

# Creating Meaningful Learning Outcomes



Learning outcomes describe the specific, measurable knowledge and skills that learners will be expected to demonstrate upon completing a training or other learning experience (e.g., lesson, class, or course). When designing training for the early learning and care workforce, it is important to include learning outcomes that are both grounded in research and meaningful for learners.

The [California Early Childhood Educator \(ECE\) Competencies](#) are research-based professional standards developed to inform learning outcomes for California's early learning and care workforce. They describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions (personal characteristics) foundational to providing high-quality care and education to young children and their families. Creating learning outcomes that are meaningful for early learning and care educators begins with developing training based on these standards.

## How to Develop Training Based on the ECE Competencies

This section provides a sample process for developing training based on the ECE competencies. You may choose to modify this approach to fit your individual development style and preferences. You may find it helpful to reference a copy of the [ECE competencies](#) as you review this information.

### Step 1: Determine Competency and Performance Areas

Reflect on the focus and goal of the training. Review the 12 competency areas and select that which most closely relates to the training focus.

**DEFINITION** **Competency areas** organize knowledge and skills into 12 essential components that identify and define high-quality care and education practices.



Review the performance areas for the competency area you have selected, then select the performance area that most closely relates to the focus of the training.

**DEFINITION** Performance areas organize the knowledge and skills within a competency area.

**EXAMPLE**

Training about children’s development might touch on multiple competency areas but relate most closely to the Child Development and Learning competency area.

The Child Development and Learning competency area includes two performance areas:

- Performance Area 1: Knowledge About Child Development and Learning.
- Performance Area 2: Facilitating Child Development and Learning.

**PERFORMANCE AREA 1**

**Knowledge About Child Development and Learning**

Topics	Competency Contexts			
	Supporting Early Learning and Development	Planning and Guiding Early Learning and Development	Creating and Maintaining Program Policies and Practices	Advancing the Early Childhood Profession
Context of developmental theory and research	Is aware that developmental theory and research represent particular perspectives that are not necessarily universal.	Initiates interactions about a variety of cross-cultural developmental perspectives, theory, and research with staff, colleagues, and families.	Applies an understanding of the context of developmental theory and research to work with diverse children and families.	Stays current on cross-cultural developmental theory and research. Uses an understanding of the context of developmental research and theory to inform decisions about policies and practices for diverse groups of children and families.
Developmental theory and research	Communicates basic knowledge of developmental theories and current research findings as they apply to children’s social-emotional, language, cognitive, and perceptual and motor development, and understands implications for practice.	Explains major developmental theories and current research findings and their contributions to the profession. Applies theory to practice and provides resources to staff and colleagues.	Develops program policies and practices that reflect a strong foundation in developmental theory and current research. Engages staff and colleagues to analyze developmental theory for relevance to practice and cultural sensitivity.	Stays current on literature and research about developmental theory, uses that knowledge to inform decisions, and provides professional development opportunities for early childhood educators that focus on implications for practice in a variety of early education settings.
Developmental domains	Identifies major milestones and communicates with families about the social-emotional, language, cognitive, and perceptual and motor domains for the stages represented in the group. Observes children in natural settings to enhance the study of child development. Uses appropriate terminology to describe development, learning, and curriculum.	Applies general knowledge of development in all domains from conception through early childhood, including knowledge about typical and atypical development. Uses research and literature on development to inform planning for individual children within the group. Ensures staff, colleagues, and families understand commonly accepted terminology that describes development, learning, and curriculum.	Engages staff, colleagues, and families to discuss development in all domains. Develops a program philosophy and policies that support children’s growth and development in all domains, within the context of family, home, and cultural considerations.	Designs systems and strategies to help early childhood educators increase their understanding of development in all domains, and of the role of early education settings in supporting child development and learning. Stays informed about current research on children’s development, learning, and curriculum, and shares pertinent information with early childhood educators, demonstrating consideration for their diverse educational, linguistic, and practical experiences. Introduces new terms or constructs as appropriate.

## Step 2: Review Topics Within the Performance Area

Review the topics listed within the performance area you have selected. Select the topic that most closely relates to the focus of the training.

**DEFINITION** **Topics** identify the specific skills and knowledge within a performance area.

### EXAMPLE

Within the Child Development and Learning competency area, Performance Area 1 (Knowledge About Child Development and Learning) includes the following topics:

- Context of developmental theory and research
- Developmental theory and research
- Developmental domains
- Factors that contribute to development

If your goal is to have learners be able to identify milestones of development, you might select developmental domains as the topic.

#### PERFORMANCE AREA 1

#### Knowledge About Child Development and Learning

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### Step 3: Select the Competency Context

The competency contexts help you identify the most appropriate competencies for the learners participating in your training.

For the topic area you have chosen, review the contexts and consider the roles and responsibilities of the intended learners.

**DEFINITION** The **competency contexts** identify four interrelated areas of responsibility and describe the knowledge, skills, actions, and scope of responsibility for each topic within a performance area.

**Context 1. Supporting Early Learning and Development.** This context typically applies to those who work with children in an assistive role.

**Context 2. Planning and Guiding Early Learning and Development.** This context typically applies to those with authority to make decisions about a group of children.

**Context 3. Creating and Maintaining Program Policies and Practices.** This context typically applies to those who make decisions for a program or site.

**Context 4. Advancing the Early Childhood Profession.** This context typically applies to those who advocate, lead professional development, or initiate change.

PERFORMANCE AREA 1				
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**EXAMPLE**

If training on the topic of developmental domains is intended for early learning and care educators who work with children in a supportive role but are not typically involved in planning learning experiences or making program decisions, the appropriate context would likely be Supporting Early Learning and Development. This context identifies specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are important for this group of early learning and care educators.

The learning outcomes for this training might focus on one or more of the following competencies:

- Identifying children’s developmental milestones
- Communicating with families about children’s development and learning
- Observing children to enhance their development and learning
- Learning appropriate terminology to describe development, learning, and curriculum

However, if training on the topic of developmental domains is intended for those responsible for creating program policies (e.g., center directors, administrators, FCC business owners), the context may be Creating and Maintaining Program Policies and Practices.

The learning outcomes for this training might focus on one or both of the following competencies:

- Engaging staff, families, and colleagues in discussions about developmental domains
- Developing a program philosophy or policies that support children’s development in all domains within the context of family, home, and cultural considerations

## How to Write Learning Outcomes

After determining how your training relates to the ECE competencies, you will be ready to develop learning outcomes.

**DEFINITION** Learning outcomes describe the specific, measurable knowledge and skills that learners will be expected to demonstrate upon completing a training or other learning experience (e.g., lesson, class, or course).

The terms **learning outcomes** and **learning objectives** are often used interchangeably. However, there is a difference.

- **Learning outcomes** are participant-focused. They describe what participants *will know and be able to do* upon completion of a training.
- **Learning objectives** are trainer-focused. They describe the trainer's goals and identify what will be covered in a training. They are sometimes referred to as training objectives.

It can be helpful to think of learning outcomes as describing what participants will be able to do if the learning objectives for the training are met.

Learning outcomes are important because they provide a foundation for assessing whether the training was successful. For this reason, learning outcomes must be measurable, observable, and achievable.

### WELL-WRITTEN LEARNING OUTCOMES:

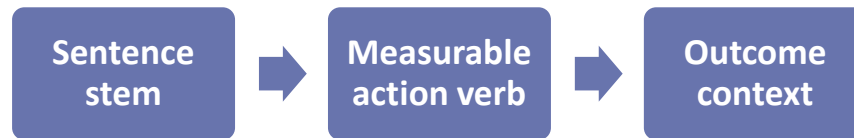
#### Help **learners** ...

- Predict what they will gain from a learning experience
- Understand why the knowledge and skills they are asked to demonstrate will be useful
- Apply the knowledge and skills presented in a learning experience

#### Help **trainers** ...

- Reflect on training content to determine what knowledge and skills will be most valuable to learners
- Clarify expectations for participants
- Plan how to assess learners' knowledge and skills
- Focus on how to help learners apply knowledge gained from the training to their work with children and families

Most learning outcomes follow a basic structure: Sentence stem, measurable action verb, and outcome context. Continue reading to learn more about these elements.



## Sentence Stem

Sentence stems are phrases that must be completed to form a full sentence. Sentence stems are used to introduce learning outcomes. They begin the sentence that states what will be expected of the learner.

### EXAMPLES

- Participants will be able to ...
- Upon completion of this training, participants will ...

## Measurable Action Verb

Action verbs describe *how* learners will demonstrate knowledge and skills. It is critical to use action verbs that are measurable and observable so trainers will know if learners have demonstrated the skills and knowledge specified in the learning outcome.

[Bloom's taxonomy](#) provides a list of measurable action verbs related to observable behaviors at varying levels of cognitive thinking. The revised taxonomy includes six levels of cognitive thinking: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. These levels increase in difficulty as they progress from remembering to creating.

### EXAMPLES

Here are two examples of action verbs added to sentence stems. Measurable action verbs are shown in **bold**.

- Participants will **identify** ...
- Upon completion of this training, participants will **evaluate** ...



## Outcome Context

The learning outcome context identifies the specific criteria expected of the learner. When the context is added to the action verb, it describes *what* learners will do.

### EXAMPLES

The context is shown in **bold** in the following learning outcome examples. Notice that in each example, the sentence stem, action verb, and context form a complete learning outcome.

- Participants will identify **perceptual and motor development at or around 8 months, 18 months, and 36 months of age.**
- Upon completing this training, participants will apply **information from the California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations and Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework to their curriculum planning for infants and toddlers.**

## Tips for Developing Meaningful Learning Outcomes

- Create learning outcomes that focus on the learner and what they will be able to do upon completion of the training.
- Ensure that training outcomes are based on the knowledge and skills described in the [California Early Childhood Educator Competencies](#).
- Use action verbs that are observable so you can assess the knowledge and skills identified in the learning outcomes.
- Avoid verbs that are vague or cannot be observed or measured, such as “learn, value, know, or understand.”
- Write learning outcomes so they are easy to understand. Keep sentences short. Avoid using jargon (words, phrases, acronyms, or abbreviations that may be unfamiliar to those outside of or new to the early learning and care workforce or that have a unique meaning within the field). For example, use:
  - Developmentally appropriate practice rather than “DAP”
  - Transitional kindergarten rather than “TK”
  - “Encourage” rather than “incentivize”
- Ensure learning outcomes are achievable within the time designated for the learning experience. Avoid having too few or too many outcomes. Three to five outcomes are recommended for most trainings. The number of learning outcomes may increase depending on the nature or length of a learning experience. For example, a semester course will have more learning outcomes than a two- to four-hour training.

- Write learning outcomes so they are flexible enough to allow for a variety of ways to assess learners' achievement of the specified knowledge and skills. For example, the learning outcome, "Participants will identify signs of child abuse and neglect," may be assessed in a variety of ways (e.g., written test, discussion, small group activity, etc.).
- Include action verbs from a variety of Bloom's Taxonomy levels. Too many outcomes at levels 1 and 2 (remember and understand) may cause participants to lose interest due to a lack of topic engagement. In contrast, too many outcomes at levels 5 and 6 (evaluate and create) may be overwhelming for learners who are new to a topic.

## Resources

- DePaul Teaching Commons: [Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes](#)
- [Revised Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs](#)
- [Bloom's Taxonomy \(Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching\)](#)
- [Bloom's Taxonomy of Measurable Verbs](#)
- [Action Verbs Aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

## Learning Outcome Examples

This table provides examples of learning outcomes based on the ECE competencies.

Learning outcome examples were developed using the revised [Bloom's Taxonomy](#), which categorizes action verbs into six levels of cognitive complexity (remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create). Some verbs may be depicted in more than one level in the taxonomy depending on the how the verb is used.

The learning outcome examples in this table depict the competency area, performance area, Bloom's level of learning, and related action verbs. Action verbs are in **bold**.

Competency Area	Performance Area	Bloom's Level of Learning	Example
Child Development and Learning	Knowledge About Child Development and Learning	Level 2	Participants will <b>identify</b> perceptual and motor development at or around 8 months, 18 months, and 36 months of age.
Child Development and Learning	Facilitating Child Development and Learning	Level 3	Participants will <b>apply</b> information from the California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations and Infant/Toddler Curriculum Framework to curriculum planning for infants and toddlers.

Competency Area	Performance Area	Bloom's Level of Learning	Example
Culture, Diversity, and Equity	Culture and Language Development and Learning	Level 2	Participants will <b>explain</b> how children's life experiences and home culture impact their learning and development.
Culture, Diversity, and Equity	Culturally Responsive Approaches	Level 5	Participants will <b>evaluate</b> strategies for building meaningful partnerships with children's families.
Relationships, Interactions, and Guidance	Supporting Children's Emotional Development	Level 2	Participants will <b>describe</b> practices that support children's ability to regulate their emotions.
Relationships, Interactions, and Guidance	Social-Emotional Climate	Level 5	Participants will <b>assess</b> their program's early learning and care environment to consider the impact on children's social and emotional development.
Family and Community Engagement	Communication with Families	Level 2	Participants will <b>select</b> strategies for communicating with families that respect the family's culture and communication preferences.
Family and Community Engagement	Relationships with Children and Families	Level 6	Participants will <b>modify</b> their program policies to increase family engagement.
Dual-Language Development	Dual Language Program Models and Strategies	Level 2	Participants will <b>recognize</b> responsive program strategies that support second language acquisition.
Dual-Language Development	Development of the Home Language and English	Level 6	Participants will <b>develop</b> a plan to support children who are multilingual learners.
Observation, Screening, Assessment, and Documentation	Documentation	Level 2	Participants will <b>explain</b> how documentation supports the assessment process.
Observation, Screening, Assessment, and Documentation	Interpretation, Planning, and Implementation	Level 4	Participants will <b>examine</b> documentation and assessment data to support individual children's learning and development.
Special Needs and Inclusion	Developmentally and Individually Appropriate Practice	Level 2	Participants will <b>discuss</b> universal design for learning and its implications for curriculum and program planning.
Special Needs and Inclusion	Collaboration with Families and Service Providers	Level 6	Participants will <b>modify</b> their program's policies to better support children with disabilities and developmental delays.

Competency Area	Performance Area	Bloom's Level of Learning	Example
Learning Environments and Curriculum	Curriculum and Curriculum Planning	Level 3	Participants will <b>illustrate</b> how to include a balance of child-initiated play, exploration, and adult-facilitated strategies into their daily schedule.
Learning Environments and Curriculum	Strategies to Support Learning and Development	Level 4	Participants will <b>compare</b> and <b>contrast</b> major child development and educational theories.
Health, Safety, and Nutrition	Response to Health Requirements	Level 1	Participants will <b>list</b> signs of child abuse and neglect.
Health, Safety, and Nutrition	Environmental Health and Safety	Level 5	Participants will <b>evaluate</b> their program's health and safety policies and practices.
Leadership in Early Childhood Education	Systems Change and Development	Level 2	Participants will <b>identify</b> theories of organizational change.
Leadership in Early Childhood Education	Adult and Community Development	Level 6	Participants will <b>create</b> a decision-making process for incorporating diverse family goals and aspirations in their early learning and care programs.
Professionalism	Professional Conduct and Behaviors	Level 1	Participants will <b>state</b> the signs of work-related stress and burnout.
Professionalism	Competence in a Specialized Body of Knowledge	Level 4	Participants will <b>connect</b> current practices to evidence-based practices that promote positive outcomes for children.
Administration and Supervision	Human Resources	Level 2	Participants will <b>discuss</b> how they implement reflective supervision in their early learning and care program.
Administration and Supervision	Organizational Systems, Policies, and Procedures	Level 6	Participants will <b>design</b> an evaluation and quality improvement plan for their early learning and care program.