

ACTION TOOL A:

Understanding Learning Targets

What Is a Learning Target?

The most effective teaching and the most meaningful student learning happen when teachers design the right learning target for today's lesson and use it along with their students to aim for and assess understanding.

A learning target describes, in language that students understand, the lesson-sized chunk of information, skills, and reasoning processes that students will come to know deeply and thoroughly.

How Does a Learning Target Differ from an Instructional Objective?

An *instructional objective* describes an intended outcome and the nature of evidence that will determine mastery of that outcome from a teacher's point of view. It contains content outcomes, conditions, and criteria.

A *learning target* describes the intended lesson-sized learning outcome and the nature of evidence that will determine mastery of that outcome from a student's point of view. It contains the immediate learning aims for today's lesson.

	Instructional Objective— Framed from the Teacher Point of View	Learning Target— Framed from the Student Point of View
Where does it come from?	Derived from a standard and/or curricular goal.	Derived from an instructional objective.
Who uses it?	Used by the teacher to guide instruction during a lesson or over a group of lessons.	Used by the teacher and the students to aim for understanding and assess the quality of student work during today's lesson.
What does it describe, and how does it describe it?	- Describes content knowledge (concepts, understandings) and skills that students should be able to demonstrate. - Uses teacher language (the language of curriculum and standards). - May span one lesson or a set of lessons.	- Asks, "What am I going to learn?" - Uses student language as well as pictures, models, and/or demonstrations when possible. - Asks, "What should I be able to do at the end of today's lesson? And how is it connected to yesterday's and tomorrow's lessons?"
How does it connect to a performance of understanding?	Generalizes to many potential tasks, from which teachers select one or several to be the performance of understanding for instructional activities and formative assessment for a series of lessons.	Is connected to the specific performance of understanding that the teacher has chosen for today's lesson.
How does it promote evidence-based assessment?	Includes criteria and performance standards in teacher language.	Includes student look-fors—criteria and performance standards in student language—often accompanied by tools (e.g., "I can" statements, rubrics, checklists) and examples of work.

Checklist for Evaluating Learning Targets

A learning target contains ALL of the following characteristics. It must

☐ Describe exactly what the student is going to learn by the end of today's lesson.

☐ Be stated in developmentally appropriate language that the student can understand.

☐ Be framed from the point of view of a student who has not yet mastered the intended learning outcome for today's lesson.

☐ Be connected to and shared through the specific performance of understanding designed by the teacher for today's lesson (what students will be asked to do, say, make, or write that will deepen student understanding, allow students to assess where they are in relation to the learning target, and provide evidence of mastery).

☐ Include student look-fors—descriptive criteria that students can use to judge how close they are to the target, stated in terms that describe mastery of the learning target (not in terms that describe how the students' performance will be scored or graded).

MATHEMATICS EXAMPLE	To focus and direct learning, you need:		
	Content outcome	Conditions	Criteria
Teacher's instructional objective for a set of lessons focused on teaching: 3-digit addition with carrying.	Knowledge and/or skills a student should be able to demonstrate	Circumstances under which students will be able to perform	Qualities of performance by which you will know that the student has reached desired level of learning
	The student will be able to solve problems using 3-digit addition with carrying in the ones' place.	Without using calculators or fact charts.	The student will perform with 80 percent accuracy.
Students' learning target for today's lesson on: Introducing carrying.	What am I going to learn?	How will I show what I know?	How will I know how well I am doing—what are my look-fors?
	I am going to be able to use a method called "carrying" so that I know what to do with the 10 under 8+2 or the 12 under 9+3 in problems like these: $\begin{array}{r} 438 \\ +152 \\ \hline \end{array}$ $\begin{array}{r} 219 \\ +363 \\ \hline \end{array}$	I will use a paper and pencil and show my work as I solve the problems.	I can explain and show how to put the carrying marks in the right places as I solve the problems (most of the time). My work will look like this example: $\begin{array}{r} 219 \\ +363 \\ \hline 582 \end{array}$
Students' learning target for another day's lesson on: Practicing for accuracy and proficiency.	I am going to be able to use carrying to solve problems like these accurately and smoothly: $\begin{array}{r} 438 \\ +152 \\ \hline \end{array}$ $\begin{array}{r} 219 \\ +363 \\ \hline \end{array}$	I will use a paper and pencil and show my work as I solve the problems.	I can put the carrying marks in the right places and use them to get the correct answers (most of the time).
Students' learning target for yet another day's lesson on: Identifying relevant problems.	I am going to be able to write my own story problems that need 3-digit addition with carrying as part of their solution.	I will create stories from my own classroom or home or shopping.	I can write three story problems that need 3-digit addition with carrying as part of their solution [depending on the lesson, may add "and I can solve them correctly"].
COUNTEREXAMPLE: NOT a learning target for today's lesson	I can do 3-digit addition with carrying in the ones' place to solve problems. [NOTE: This is not one lesson-sized chunk, and it is mostly in teacher language, just with an "I can" stuck on at the beginning.]	Without using calculators or fact charts.	I will get at least a B on my quiz. [NOTE: This criterion is about scoring, not showing learning. It is not shared as a student look-for.]

READING EXAMPLE	To focus and direct learning, you need:		
	Content outcome	Conditions	Criteria
Teacher's instructional objective for a set of lessons focused on teaching: The concept of main idea.	Knowledge and/or skills a student should be able to demonstrate The student will be able to identify main idea.	Circumstances under which students will be able to perform In grade-level-appropriate reading passages one paragraph in length.	Qualities of performance by which you will know that the student has reached desired level of learning The student can say, select, or write the main idea of a passage with 80 percent accuracy.
	What am I going to learn? I will learn that a main idea is the most important thing the writer of a paragraph is trying to tell me.	How will I show what I know? I will read paragraphs and choose the main idea for each paragraph from a list.	How will I know how well I am doing—what are my look-fors? I can choose the right main idea and explain why it was more important than the other choices.
Students' learning target for today's lesson on: Identifying the main idea of a paragraph.	I will learn to answer the question "What does the writer say is the main idea?" in one sentence.	I will read paragraphs and look for main ideas that the author has stated. I will usually find these in the topic sentence.	I can restate the paragraph's main idea in my own words, in one sentence.
	I will learn to answer the question "What is the writer trying to tell me?" in one sentence.	I will read a paragraph, think about how all the details in the paragraph are related, and describe what the paragraph as a whole is trying to say.	I can summarize the paragraph's main idea in my own words, in one sentence.
COUNTEREXAMPLE: NOT a learning target for today's lesson	I can identify the main idea in a paragraph. [NOTE: This is not one lesson-sized chunk, and it is mostly in teacher language, just with an "I can" stuck on at the beginning.]	I will read a paragraph. [NOTE: This is too general. It is not connected to a specific performance of understanding.]	I will get all of the teacher's main idea questions right. [NOTE: This criterion is about scoring, not showing learning. It is also too general and cannot serve as a student look-for that promotes meaningful self-assessment.]