Instructional Guide for Developing Student Learning Objectives

SLO

Student Learning Objectives

Many states and districts are employing Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as one method to document the influence that educators have on student learning over a specific amount of time. SLOs are content- and grade/course-specific learning objectives that can be validly measured to document student learning over a defined and significant period of time (e.g., semester or year). SLOs can constitute an instructional improvement process, driven by teachers in all grades and subjects.

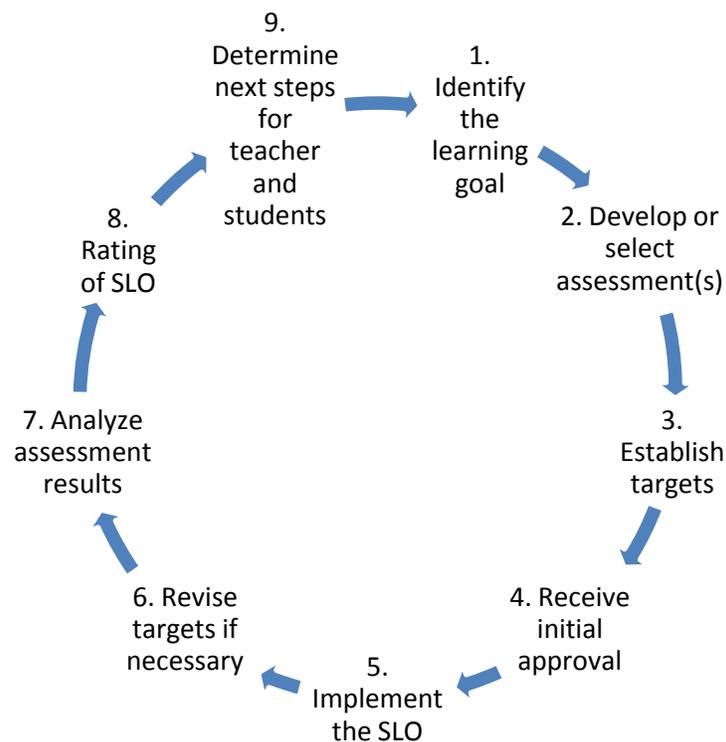Student Learning Objectives provide the opportunity for all teachers to be able to:
- set meaningful goals,
- collaborate with other educators around shared goals,
- monitor student and teacher progress toward goals,
- evaluate the extent to which goals were achieved.

In other words, SLOs encourage and support good teaching and learning!

Student Learning Objectives comprises three key components that meet the expected criteria found on the SLO rubric. These three components consist of:
1. The Learning Goal: a description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course or grade;
2. The Assessment(s): measurement of students' understanding of the learning goal;
3. The Targets: the expected student outcome by the end of the instructional period.

In order to develop and rate SLOs, we recommend the process described below.

9. Determine next steps for teacher and students

1. Identify the learning goal

2. Develop or select assessment(s)

3. Establish targets

4. Receive initial approval

5. Implement the SLO

6. Revise targets if necessary

7. Analyze assessment results

8. Rating of SLO

Instructional Guide for Developing SLOs. Part of the Center for Assessment's SLO Toolkit (2013)
Center for Assessment: www.nciea.org

This process includes reflecting on:
- enduring understandings and content standards
- instruction and strategies
- use of assessments
- monitoring student progress
- data to set targets and to determine next steps for student success.

The remainder of this document will provide guidance in understanding the SLO template, including the meaning of each question, the process for developing a cohesive and acceptable quality SLO, and successfully using the SLO rubric for evaluating and improving the different aspects of the SLO. You will also find links within this document to help provide you with annotated examples of completed SLOs.

For annotated examples of SLOs see the Center for Assessment's SLO Toolkit.

Context and Authorship

The first page of the SLO template includes the information necessary to identify the context for the SLO.

The header on the top of the template is set to repeat on each page of the SLO, if completed electronically. It includes the teacher name, school name, and district name. This repeating information will help to ensure that all pages of the document are included correctly with the corresponding teacher once it is printed. This information will only need to be completed one time as the information will automatically repeat on all subsequent pages.

Teacher Information	
Teacher Name	
School Name	
District name	

The next section lists the course or grade level information. The purpose of this section is to provide what course or class this SLO is written toward. A brief course description indicates what is taught in this course. A detailed description is vital here, so someone who is not familiar with what is taught will have a solid understanding of the objectives of the course and then be able to see how the standards and learning goal are core to student success in this course. Specifying the grade level is also important to be clear that the subject matter taught and the included standards are appropriate for what is described.

Course/Grade Level Information	
Course Name	
Brief Course Description	
Grade Level(s)	

Some logistics included are important as part of the auditing and sign-off for SLO implementation. This information includes the names and current positions of those developing the SLO. This information will assist the person reviewing the SLO should there be a need to address the authors to gain additional clarity or information. The administrator's name and title that will be approving the SLO at the beginning of the year, as well as providing a teacher rating at the end of the year, should be included. The "sign-off" of the initial SLO requires the administrator's signature and the date to show that the SLO Rubric (see page 18) has been used to review the SLO and agrees that all aspects of it are rated as "acceptable" for use. The sign-off means that no more edits are needed to improve the SLO and thus, it can be used for a teaching effectiveness rating later on. This is called the initial SLO because it is the plan for what will be implemented at the beginning of the year.

Process, Implementation Timeline, and Sign-Offs	
List the names and current job positions of those developing this SLO.	
Administrator Name & Title	
Administrator sign-off of initial SLO	

Learning Goal

A SLO comprises three aspects: **a learning goal**, assessment(s), and targets. A learning goal is:
- a description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course or grade,
- it is based on the intended standards and curriculum that are being taught and learned,
- shared expectations of standards and enduring understandings of a school or class for a group of students.

When developing Learning Goal big ideas and enduring understandings should be considered. Big ideas are the thread that links units, lessons, and year-to-year teaching. They provide a way to focus daily classroom activity on **meaningful** goals. They are a way to think about our curriculum that helps us answer the question: Why does it matter?

Important or "big ideas" are central to a discipline or course and have lasting value beyond the classroom. Big ideas synthesize what students should understand—not just know or do—as a result of studying a particular content area. Moreover, they articulate what students should "revisit" over the course of their lifetimes in relationship to the content area.

The first section of the template begins with a description of the Learning Goal for this SLO. In order to ensure that the learning goal has the right size, detail, and depth necessary, use the planning information and the SMART review.

Learning Goal: A description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course or grade based on course- or grade-level content standards and curriculum.	
Learning Goal for this SLO:	
Describe the **learning goal** for this SLO.	

To help map out the different pieces of the Learning Goal section, it is necessary to understand the SMART acronym and which questions will help guide this review. The SMART approach stands for the following:

S is for **Specific**
M is for **Measurable**
A is for **Appropriate**
R is for **Realistic**
T is for **Time Limited**

Specific

The learning goal must be focused on specific expectations. For example, a learning goal can be specific by content standards, competencies, or by learners' needs (e.g., a high level idea based on a pre-test that students are struggling with).

The issue with Specific is: *What's the right grain size?* Also known as the Goldilocks Dilemma:

- If the learning goal is <u>too broad</u>, then it's difficult to measure well because there is too much information to teach and too few items to truly measure the something that big.
- If the learning goal is <u>too narrow</u>, then it may not be measuring anything beyond a single standard or even one part of a standard. This could lead to teaching content in a piecemeal or fragmented ways, which won't help students see connections in what they learn.

Writing a learning goal is getting past the *Goldilocks Dilemma* and finding out what is "just right"! Just as Goldilocks needed to find the right fit, it will be necessary to keep trying to refine the learning goal so that it is the right size, representing the most important learning in the course, but narrow enough to be measured through one or more summative assessments.

Specific is identified by the "big idea" and "content standards" sections of the SLO template.

Planning Information for Writing the Learning Goal:	
Which big idea is supported by the learning goal?	
Which content standards are associated with this big idea? *List all standards that apply, including the text of the standards (not just the code).*	

Measurable

Measurable relates to assessments. We want to know that there is something being used that can actually measure the goal. Not only that, but the instrument or measure selected to assess the learning goal must be appropriate and a high quality assessment. It is critical that valid tools to measure the degree to which students achieve the learning goal are identified.

[Determining high quality assessments that support and measure the learning goal will be discussed further in the Assessments section of the template.]

Appropriate

When thinking about Appropriate, it means making sure that the learning goal is within the teacher's control to effect change and is a worthwhile focus for the students' academic year. The learning goal must be designed in ways that the teacher feels that s/he has a fair chance to succeed, yet is ambitious enough to require high quality teaching to achieve.

Appropriate is addressed in the "important and meaningful" and "deep understanding" sections of the SLO template.

Planning Information for Writing the Learning Goal:	
Why is this learning goal important and meaningful for students to learn?	
In what ways does the learning goal require students to demonstrate deep understanding of the knowledge and skills of the standards or big idea being measured?	

Realistic

Realistic ensures that the learning goal is feasible for the teacher to teach. While the learning goal should be ambitious, it must also be achievable, not just for the extraordinary teacher, but for all effective teachers.

Realistic is addressed by the "instruction and strategies" and "time span" sections of the SLO template.

Planning Information for Writing the Learning Goal:	
Describe the instruction and strategies you will use to teach this learning goal. *Be specific to the different aspects of the learning goal.*	
Identify the time span for teaching the learning goal (e.g., daily class-45 minutes for the entire school year).	

Time Limited

When thinking about time limited, it is to ensure that the learning goal is contained within a single school year or appropriate unit of time. For instance, a semester long course would have the time frame limited to when a teacher has students to teach. Similarly, the learning goal must be written so it can be summatively evaluated within the time under the teacher's control. The Targets section will allow for the collected data to show the progress that students have made in this time span.

Time Limited is addressed in the two "time span" sections of the SLO template. Note: the first time span section of the template is used for evaluating whether the learning goal is both realistic as well as time limited.

Planning Information for Writing the Learning Goal:	
Identify the time span for teaching the learning goal (e.g., daily class-45 minutes for the entire school year).	
Explain how this time span is appropriate and sufficient for teaching the learning goal.	

Explaining the learning goal with enough specificity allows for a solid SLO, which is the foundation that the other two parts of the SLO are built on. Think of the learning goal as the foundation to the SLO. If that is done well, then everything built around it will have the potential to be stable and strong.

Assessments and Scoring

A SLO comprises three aspects: a learning goal, **assessment(s)**, and targets. Assessments should be:
- designed to best measure the knowledge and skills found in the Learning Goal
- accompanied by clear criteria or rubrics to determine student learning from the assessment
- high quality measures used to evaluate the degree to which students achieved the developed Learning Goal.

Assessments should be used to support and measure the Learning Goal, not vice versa. This section of the template asks for a description of the assessments and scoring criteria or rubric for this SLO.

Assessments and Scoring: Assessments should be of high quality, and designed to best measure the knowledge and skills found in the learning goal of this SLO. The assessment should be accompanied by clear criteria or rubrics to describe what students have learned.	
Assessments for this SLO	
Describe the **assessments** (such as performance tasks and their corresponding rubrics) that measure students' understanding of the learning goal[1].	
Explain how student performance is defined and scored using the assessments. Include the specific rubric and/or scoring criteria to be used.	

To help guide the description of the assessments and scoring guide or rubrics, it is essential to determine the elements of a high quality assessment. Specifically, the assessment and scoring tool should be:
- **Aligned**
  - identified big idea and standards are reflected in the assessment
  - engages students in the appropriate depth-of-knowledge and level of difficulty, considering the expected knowledge and skills on the assessment
- **Reliable for Scoring**
  - clear guidelines and criteria that are coherent across performance levels and aligned to the standards
  - allow for different scorers to reach the same score
- **Fair and Unbiased**
  - provide opportunity and access for all students
  - free from unnecessary information that can cause a distraction
  - clear and identifiable prompt or question

The planning section of the template provides two critical questions to guide the thinking of monitoring student progress. The use of formative and/or interim assessments administered thoughtfully and at appropriate time intervals will ensure that students are prepared for the assessment used to measure

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[1] Assessments and rubrics need to be established as high quality, such as through the Assessment Review Tool.

students' understanding of the learning goal. However, there is no value in assessing students if it does not impact instruction. Therefore, the second question requires consideration of how the assessments used for monitoring progress will be used to differentiate instruction for all students, both struggling students and those who are in need of being challenged on the material.

Planning Information for Explaining the Use of Assessments and Scoring:	
How often will you collect data to monitor student progress toward this learning goal?	
How will you use this information to monitor student progress and to differentiate instruction for all students toward this learning goal?	

Targets and Outcomes

A SLO comprises three aspects: a learning goal, assessment(s), and **targets**. Targets:
- should identify the expected outcome by the end of the instructional period
- may differ for subgroups of students
- consist of two key components:
  1. Starting Level
  2. End Goal

This section of the template asks for the starting level and the end goal, or expected targets, by the end of the instructional period for all students.

Targets: identify the expected outcomes by the end of the instructional period for the whole class as well as for different subgroups, as appropriate.	
Actual Performance from Baseline Data	
Identify the actual performance (e.g., grades, test scores, etc.) from the collected baseline data used to establish starting points for students.	
Expected Targets for this SLO	
Using students' starting points, identify the **number or percentage of students** expected at each achievement level based on their assessment performance(s).	

In order to identify the actual performance from the baseline data and the expected targets, it is first necessary to consider the courses, assessments, and/or experiences that are pertinent to the learning goal. In other words, think about what information will help to identify students' prior knowledge and their achievement on this knowledge. For example, if a course does not have a prerequisite, consider whether the assessment that will be used to measure the learning goal expects students to utilize math, reading, and/or writing skills. Data from state assessments, previous core content classes, and/or student work samples can be examined. A student enrolled in an entry level music class may have taken private music lessons or a student enrolled in an entry level automotive class may have been learning about cars with a family member for years. In these cases, a student survey about their knowledge and experiences would be beneficial for establishing starting levels and consequently, for developing expected targets.

Planning Information for Writing the Target Used to Define Teacher Performance:	
Describe the courses, assessments, and/or experiences used to establish starting points and expected outcomes for students' understanding of the learning goal.	
Identify the actual performance (e.g., grades, test scores, etc.) to establish starting points for students.	

After the expected targets are set, reflect on whether these targets are ambitious, yet realistic. Consider the following:

- Is it realistic to expect **all** students to demonstrate proficiency on the learning goal in a social studies class as measured by argumentative writing? This may be ambitious, but is it realistic when students have entered the course significantly below expectations in argument writing?
- On the other hand, is it realistic to expect **all** students to demonstrate proficiency on the learning goal in an orchestra class as measured by the melody and harmony of the performance? This may be ambitious and realistic for students exiting this class.

Planning Information for Writing the Target Used to Define Teacher Performance:	
Explain how these expected targets demonstrate ambitious, yet realistic goals, for measuring students' understanding of the learning goal.	

Until now, everything that has been completed in the SLO template is goal setting. The actual outcomes are how your students performed at the end of the year. The template asks you to record the actual number or percentage of students who achieved the targets. If you had differentiated targets, you will want to include appropriate subgroups here, as well. In addition, the template provides a place to explain any additional information about the actual outcomes.

Actual Outcomes: identify the actual outcomes at the end of the instructional period for the whole class as well as for different subgroups, as appropriate.	
Record the **actual** number or percentage of students who achieved the targets.	
Please provide any comments you wish to include about actual outcomes:	

Teacher Ratings

Finally, the comparison of the actual and expected targets then determines a teacher's rating as does not meet, meets, or exceeds their expected targets. If the actual target falls below the expected, then the teacher is classified as "does not meet" while if they surpass their goals, they are rated as "exceeds". Clearly it is difficult to have an exact match between expected and actual targets, and there will need to be some room for error. Thoughtful judgment and understanding of the student population will be necessary here. In addition, there will need to be discussions of expectations both at the district and school level.

Teacher Ratings: Based on the results of the learning goal, assessments/tasks, and targets of this SLO, a teacher rating is noted below.		
☐ **Does Not Meet**	☐ **Meets**	☐ **Exceeds**
Based on the students' starting points, students performed worse than expected.	Based on the students' starting points, students performed as expected.	Based on the students' starting points, students performed better than expected.
Administrator comments:		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Administrator Signature</u>	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Teacher Signature</u> (the signature does not necessarily indicate agreement with the rating)	

SLO Planning Pages

Directions for Establishing a Learning Goal: After completing the entire table, use the planning information and the SMART Review to write the description of the learning goal.

Learning Goal: A description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course or grade based on course- or grade-level content standards and curriculum.	
Planning Information for Writing the Learning Goal:	
Which big idea is supported by the learning goal?	
Which content standards are associated with this big idea? *List all standards that apply, including the text of the standards (not just the code).*	
Why is this learning goal important and meaningful for students to learn?	
In what ways does the learning goal require students to demonstrate deep understanding of the knowledge and skills of the standards or big idea being measured?	
Describe the instruction and strategies you will use to teach this learning goal. *Be specific to the different aspects of the learning goal.*	
Identify the time span for teaching the learning goal (e.g., daily class-45 minutes for the entire school year).	
Explain how this time span is appropriate and sufficient for teaching the learning goal.	

SMART Review of the Learning Goal for this SLO	
Use the SMART protocol to confirm that the Learning Goal has the right size, detail, and depth necessary. Check the boxes that apply.	The Learning Goal is: ☐ **Specific** –focused on the big idea and content standards. ☐ **Measurable** – able to be appropriately and adequately assessed (note the Assessments section will identify the specific assessment to be used). ☐ **Appropriate** – within the teacher's control to effect change and is important, meaningful for students to learn during the identified time span. ☐ **Realistic** – while ambitious, it is achievable for both teachers and students, during the time span identified. ☐ **Time Limited** – can be summatively evaluated within the time under the teacher's control.

Directions for Documenting Assessments and Scoring: After completing the entire table, use the planning information to write the description and use of assessments and scoring criteria or rubrics.

Assessments and Scoring: Assessments should be standards-based, of high quality, and designed to best measure the knowledge and skills found in the learning goal of this SLO. The assessment should be accompanied by clear criteria or rubrics to describe what students have learned.	
Planning Information for Explaining the Use of Assessments and Scoring:	
How often will you collect data to monitor student progress toward this learning goal?	
How will you use this information to monitor student progress and to differentiate instruction for all students toward this learning goal?	

Directions for Establishing Targets: Use the planning information to guide how you will use previous performance to set baseline data as well as to establish expected targets.

Targets: identify the expected outcomes by the end of the instructional period for the whole class as well as for different subgroups, as appropriate.	
Planning Information for Writing the Target Used to Define Teacher Performance:	
Describe the courses, assessments, and/or experiences used to establish starting points and expected outcomes for students' understanding of the learning goal.	
Explain how the expected targets identified demonstrate ambitious, yet realistic goals, for measuring students' understanding of the learning goal.	

SLO Rubric for Rating the Quality of SLOs

Rubric for Rating the Quality of Student Learning Objectives

Purpose of this Rubric: This rubric is for use by teachers, school administration, and district administration in evaluating the different aspects of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) to make sure the SLO meets an "acceptable quality" rating on this rubric before it is used for teacher performance ratings.

	Acceptable Quality	Quality Needs Improvement	Insufficient Quality
Learning Goal A description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course or grade based on course- or grade-level content standards and curriculum. ☐ Acceptable Quality ☐ Quality Needs Improvement ☐ Insufficient Quality	Appropriately identifies and thoroughly describes an important and meaningful learning goal, with: ➤ the big idea and the standard(s) clearly aligned to and measured by the learning goal, ➤ a clear explanation of the critical nature of the learning goal for all students in the specific grade/ course, ➤ a clear description of how the learning goal allows students to demonstrate deep understanding of the content standards within the identified time span, and ➤ specific and appropriate instruction and strategies described to teach the learning goal.	Generally identifies and describes a learning goal with: ➤ the big idea and/or standards minimally aligned to the learning goal, ➤ some explanation of the importance of the learning goal for students in the specific grade/ course, ➤ a general description of how the learning goal allows students to demonstrate adequate understanding of the content standards within the identified time span, and/or ➤ some generic instruction and strategies used to teach the learning goal.	Identifies and describes a learning goal that is vague, trivial, or unessential, with: ➤ the big idea and/or standards not aligned to the learning goal, ➤ lack of information of the importance of the learning goal for students in the specific grade/course, ➤ little to no description of how the learning goal allows students to demonstrate understanding of the content standards in the identified time span, and/or ➤ questionable and/or vague instruction and strategies used to teach the learning goal.
Assessments and Scoring Assessments should be standards-based, of high quality, and be designed to best measure the knowledge and skills found in the learning goal of this SLO. They should be accompanied by clear criteria or rubrics to determine student learning from the assessment. ☐ Acceptable Quality ☐ Quality Needs Improvement ☐ Insufficient Quality	Appropriately identifies and clearly describes: ➤ high quality assessments*, with evidence to support how the appropriateness and quality of the assessments has been established ➤ scoring rubrics that appropriately differentiate student performance, including evidence to support these rubrics have been validated, and ➤ progress-monitoring measures that will be used, including how instruction will be differentiated for all learners based on this information.	Identifies and provides some description, which may lack specificity, of the: ➤ assessments, with partial explanation and no evidence to support how the appropriateness and quality of the assessments have been established , ➤ scoring rubrics that partially differentiate student performance, with no evidence to support how the rubrics have been validated, and/or ➤ progress-monitoring measures used with little detail in how instruction will be differentiated based on this information.	Identifies and provides an unclear, insufficient, or confusing description of the: ➤ assessments, which minimally measure the learning goal, with no reference to how the appropriateness and quality of the assessments have been established, ➤ scoring rubrics with minimal or no differentiation of student performance with no evidence to support how the rubrics have been validated, and/or ➤ progress-monitoring measures used with minimal or no reference to the differentiation of learners based on this information.
Targets Identify the expected outcomes by the end of the instructional period for the whole class as well as for different subgroups, as appropriate. ☐ Acceptable Quality ☐ Quality Needs Improvement ☐ Insufficient Quality	Clearly and thoroughly explains how the data are used to define teacher performance, including: ➤ appropriate baseline data/information used to establish and differentiate expected performance, and ➤ rigorous expectations that are realistic and attainable for each group of students using the documented high quality assessments.	Broadly, without specificity, explains how the data are used to define teacher performance, and may include: ➤ unclear baseline data/information used to establish and differentiate expected performance,, and/or ➤ expectations that are imprecise, somewhat realistic and/or attainable for each group of students.	Provides an unclear, insufficient, or confusing explanation of how the data are used to define teacher performance, and may include: ➤ no baseline data/information or use of irrelevant information to establish and differentiate expected performance, and/or ➤ low expectations, for each group of students.

* A high quality assessment has been determined to be aligned to identified standards and depth of knowledge, has a rubric or scoring guide that allows for reliable scoring, and is fair and unbiased.