How to Write an Objective

The MSU Code of Teaching Responsibility states that, “Instructors shall direct class activities toward the fulfillment of course objectives and shall evaluate student performance in a manner consistent with these objectives.” To follow those guidelines properly, instructors must state objectives so clearly and specifically that students could recognize that the exams and the teaching match the objectives. However, some teachers compose objectives so vaguely and broadly that students can’t tell for sure if a test or an activity matches the objectives. In those cases students don’t know what is required of them. Consequently they become anxious and see the teacher as unfair and disorganized. To avoid these undesirable consequences, here’s a way to write clear, specific objectives.

1. Think of a typical test question or a course requirement and describe it.

   At work, Jane made many mistakes in using spreadsheets. So she took an online training course her company provided. Jane is now flawless in her use of spreadsheets. According to the text, what term do organizational psychologists use to refer to the process that led to her improvement?
   
   a. on-the-job training
   b. performance enhancement
   c. positive transfer
   d. work linkage

   “Given an example of an organizational psychology term, choose the term, according to the text definition.”

   Note: If you add the list of terms from each lesson that students will need to identify, your students will know what to expect and will study so as to be able to name any example you provide.

2. To most clear, write an objective with three parts. Let’s construct another example.

   a. What sort of stimulus students are given, sometimes with an example – “such as.”

   Given the name of a cognitive theory and a question about the facts related to that theory, such as: “According to information processing theory, what aspect of a person’s cognition is responsible for decision making?”

   b. What the student will do that can be observed – an action verb and the object of that verb.

   You will choose by marking the most accurate fact or You will write the fact called for

   c. The standard by which the student response will be judged.

   according to the text/lecture/handouts/article/checklist.

So the way this objective would be expressed in a syllabus might be like this:

(Condition) Given questions about the elements of any cognitive theories we study, such as, the nature of the major parts or the operation of memory processes: “Which of the following is the essential idea of cognitive load theory?”

(Behavior) you will be able to choose the most accurate factual statement

(Criterion) according to text and lecture
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>conditions</th>
<th>behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Given questions about the elements of a theory (theorist, principles)</td>
<td>Choose or state facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or a study (Questions, hypotheses, methods, findings, conclusions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of a term/concept</td>
<td>Choose or state the concept name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A term or a concept name</td>
<td>Choose or state an example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data and a question</td>
<td>Calculate and choose or write answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A term</td>
<td>Choose or state the definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A definition</td>
<td>Choose or state term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A topic or choice of topic</td>
<td>Find sources, and write or present a description, analysis, application, interpretation, evaluation, plan for a new study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The names of more than one theory and some aspects or elements of the theories</td>
<td>Write a comparison of their elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The name of a principle, a situation, and a goal</td>
<td>Choose or write an application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The most common criteria are**

“according to the text and/or class presentations.”
“according to the definitions in the handouts.”
“according to the checklist of criteria presented."

**Consider elaborating by using**

1. even more specific objectives for each lesson that include specific ideas,
2. test review sheets to make the objectives even clearer by listing content, and
3. practice exercises or practice tests that illustrate what the test will be like.

On the following pages are excerpts from some psychology course syllabi. Sometimes I listed samples only. Be aware that I edited the course’s objectives. The objectives are not perfect, but they make a very good attempt at describing tests, assignments, projects and papers in a way students would know a bit about what to expect. It might be interesting to compare what different instructors listed for the same course.
Psychology 244: Developmental Psychology Infancy through Childhood (MB)

Course Objectives:
By the end of this course, you will be able to:
1. Write a paper to demonstrate application of different developmental theories and concepts to real life situations based on the specific requirements and provided checklist.
2. Given a developmental theory, write a real-life example that demonstrates the theory.
3. Given a developmental concept, write an example that demonstrates the concept.
4. Given a case example, choose the best explanation of which developmental theory it demonstrates.
5. Given factual questions about developmental concepts as well as the context, such as the role of culture on development, choose the most accurate answer.
6. Given an example/scenario in class, be able to apply your own personal experiences as what you’ve learned in lectures, discussions or readings.
All will be judged as correct according to class notes and text explanations and definitions of theories, principles and concepts.

Psychology 244: Developmental Psychology: Infancy to Childhood (LC)

Course Goals
After this course you should be able to:
1. Recognize the major developmental theories such as social learning theory and their authors, such as Bandura.
2. Identify similarities and differences between theories.
3. Identify the major physical, cognitive, and emotional changes that children undergo.
4. Recognize which developmental milestones occur during each developmental stage from infancy to middle childhood.
5. Define key terms from developmental psychology.
6. Identify symptoms of major childhood disorders.

Course objectives:
On tests you will be asked to select the:
1. Theorist that matches the theory (or the theory that matches the theorist).
2. Major developmental milestone for the age group provided
3. Definition that matches the key term (or the key term that matches the definition).
4. Disorder that matches the description.
5. Theory/stage/milestone that best describes a given example.
6. Similarity or difference between two theories or a set of theories.
7. Key feature of a developmental theory or concept.

Note that I will give you a study guide and other handouts that will assist you with studying and understanding these conceptions and terms. This study guide will also include example items that may appear on the test. Attending lecture, reading the text, and using the study material will greatly improve your grade in the course.
Psychology 344: Developmental Psychology - Adolescence Through Youth (LF)

Course Goals:
1. Identify the major physical and social transitions that occur in adolescence.
2. Understand the theories that explain these transitions and their effects.
3. Understand contextual influences and their effects on adolescent development.
4. Define key terms from developmental psychology and understand research methodology utilized in a developmental approach

Course Objectives:
On the tests you will be asked to identify the:
1. Theory/stage/transition that best describes a given example.
2. Theory that would explain the transition.
3. Key feature of a developmental theory or concept.
4. Definition that matches the key term
   according to text’s explanations of elements of the theories, and definitions of principles and concepts.

Psychology 395 Research Design and Measurement (DP)

Course Objectives:
1. Given factual questions about the role of values and ethics in research, such as “What is the role of values on the focus of research?,” choose the most accurate factual answer according to the text.
2. Write a literature review that summarizes and evaluates a research topic so as to demonstrate your understanding of how to read, critique, and synthesize the literature according to the course checklist.
3. Given a conceptual term regarding different forms of data collection and measurement, such as “sample, population, internal validity, external validity, test validity, test reliability,” and several examples, identify the example that best matches the term, according to the concept definitions in the text and class.
4. Given a brief case example of a design used to answer a research question, and four or five explanations of how the method’s design would affect the validity and reliability of the research study, choose the best explanation according to the class and text discussion of factors that affect.
5. For a given research question, write a research design that best answers the research question, according to the research design checklist.
Psychology 295 Data Analysis in Psychological Research (NH)

Course Objectives:
A. You will be able to categorize and describe types of psychological studies
   1. Given a description of a psychological study or an example, choose the name of the type, according to text definitions.
   2. For each type of psychological study, state the strengths and weaknesses of the methods.
   3. Given a description of a psychological study or an example, identify which type of data is appropriate to collect.
   4. For each type of psychological study, state how you can collect data for that type of study.
B. You will be able to state when and how to use descriptive statistics.
   Given sets of data you will summarize that data, describe that data, and communicate the patterns of data by graphs and charts.
C. You will apply appropriate inferential statistics.
   State generally when inferential statistics are to be used.
   Given a specific data set and theory, state what inferential statistics are to be used, perform the appropriate statistical test based on the study objective (e.g., theoretical and practical questions) and state an interpretation of the results in accord with the data analysis.
D. You will describe and predict the relationship between two variables.
   Given specific data of the relationship of variables, state a description of the relationship state a prediction of the psychological outcomes.
E. You will analyze nonparametric data using appropriate statistical procedures.
   Given categorical data conduct appropriate statistical tests communicate your results and conclusions in writing.

PSY 295: Data Analysis in Psychological Research (LR)

Goals
After your participation in this course you should:
1. Understand why the different statistical methods have been developed (You should be be able to state what purpose they serve, the circumstances in which they are used, and what questions they answer).
2. Demonstrate how to do each statistical procedure.

Course Objectives
1. Given actual data, perform each statistical procedure according to the text’s steps.
2. Given a a description or an example of a statistical procedure, choose the appropriate purpose or state in writing what purpose each procedure serves, according to the chart presented.
3. Given a a description or an example of a statistical procedure, choose the appropriate circumstances in which each procedure is used, according to the chart presented.
4. Given a description or an example of a circumstance, choose the appropriate procedure, according to the chart presented.
5. Given a description or an example of a question choose or state the statistical procedure to be used according to the chart presented.
6. Given a description or an example of a procedure choose or state which question the procedure answers, according to the chart presented.
PSY 295 - Data Analysis in Psychological Research (JS)

**Course objectives**

1. Given a set of data, conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, according to the steps discussed in text and class.
2. Given a set of data and a desired analysis, apply basic SPSS according to the SPSS manual.
3. State in writing the importance of statistics in psychology according to class discussion.
4. Given direct factual questions about any term, such as correlation, be able to choose the definition or state the definition in writing as in the text.
5. Given any example of a statistical result such as, “What does a correlation of 4.0 mean?” be able to choose or state in writing the meaning of that result according to class presentations and handouts on interpretation.
6. Given a direct question about the reasoning behind research methods as they relate to psychological research and theory, such as, “Why sampling method would most likely lead to a representative sample?,” state a logical argument similar to the rationales given in class.
7. Given results sections for articles using basic statistical analyses, state the interpretation that fits the data and the analyses according to the meaning of each type as discussed in class.
8. Given a basic psychological research questions of your choice question, state which analyses would be best, according to the decision chart presented.

Psychology 320: Health Psychology (PH)

**Course Goals**

1. Explain what Health Psychology is and its relation to other fields of psychology.
2. Understand how psychological, biological and social factors interact with behavioral and lifestyle choices to produce health outcomes.
3. Use the approaches to health promotion, prevention and intervention to evaluate your own health behaviors.
4. Utilize models of behavioral change to modify your health behaviors to produce positive health outcomes.
5. Critically examine health-related research and methods to evaluate their effectiveness.
6. Explain health disparities and how they affect the health outcomes of various populations.

**Course Objectives**

1. Choose an accurate definition of health psychology according to the text.
2. For a given lifestyle behavior, choose which factors have the primary effect.
3. For a given lifestyle behavior, choose accurate statements describing how psychological, biological and social factors interact with behavioral and lifestyle choices to produce health outcomes according to the health psychology models presented.
4. Given a specific health promotion, prevention or intervention technique, write an explanation about how it affects you or not and why.
5. Given a specific health promotion, prevention or intervention technique, choose approaches to health promotion, prevention and intervention.
6. With a health behavior of your choice, write a plan to modify that behavior applying a model of change.
7. Choose accurate statements about models of behavioral change used to modify health behaviors.
8. Write a criticism of a piece of health research from a health psychology point of view according to the critique checklist provided.
9. Choose accurate factual statements about health disparities and how they affect the health outcomes of various populations.
Psychology 280: Abnormal Psychology (JD)
Objectives
1. Given a written description of a disorder or a case example of a disorder, choose the appropriate label, according to the DSMIV.
2. Given the name of a theory, choose the best statement that represents that whole theory or some element of it, according to the classroom explanations and handouts.
3. Given an explanation of an example of a disorder, choose the name of that theory, according to the classroom explanations and handouts.
4. Present a short speech describing the pros and cons of a psychopathological issue related to the etiology, prevalence, symptoms or treatments of a disorder, according to the group report checklist.

Psychology 424: Child and Family Psychopathology (KL) (TM) (JM)
Course Objectives
1. Given factual questions about the symptoms and syndromes of child psychopathology such as, “What are the symptoms of childhood depression?,” choose or write the most accurate factual answer based on the current classification systems used in research and clinical practice.
2. Given examples of cases of childhood psychopathology, choose the classification, according to the current classification systems used in research and clinical practice.
3. Given direct factual questions about the developmental psychopathology framework, including risk and protective factors from multiple levels of ecology, choose or write the most accurate answer based on the framework discussed in class.
4. When given a case, state risk and protective factors at the level of the individual, family, and community as they relate to that case, according to the developmental framework.
5. Write a critical review of the literature on a risk factor for child and family psychopathology using APA style and the literature review checklist.
   or (each instructor had a different requirement in their courses, not a choice.)
   Given a choice of a form of child psychopathology facing clinicians, scientists, and society today, write a critical analysis of its causes, consequences, questions, and treatment challenges according to the critical thinking checklist and the models presented in class
   or
   Given a choice of a research article about childhood pathology, write an evaluation of the article according to the research evaluation and clear scientific writing checklist.

Psychology 270 Community Psychology (MB)
Sample Objectives
1. Given your choice of a social phenomenon, write an essay describing your analysis of the elements and relationships in the situations according to a given theory of community psychology and the report checklist.
2. Given a factual question about the nature of a theory of community psychology, choose the most accurate answer from those given according to the lecture and text.
3. Given an example of a principle or value of community psychology, choose the appropriate name, according to lecture and text.
Psychology 200  Cognitive Psychology (LH)

Course objectives:
1. Explain in writing current theories on attention, perception, memory, problem solving, decision making and language comprehension and production within a cognitive psychology framework as defined in the checklists and the model examples.
2. Describe in writing research findings in cognitive psychology and relate those findings to everyday experiences with attention, perception, memory, problem solving, decision making or language comprehension and production.

Some objectives I wrote for possible multiple choice exams (SY)
1. Given the name of a current theory, such as one of the theories of on attention, perception, memory, problem solving, decision making, and language comprehension and production, and a direct factual question about one of its terms, elements or principles, you will be able to choose the most accurate answer according to the test or class explanation.
2. Given an element, term, or principle of one of the current theories, identify by choosing the name of the theory according to the test or class explanation.
3. Given a direct question about the research questions, methods, findings or conclusions of a research study on attention, perception, memory, problem solving, decision making and language comprehension and production, you will be able to choose the most accurate answer, according to the test or class explanation.
4. Given a theory or research result and a choice of applications, you will be able to choose or write a description of the best application according to the theory or findings.

Psychology 236  Personality Psychology (MH)

Sample Course Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1. Identify and understand theoretical perspectives of personality psychology.
   a. Given the name of a theory of personality and an example of a behavior, choose or write the best statement of the way that theory would explain the behavior, according to the text and class.
   b. Given the name of a theory of personality, choose or write statements of strengths and weaknesses of that theory, according to class discussion.

Goal 2. Understand the methods used to study personality psychology.
   Given the name of a theory, choose or state in writing the type of research method most commonly used in that perspective and their strengths and weaknesses, according to the text and class handouts.

Goal 3. Understand the relationship between personality psychology and the real world.
   Write an explanation of examples of behavior from your day-to-day life, using concepts learned in class, according their definitions in the text.

Psychology 236  Personality Psychology (EW)

Sample Course Objectives
1. Given the name of a personality theory, or a psychologist’s name a. choose or state in writing various definitions of personality and b. choose or state the strengths and weaknesses of thinking of personality in each way, according to class discussion and text.
2. Given the name of a personality theory, choose or state in writing the most accurate explanation of the theory, according to text and class handouts.
3. Given a name of a personality theory, a. state in writing an operational definition of personality according to that theory as well as b. the methods researchers use to study that, according to the definition for operational terms and the text explanation of research methods for various types of personality theories.
4. Given a choice of some observed real-world behavior, state an interpretation according to at least two of the theoretical views of personality according to the elements of each theory and the comparative essay checklist.
Please write two complete objectives likely to be part of your course

Please send your objectives to yelons@gmail.com

Here is a format if you want to use it:

(Conditions) Given _______________
such as _______________

(Behavior) you will ____ (action verb) _______ (object)

(Criterion) according to _________ (source or checklist)
and/or
so well that _________ (result description or checklist)
and/or
within _________ (time)

Here are standards to check your objective:

__ 1. Does the objective describe a type of test item or a required performance?

__ 2. Do the conditions for the test item contain all that a student will be given?
   For example, for a multiple choice item, are students told generally what is given in the question portion (stem): “Given a new example of a scale representing scale concepts…”

__ 3. If needed, is a typical example of the “givens” included?
   For example,

__ 4. Is an action verb used to describe a student’s observable behavior on the test?
   For example, “students will select” “You will choose” “You will write”

__ 5. Is there a clear, specific object of the verb?
   For example, “students will select the name of the scale concept [the scale type: nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio]

__ 6. If a student is to demonstrate mastery of an idea, does the criterion refer to a specific source that will be used to assess correct response?
   For example, “…according to concept definitions in the text and presentations.”

__ 7. If a skill or a product is required, does the criterion refer to a checklist?
   For example for a skill, “Given data, write out your calculation of the standard deviation, according to the checklist of steps,” or for a product, “Given an operational definition of a variable, create a scale, that has the features in the Good Scale Checklist.”

Finished objective: Given a new example of a scale such as, ‘Sara asks clients to check which of four categories…’ representing scale concepts such as nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio, students will select the name of the scale concept, according to concept definitions in the text and presentations.