

## Fadil's Defining Learning Objectives for ELT

*(Please answer in full sentences and in your own words)*

1. What is the difference between statements of aims and statement of objectives?

	Aims	Objectives
Time	a.	a.
Specificity	b.	b.
Perspective	c.	c.
Measurability	d.	d.

2. What are three benefits of writing statement of objectives from the perspective of student learning?

3. What type of verbs should statement of objectives contain? Why?

# Defining learning objectives for ELT

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*This article attempts to introduce the teacher of EFL to developments in the area of specifying learning objectives. This topic has been largely ignored in recent years as new theories of language acquisition and the emphasis on communication have come to the fore. Many teachers, while welcoming the new approaches, nevertheless feel a need for a clearly defined framework for organizing their teaching, both in the long term and in the short term. When you have studied this article carefully, you should be able to (a) distinguish between statements of aims and statements of objectives, (b) discuss the merits of writing objectives from the point of view of the learner, and (c) write both complete and abbreviated statements of learning objectives for different language skills, functions, and notions. Given the choice, you may elect to use such statements in addition to the more conventional teacher's aims.*

## Statements of aims and statements of objectives'

Most modern language courses seem to recognize the need for teachers to give some kind of direction to their activities by stating the aims of each lesson or unit in the course. Generally speaking, these statements of aims describe either the activities of the teacher (as in examples (a), (b) and (c) below) or the object of the lesson (examples (d) and (e)):

- a to teach greetings and introductions
- b to teach the names of animals
- c to practise the simple past
- d indirect statements/questions in the present with *know*
- e ways of making suggestions: *let's . . . , I suggest . . . , why don't we . . . ? , I think we should . . .*

Statements like the above, however, present a number of difficulties for teachers and learners alike. Firstly, they are written from the point of view of the *teacher* and not the learner. They tell us what the teacher will be doing during the lesson and not what the pupils will be able to do at the conclusion of the lesson. For example, one could ask: 'How long should the pupils practise for, and for what particular purpose and at what level of proficiency?' Secondly, they are open to different interpretations by different readers, as it is not clear whether active production of the forms is required, or merely passive recognition. This is especially true with statements involving language functions or notions, as in examples (b), (c), (d) and (e) above. Thirdly, it is impossible for teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching except by personal criteria such as whether the students appear active, responsive, or even just amused.

Thus we can see that, although many language courses try to give direction and order to the activities of the teacher, they miserably fail to do so, because the aims stated for each lesson or unit, not to mention the goals

of the whole course, lack the precision needed for effective teaching and evaluation.

**The need for written learning objectives**

There are a number of reasons why it is valuable to write precise statements of objectives in terms of pupils' learning, rather than in terms of teachers' activities. In his book *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (which I strongly recommend to teachers of EFL), Mager suggests three reasons for writing learning objectives (Mager 1975:6).

First, when objectives are defined in terms of learning outcomes, teachers have a better chance of selecting the most appropriate content and teaching tactics. When the teacher has stated quite specifically what he or she wants students to learn, the teacher can ask: 'Now that I know what I want my pupils to learn, what is the best way of helping them achieve it?'

Second, when objectives are described in precise and unambiguous terms, it is easier to find out if our teaching has been effective or not, since we can test our pupils' performance. Depending on the result of our assessment, we either augment our objectives or try using different materials and teaching tactics. This process of trying out new materials and new tactics may eventually create the teacher-researcher that Widdowson (1984) has recently been calling for.

Third, when pupils know exactly what is expected of them, they can organize their own efforts in order to attain the stated objectives. A further benefit is that slow learners, armed with a set of learning objectives, can seek specific help from their peers, parents, and others in the community.

**Resistance**

Despite the obvious merits, EFL/ESL teachers have been reluctant to use objectives-based instruction, for a number of reasons. First, this approach smells too much of behaviourism. Many instruction designers use the term 'behavioural objectives', and their insistence on *observable* behaviour makes EFL/ESL experts reject such objectives. As it is assumed that it is difficult to observe much of language behaviour, the notion is seen as being incompatible with recent thinking in TEFL methodology, even though it has been proved to work in other spheres of learning and teaching. Second, it is maintained that it is difficult to determine a precise time target for a group of learners to achieve a certain objective within. Third, there is the fear that this approach may fail to take account of language acquisition, as hypothesized and described by Krashen among others, where learning a language is a slow-building spontaneous process catalysed by exposure to meaningful input in the target language (see Krashen 1983:41).

**Allaying the fears of TEFL/ESL experts**

The term 'behavioural objectives' tends to be confused with behaviourism. Because of this, many writers now avoid using this term and use other terms such as: 'instructional objectives' (Mager 1962/1975), 'performance or operational objectives' (Gagné and Briggs 1974/1979), or 'learning objectives' instead. Needless to say, the stating of such objectives in no way dictates the route learners will take to achieve them. One can write learning objectives for a number of different learning capabilities, including both cognitive and affective ones, regardless of the theory of language learning one espouses. Indeed many educationists in this field adopt modern cognitive theories of learning (see Gagné 1977, Introduction).

Moreover, the fact that learners have different learning abilities is allowed for in a systematic objectives-based approach. On the one hand, it is possible to analyse any objective in order to discover the prerequisites

needed for learning it, and consequently it is always possible to deal with these before addressing the new objective. On the other hand, enrichment programmes can be provided for those students who reach the desired level of performance rather too soon, while remedial materials can be given to those students who fail to reach the expected level.

In addition, this approach takes account of natural acquisition theory. In their latest book, Krashen and Terrell (1983:65) make the point that: 'A decision on the methods and materials to be used in a course is possible only once the goals of the course have been defined'. They have also listed some goals for the learning of English through their Natural Approach. If the importance of stating goals is accepted, as it seems to be, then it becomes necessary to make them so specific that two different teachers cannot interpret them differently. This is a very important condition if we want statements of objectives to be useful to teachers and textbook writers. I will try to show in the next section how this can be done.

### **How to write learning objectives**

The first task of a course writer is to define the goals of the course.<sup>2</sup> As statements of aims tend to be interpreted differently by different people, it is imperative to make them as precise as possible. In other words, we need to transform general statements of aims into unambiguous statements of objectives. For such statements to be precise they have to:

- a provide information about the focus of the lesson, i.e. what the students will be learning, whether these are concepts, intellectual skills, or attitudes, etc;
- b specify what the learner must do in order for us to ascertain that he or she has fulfilled the objectives;
- c lay down the conditions or define the situation(s) in which the intended outcomes are to occur;
- d determine the level of proficiency or speed the learners must attain;
- e state the proportion of students expected to attain the stated outcomes;
- f fix a time limit within which the learners should achieve the objectives.

Obviously, not all six need to be specified all the time. Indeed, we may sometimes specify the first three or four things only. Below are three examples: the first is a complete statement containing all six elements, the second is an abbreviated statement containing four, while the third example illustrates how the same principles can be applied to the writing of course objectives.

#### *An example of a complete statement of a learning objective:*

'By the end of the week (TIME), all pupils (TARGET INDIVIDUALS), will be able to use (BEHAVIOUR) fairly accurately (LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE) appropriate greeting forms, such as *hello, good morning, good afternoon, good evening* (FOCUS) when meeting different people at different times (SITUATION).'

#### *An example of an abbreviated statement of objectives:*

'Given a short text of about six hundred words (FOCUS), the student will read it silently in three minutes (CONDITION), and answer orally (BEHAVIOUR) at least eight of the ten multiple choice questions (LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE).'

#### *An example of course objectives:*

'By the end of the course, the pupils will be able to express themselves accurately and appropriately in different situations, such as the following:

- in social groups, discussions, and talks
- in giving out instructions or directions for carrying out tasks, such as helping some one find their way in town, etc.
- presenting an oral summary of a written or oral report
- giving detailed information about an accident and asking for help.

**Observable behaviour** Perhaps this is the most important and at the same time the trickiest of the components. In order for us to be certain that the pupils have achieved the objectives stated, we need to remember two things when specifying the desired behaviour. First, we must use action verbs and avoid using non-action or abstract verbs (Gagné and Briggs 1974/1979:122). The verbs on the left are among the verbs that are useful, while those on the right are among those to be avoided when writing statements of learning objectives:

<i>Verbs to use</i>	<i>Verbs to avoid</i>
Recite, sing, say, direct, describe, write down, classify, apologize, ask, greet, describe, argue, demand, request, etc.	Enjoy, understand, learn, know, revise, listen, read, practise, etc.

Second, when we have to use words such as *understand*, *read*, or *listen*, we require learners to perform some observable behaviour from which we can infer that they have listened to or read something and understood it. In the second example above, the verb *read* was used, but learners were required to answer some questions based on the text in order to show that they had read and understood the text. There are, of course, other ways of providing such evidence, for example completing tables, following a route on a map, etc.

**The level of performance** Although it is possible to measure objectively the performance of a listener or reader, it is difficult to measure objectively the performance of a speaker or writer (van Ek 1980:84) for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the level of performance in speech and writing depends on the abilities of the listener or reader as well. This is characteristic of situations where pupils of markedly different abilities are taking part in a role play, for example. One speaker may not be understood, not because of inability to communicate, but because of the inability of others to understand him or her. Moreover, the evaluation of a speaker or writer, to a large extent, depends on the subjective judgement of the teacher. Teachers differ not only in what they consider to be acceptable performance but also in their tolerance of pupils' mistakes. However, there are a number of guidelines which I have found to be useful in this connection.

First, we must always regard our students as progressing towards a native-like command of the target language, although this requires a lot of time, effort, and patience both from students and their teachers. Secondly, we must recognize the need not only for grammatical accuracy but also for appropriateness of the form to the particular situation in which it is uttered (Widdowson 1978:67). For example, 'Will you borrow me your book?' may be more acceptable than 'Lend me your book' uttered in an imperious tone. Finally, we should turn a blind eye to some of our pupils' mistakes, so as to encourage the development of fluency.

**Target individuals and time** When planning lessons or courses, it is essential to be realistic about what students can master within any period of time, whether it is a lesson, a term, or even a period of years. For example, many practising teachers with

whom I have discussed the question of how much to teach complain that inspectors and other school administrators assess teachers' efficiency according to how much material they have covered, rather than according to how effectively it has been learned. This may well be the simplest way of finding out whether a teacher has been working or not, but it is not a valid means of evaluating the teacher. There are many other more effective methods of doing this, and one of the most important is to find out what the teacher intended the students to achieve, and what degree of success he or she had with these objectives.

Given the varying standards achieved by ESL/EFL students, it is imperative that we investigate how much students can learn within a given period of time. Obviously learners have different learning abilities, and, as the novice teacher gains in experience and wisdom, he or she will come to realize what students are capable of mastering within a given period of time, and to appreciate that what is a realistic objective for one group of students may be unrealistic for another.

**Summary** Statements of learning objectives written from the point of view of learners do not replace the more conventional statements describing teachers' activities; indeed, they are intended to be an essential complement. Statements of learning objectives are useful in organizing the activities both of teachers and of students. Moreover, they help the teacher to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. For learning statements to be useful, they must be precise about (a) the object of the lesson, (b) what the pupils must do in order for us to know that they have achieved the objectives, (c) the conditions or the situations in which they will perform, (d) the level of proficiency they must attain, and (e) the time in which the objectives will be achieved. Of course, not all of these components are equally important, and in many cases we can settle for the first three or four only. □

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#### Notes

- 1 These two terms are used quite loosely in educational writings. However, 'aims' usually refer to long-term, general indications of intent, while 'objectives' are used to refer to short-term, specific indications of intent.
- 2 The aims of a course can be determined either by taking advice from some recognized authority such as a ministry of education, or by doing a needs analysis.

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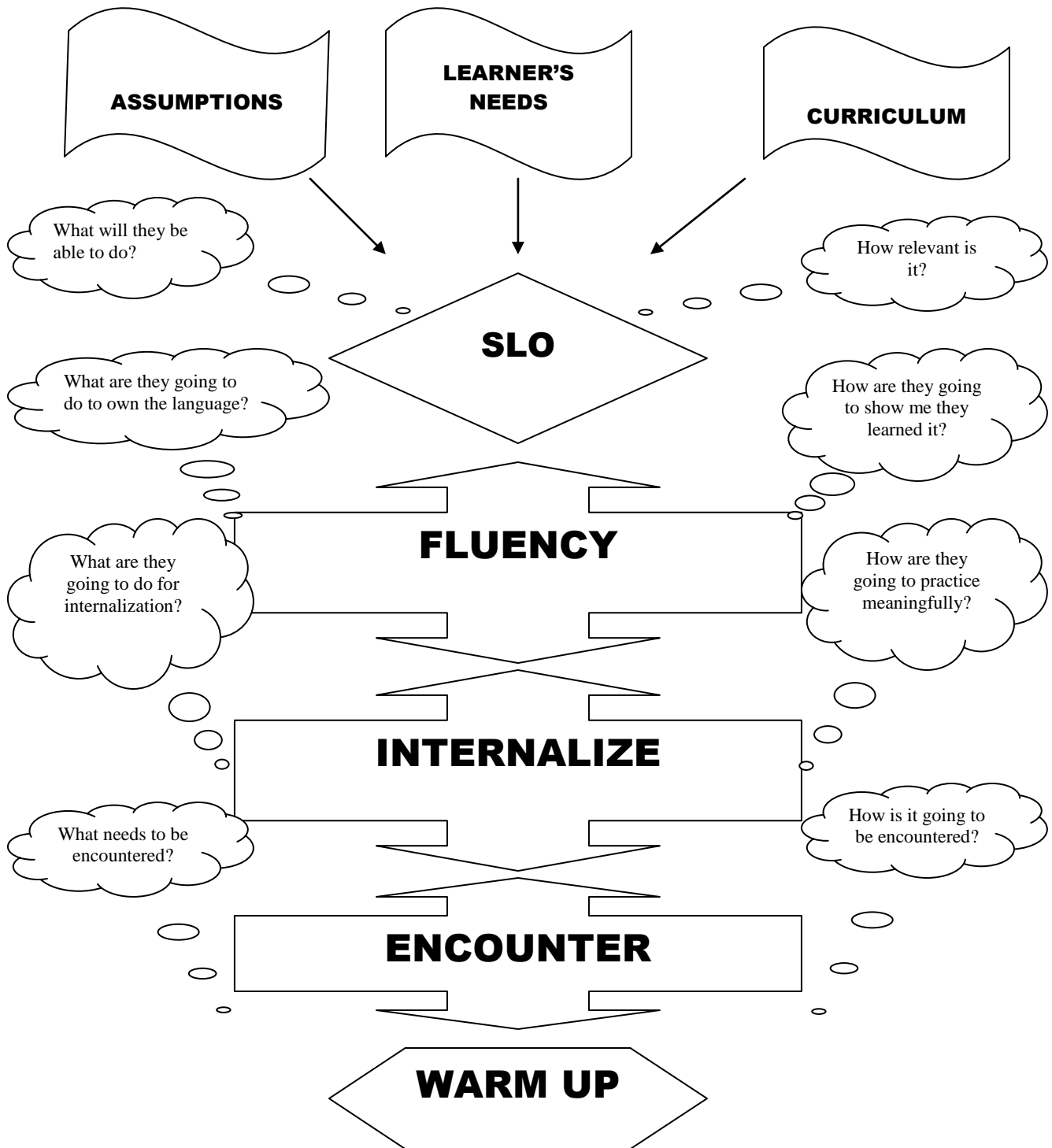
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# Lesson Planning Process



## Final Questions to ask:

1. How does each part support the SLO?
2. Have I broken it down into digestible parts?
3. Have I provided them with relevant, challenging activities?
4. How am I keeping the learners in the spotlight?

## How to Develop a Lesson Plan

Overview: To begin, ask yourself three basic questions:

1. Where are your students going?
2. How are they going to get there?
3. How will you know when they've arrived?

Then begin to think about each of the following categories that form the organization of the plan. While planning, use the questions below to guide you during each stage.

### Goals

1. What is the purpose, aim, or rationale for the lesson?
2. What do you want or expect students to be able to do by the end of the lesson?
3. How does the lesson tie in with the course framework?

### Prerequisites

1. What must students be able to do before this lesson?
2. How will you make connections to what students already know (i.e. their background knowledge)?

### Materials

1. What materials will be needed?
2. How familiar are you with the content?
3. How will the materials be used?
4. How much preparation time is required?
5. How will you instruct students to use these materials?

### Lesson Procedure – Introduction

1. How will you introduce the ideas and objectives of this lesson?
2. How will you get students' attention and motivate them in order to hold their attention?
3. How can you tie lesson goals with student interests and past classroom activities?
4. What will be expected of students?

### Lesson Procedure – Main Activity

1. What is the focus of the lesson?
2. What does the teacher do to facilitate learning, manage the various activities, and sustain interest?
3. How can this material be presented to ensure each student will benefit from the learning experience?

### Closure/Conclusion

1. What will you use to draw the ideas together for students at the end?
2. How will you provide feedback to students to correct their misunderstandings and reinforce their learning?

### Follow-up Lessons/Activities

1. What activities might you suggest for enrichment and remediation?
2. What lessons might follow as a result of this lesson?

### Assessment/Evaluation

1. How will you evaluate the goals that were identified?

How will students demonstrate that they have learned and understood the goals of the lesson?



## Reflective Teaching Questions about Lessons

### Overall

- 1) Was the lesson effective? Why or why not?
- 2) Did I achieve the goals and objectives I had for the lesson? Why or why not?
- 3) Were my students' needs addressed successfully? Why or why not?
- 4) Was there anything that the students didn't respond to well? Why?
- 5) What helped my students' learning?
- 6) What hindered my students' learning?
- 7) What were my strengths as a teacher today?
- 8) What were my weaknesses as a teacher today?
- 9) What are 3-5 things I could improve?
- 10) How do I plan to reach my improvement goals?

### Specifics

- 1) Were there clear goals and objectives for the lesson?
- 2) Did I plan and prepare well for the lesson?
- 3) Was the lesson well organized and logically sequenced?
- 4) Were the goals and objectives of the lesson clear to the students?
- 5) Were my instructions brief and clear?
- 6) Was the contented encountered/presented effectively?
- 7) Were all my teaching materials appropriate and used effectively?
- 8) Did I provide students with time to practice?
- 9) Did students use different language skills?
- 10) Was I able to stimulate and sustain student interest and motivation for the duration of the lesson?
- 11) Did I praise, encourage and motivate my students as much as possible?
- 12) Were the students able to make connections between what I was teaching and their own lives?
- 13)
- 14) Was the challenge level suitable for my students?
- 15) Did the activities go as planned?
- 16) Were the activities meaningful and appropriate to achieve my goals and objectives?
- 17) Were the activities appropriate for different learning styles?
- 18) Did the students have enough time/opportunities to participate in the learning activities?
- 19) Was the material/content too much, too little, or just right for the lesson?
- 20) Was the seating arrangement appropriate for each activity?
- 21) Did I help my students become more aware of the second language culture?
- 22) What events during the class made me deviate from my plans?
- 23) Was I able to guide students/explain any difficult concepts to my students clearly?
- 24) Were student errors monitored and corrected effectively?
- 25) Did I respond well to student problems?
- 26) Did I pay attention to all my students as equally as possible?
- 27) Did I speak in the target language (English) as much as possible?
- 28) Was teacher talk minimized and student talk maximized?
- 29) Did I use gestures, body language, and/or humor to enliven the class?
- 30) Did the students speak in the target language (English) with each other?
- 31) Did students get sufficient practice using the target skills?
- 32) Did all students participate actively – even the reluctant ones?
- 33) Did I organize class time effectively (i.e. Did I have good time management skills)?
- 34) Was I able to recycle language which I had previously taught?
- 35) Were the students' performance assessed properly?
- 36) Did I do anything to leave the students with a feeling of achievement?