following learning outcomes **do not** sufficiently address all required elements and could be improved.

Example 1:

To communicate effectively with team members in order to manage time effectively to provide appropriate evidenced based care.

Comments:

It is not clear how 'effective' will be measured (i.e., what are the criteria for this?). There is also no clear timeframe of how and when the objective and measurement was to take place. It is not clear how communicating effectively is linked to managing time effectively. Finally, 'to provide appropriate evidenced based care' could be the start of a new learning outcome.

SMART Learning Outcome

Demonstrate ability to communicate effectively with team members at the start of a shift using a recognised communication tool such as ISBAR.

Example 2:

Conduct an accurate patient/client/service user handover to the student group in order to further develop the knowledge and skills of myself and others by weeks 3 and 6.

Comments:

It is not clear how 'accurate' will be measured (i.e., what are the criteria for this?). The statement 'to further develop knowledge and skills of myself and others' is too general and could relate to any learning outcome – this could be omitted as it does not add anything to the outcome.

SMART Learning Outcome

Conduct a patient handover to the student group by weeks 3 and 6.

Example 3:

Wherever possible further develop my knowledge and skills in order to provide effective, evidenced based nursing/midwifery care for the duration of placement.

Comments:

There is also no clear indication of what knowledge and skills are to be focused on and what area of 'evidenced based nursing/midwifery care' related to this. 'Further develop' is not useful unless the student makes clear what the starting point is, and this objective does not clearly show how the achievement will be measured. A timeframe is provided but it spans the whole placement – does this mean that the judgement is to be made on the last day?

SMART Learning Outcome

Identify a minimum of 2 nursing/midwifery skills and associated evidence base that you want to develop during this practice placement, by the end of week one.

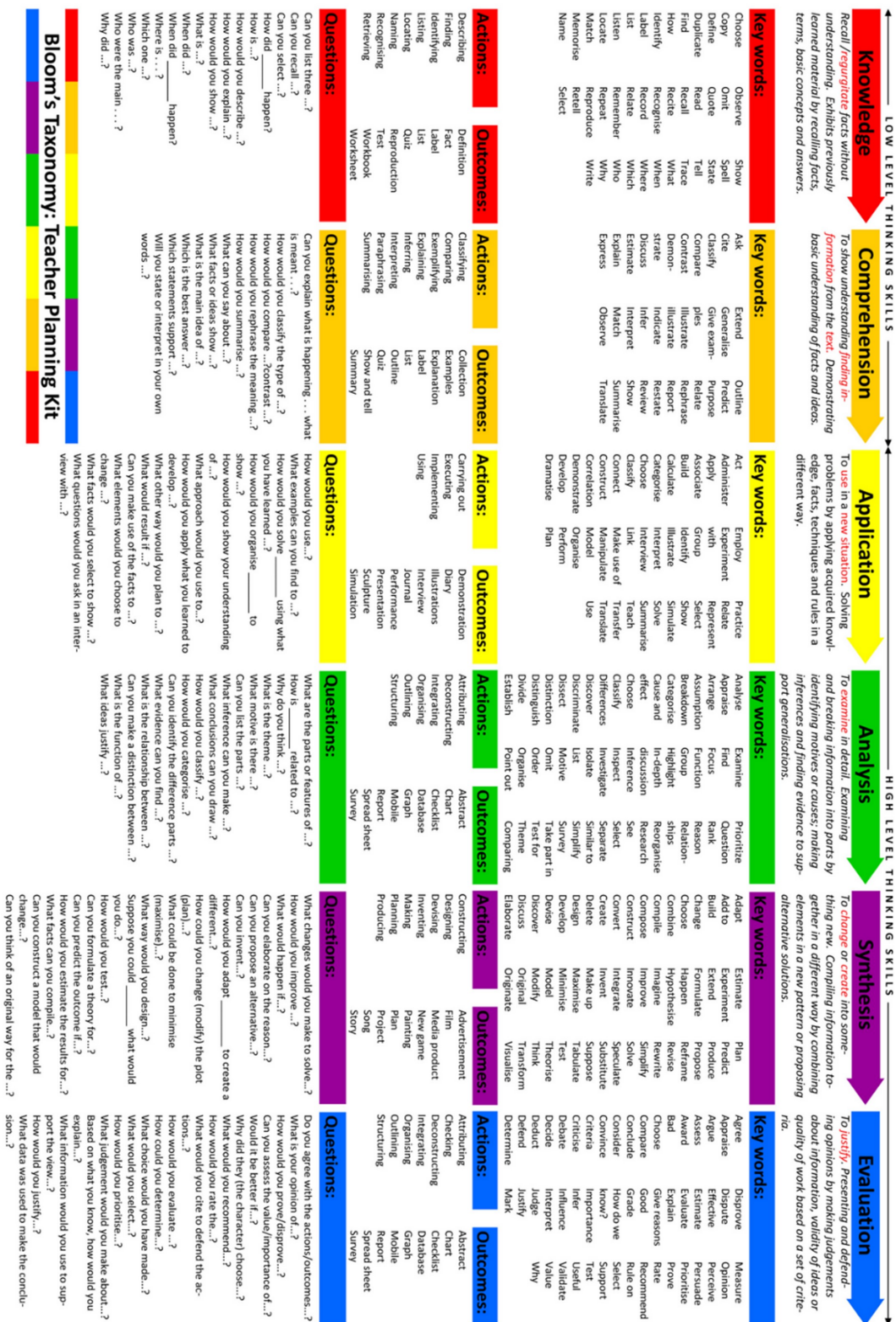
Few points to remember

Ask yourself:

- 'Do the learning outcomes that I have developed genuinely reflect what I want the students to learn?'
- Are they limited to a small number? No more than 5.
- Are they appropriate to the student's stage of learning? Level of learning e.g., 1st year?

Practice placements should be enjoyable, rewarding, and valuable learning opportunities for students. Well written learning outcomes can direct students to positive learning experiences that have the added benefit of developing their knowledge, skills and ultimately their competence.

Remember the National Competence Assessment Document (NCAD) is the approved assessment document for student use. The learning outcomes should be used in conjunction with the NCAD to support the achievement of competence at the stated level. Keep the learning outcomes document simple and short – no more than 5 outcomes per placement.



Bloom's Taxonomy: Teacher Planning Kit

Acknowledgement: This resource was originally developed by the Language & Learning Advisers (2012) in the Learning & Teaching Unit, University South Australia and is based on material compiled by A. Gardner (2011). This resource was updated by Learning Advisers, Academic Learning Support, SEU in 2022.