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Frustrated with Bloom's Taxonomy?

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Have you been faced with writing learning outcomes and frustrated when presented with a list of verbs (e.g. understand, define, describe, organize, develop, summarize, analyze)? Writing outcomes that reflect higher level learning has sometimes been simplified to the point that it seems like all we have to do is choose a higher order verb from a table of Bloom's Taxonomy. These tables can appear to reduce the value of learning processes that we know can lead to meaningful student engagement and learning. Is it really wrong to use the word "describe" in an outcome for an advanced class? The answer is a qualified "no."

Because we care about student learning, we want to develop student learning outcome statements (for ourselves, our students, and others) which reflect the learning we intend to facilitate. What matters, then, is not the verb we select, but the verb's context and the depth of thinking required. More on this approach is described in the literature as "Webb's Depth of Knowledge." The examples below, from materials developed by the EUPISD, illustrate how the word "describe" can be appropriately used in a high-level outcome statement.

- **Level 1** Describe a core ideal of American society
- **Level 2** Describe how peoples' point of view may differ on a core ideal of American Society
- **Level 3** Describe how peoples' misconceptions about American Core ideals causes conflict over the role of government in American Society

When writing learning outcome statements for your course or program, focus less on the verb, and more on the context and depth of knowledge that you expect from your students or graduates. Bloom's Taxonomy, and other resources, can be helpful, but use your professional judgement at every step as you develop outcomes, assess those outcomes, and then use what you learn to improve student learning.

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Blooms_rose.svg

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>

<http://teaching.uncc.edu/learning-resources/articles-books/best-practice/goals-objectives/writing-objectives>

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Supporting student learning and institutional effectiveness
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