

Writing Course Level Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs): The Foundation for Course Design

Course design starts with a vision of what you want students to know, be able to do, or how you want them to act by the end of the course. This vision is captured in clear statements of intended course learning outcomes (CLOs). All University of Kent courses must specify their CLOs which must align to the [UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ). The FHEQ provide the reference basis for all UK courses at HE level, from level 4 to level 7. CLOs capture broadly, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected of a graduate of the discipline or subject. Thus, they focus on student activity, typically starting with verbs.

All course activities are then designed to align with agreed and stated CLOs. CLOs help academics in the planning of assessment and assessment criteria because assessments provide evidence of how well students achieved those CLOs and whether students are making sufficient progress toward reaching that vision. When aligned with the CLOs, assessment supports appropriate student learning. CLOs also support choice of teaching methods, activities, and resources because teaching and learning activities should prepare students to succeed on the assessments. The aim is for students to see how CLOs, assessments and teaching/learning activities are all aligned to help them achieve the CLOs. When they appreciate this alignment, CLOs can then guide student learning activity directly by helping them understand expectations and see connections between their day-to-day activities and their long-term ambitions.

How to write course learning outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes are usually articulated in a standardised format that describes learning rather than describing a teaching task. All learning outcomes must be measurable, as they form the basis for assessment and evaluation. Course learning outcomes usually only include the most important outcomes, are future focused and use an active verb to indicate what the learner will do.

When writing course learning outcomes:

- Aim for 5-7 learning outcomes per category below. They will be high level. Remember that details will be fleshed out in module learning outcomes.
- Articulate the main ways of thinking, practicing, and being that graduating students will have developed in your discipline or profession. Characterise your discipline or profession's contribution to society.

- Express your courses' distinctive vision and identity and its relevance to the learners' educational goals, the PSRB competencies, and the real-world setting. How will the course be perceived by prospective students and employers?
- Remember that your CLOs will underpin subsequent course design decisions, including module selection, sequencing, and content; assessment and feedback; and teaching/learning activities. Be consistent with the course description, aims and academic rationale.

An effective way to begin the Course Learning outcomes is to make a statement such as

On successful completion of this course, our graduates will be able to...

The statements that follow will start with active verbs that spell out what students will be able to do. Expressions such as 'demonstrate knowledge of', 'to understand', 'show appreciation of', are vague and should be avoided. More active and explicit verbs such as state, explain, define, report, describe, analyse, justify, evaluate, critique, create, and anticipate should be used wherever possible.

Examples of threshold learning outcomes for an undergraduate degree

The following is informed by the [QAA Outcomes Classification Descriptions](#) with updates based on the [UNESCO](#) key competencies for sustainability (pages 20-21). Note that students will achieve these outcomes at various levels, which will be reflected in their degree classification. These statements detail the threshold/pass (3rd class degree classification) level. We have organised course learning outcomes around three headings of ways of thinking, practicing, and being. Addressing all three headings creates balanced graduates able to cope with the complexities and uncertainties of the modern world. *Thinking* refers to the cognitive dimension of learning, including developing analytical skills, acquiring and applying knowledge, challenging existing assumptions, and exploring alternatives and possibilities. *Practising* refers to how students act socially, ethically, and technically, including the ability to apply practical knowledge and skills in different contexts and situations and to contribute to the improvement of practice and society. *Being* involves developing personal and social identity, values, and commitments, including the ability to reflect on one's own learning and development and to construct one's own meaning and purpose. Criticality permeates all three dimensions.

The graduate can:

Ways of thinking

- a) use key theories, knowledge, and paradigms of their field of study with appropriate terminology, facts, concepts, and principles.
- b) select, evaluate, and comment on reading, research, and primary sources.
- c) question dominant norms, practices, and opinions.

- d) conduct general background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques, with the ability to extract relevant points, assess consequences, and evaluate multiple outcomes.
- e) construct and sustain an argument, with consideration of alternative views and evidence.
- f) solve problems, applying a range of methods to do so, and make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances that are embedded in wider systems.
- g) produce some creative work or action.

Ways of practising

- a) develop and apply discipline-specific specialist skills such as technical, creative, or artistic methods to create viable, inclusive, and equitable solutions.
- b) complete practical tasks and/or processes accurately in the context of independent and collaborative work.
- c) gather, process, and interpret data effectively and present their research or project findings in multiple formats.
- d) communicate to different audiences complex information, ideas, problems, and solutions in multiple modalities.
- e) make useful contributions to group discussions and/or project work including learning from others, respecting other perspectives, motivating, or guiding others to do their best work, and dealing with conflicts.

Ways of being

- a) manage their learning and work with minimal or no supervision including setting goals and priorities and adapting to changing situations.
- b) evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses to formulate actions that improve their work.
- c) take personal responsibility for their role in the local community and global society.
- d) reflect on and articulate the norms and values that underlie their actions or decisions, considering the principles and ethics of the discipline or profession.
- e) anticipate potential consequences of their own actions or decisions.
- f) take initiative to contribute innovative ideas that lead to improvements.

Reference Points

- g) The UK Quality Code for Higher Education - <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/revised-uk-quality-code-for-higher-education.pdf>
- h) Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications - <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>
- i) QAA Subject Benchmark Statements - <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

- j) Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship reports, publications, and resources - <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/employability-enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-higher-education>
- k) Advance HE Sustainability guidance - [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance \(kent.ac.uk\)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/education-for-sustainable-development-guidance)