How to Write Effective Learning Outcomes

ATD is committed to continuously delivering high quality, impactful participant focused learning opportunities through our conference sessions, so learning outcomes are an essential part of session design, and they factor strongly into our proposal review process.

1. Learning outcomes are participant centered.
2. Learning outcomes are future focused.
3. Learning outcomes are action oriented.

Learning outcomes answer the question: **What will the participant be able to do with the knowledge, skills, or attitudes introduced in your session**?

Ensuring your learning outcomes align to the session type, the content, length, level and structure of your session is part of developing a stellar proposal and, if accepted, delivering an impactful conference session.

All learning outcomes statements reflect the phrase: "On completion of this session, **participants will be able to**…."

1. **Develop 1-3 learning outcomes** that can be reasonably accomplished in the session time frame and type. (*Answer the question: what can a participant **reasonably achieve** as a result of my session?)*
   a. **Effective**: Identify a strategy they can use to build a good working relationship with a subject matter expert.
   b. **Less Effective:** Write a complete engagement plan for working with subject matter experts on a project. (Probably not achievable in a one-hour conference session.)
2. Use outcomes that reflect the participant outcomes, **not** what will be done in the session. (*Answer the question: what will the participant **be able to do** as a result of completing my session?)*
   a. **Effective**: Select an assessment strategy for a current project
   b. **Less Effective**: Review strategies for assessing learning. (Describes what is done in the session and reflects what participants will do in the session.)
3. Use action-oriented verbs, and avoid compound outcomes. (*Answer the question: what is **one achievable action** that a participant can reasonably complete as a result of this session?)*
   a. **Effective:** Apply a needs assessment strategy to a current or future project.
   b. **Less Effective:** Apply and evaluate a needs assessment model. (Reflects two separate actions and should be split into two different outcomes.)
4. Skip passive verbs that are not clearly measurable or observable. (*Answer the question: What **observable actions** will participants be able to complete as a result of this session?)*
   a. **Effective:** Explain to a non-learning and development audience why needs assessment is an essential part of learning design.

b. **Less effective**: Understand why needs assessment is an essential part of learning design. (Understand is not an observable, measurable action.)

5. Ensure the learning outcomes reflect the session type. (What observable actions will participants be able to complete as a result of this session?)
   a. **Effective for a Case Study**: Explain 3 different perspectives on the best way to establish psychological safety in trainings.
   b. **Less Effective for a Case Study**: Write a plan for establishing psychological safety in a training. (Panel discussions are generally presenting information, ideas and strategies, but not instructing on how to do something.)
   c. **Effective for a Workshop**: Apply a strategy for establishing psychological safety in a training.
   d. **Less Effective for a Workshop**: Understand why psychological safety is an important part of learning design. (Understand is not measurable or action oriented. The expectation for a workshop is that participants will have opportunities for applicable hands on learning.)

6. Ensure the learning outcomes reflect the selected pre-requisite knowledge or skills indicated (beginner, intermediate, advanced). (Answer the question: based on the the anticipated skill or knowledge level that participants will have for this session, what can they reasonably expected to achieve in the session.)
   a. **Effective for a beginner level workshop**: Apply strategies for designing good quality instructional materials.
   b. **Less effective for a 60-minute beginner level workshop**: Use advanced graphic design software to develop quality instructional materials. (Given that this session is a beginner level session, using advanced graphic design software after a 60-minute workshop is probably not reasonable.)

The ATD Program Review Committee will be looking at your outcomes for several elements:

1. Are the outcomes participant focused?
2. Are the outcomes action oriented and achievable?
3. Are the outcomes future focused reflecting intended impact of the session?
4. Do they align to the session type?
5. Are they realistic for session delivery?