A GUIDE FOR WRITING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES
FOR STC ANNUAL COURSE CERTIFICATION
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Program is to raise the level of competency of state and local corrections and probation officers. To accomplish this goal, the STC Program provides quality, job-related training. Certification of each course requires clearly stated performance objectives. STC's <u>Policies and Procedures Manual for Training Providers</u> emphasizes performance objectives as a means to enhance the training effort. The following overview is provided to assist those who write course objectives for annual course certification, and is intended only as a summary of the methods involved. For more in-depth information please refer to the publications listed on page 11

FUNCTIONS OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Performance objectives for training courses serve many purposes. For the trainee, objectives provide a focus for the learning. For the instructor, they give direction for course design. For the training officer, performance objectives serve as a basis for dialogue with training providers to ensure that the training will meet the department's needs and to evaluate course effectiveness. For managers, performance objectives allow a better understanding of the training so that the results can be transferred back to the job. For administrators, performance objectives assist in the evaluation of the training investment and serve to justify the link between training and desired job performance. For all others responsible for training, performance objectives may help reduce legal liability associated with inappropriately trained personnel.

DEFINITIONS

Performance objectives describe the desired behavior (the performance), skill or knowledge you want the learner to be able to exhibit before you consider him or her competent. Performance objectives describe the expected outcome of the training at the end of the course, not the anticipated impact of training back on the job.

Performance Objectives

Performance objectives are comprised of three elements: condition, behavior (performance), and criterion. <u>Condition</u> represents the circumstance under which the trainee demonstrates the learning. <u>Behavior</u>

(performance) focuses on the observable activity the trainee demonstrates. <u>Criterion</u> is the level of achievement required. For example:

At the conclusion of the training session, trainees will be able to…

Behavior: will describe
Criterion: at least three major symptoms of alcohol withdrawal
Condition: without reference to the medical screening handbook.

DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

It is easiest to approach the task of writing objectives as a three-step process dealing with each element separately.

Step One: Condition

Describe the condition under which the trainee will be asked to perform the desired behavior. The condition includes materials or information given to the trainees at the time they are tested. Construct the condition which most closely resembles that found on the job. For example, usually there is time to consult a <u>Physician's Desk Reference</u> during a medical screening. There is never time to read the <u>Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Booklet</u> when CPR is required.

Frequently, the condition is introduced by the words "given," "provided," "allowed," or "using." It can also state restrictions. Examples:

> Given a list of references to the Penal Code…
> Using the departmental procedures manual…
> Without receiving any physical assistance…

Step Two: Performance (Behavior)

Isolate the desired behavior or performance. Keep the phrase "able to do" in mind and try to answer the question: **"What should the trainee be able to do as a result of the training?"** Use action verbs in the performance objectives that describe observable behavior, e.g., identify, demonstrate, label, write, explain, describe.

Avoid words that denote internal processes that cannot be observed; e.g., know, understand, learn. (A list of action verbs is located on page 8.)

When selecting the action verb, choose the one that most clearly conveys the instructional intent. For instance, a child abuse recognition class might be described by the following action verbs in a performance objective:
- LABEL blunt trauma marks
- IDENTIFY blunt trauma marks

If the point of the training is to teach the students how to *recognize* bruises, not draw pictures of the bruises on a diagram, the verb IDENTIFY would be the more pertinent verb for this course objective. On the other hand, if the thrust of the training is to teach students how to document child abuse for the future courtroom evidence, the verb LABEL might be the more appropriate choice.

PITFALLS OF CONDITIONS

There are some major pitfalls to avoid when deciding on the conditions:

Skip Obvious Conditions

Sometimes the condition is so obvious it does not need stating; e.g.,
    Given handcuffs, the trainee will handcuff…
    Given the booking form, the trainee will fill it out…
    Given paper and pen…

Don't Use Instructional Process

A common trap to avoid when formulating the condition is to describe the instructional process rather than the condition at the time of testing. For example:

    Given practice role-playing counseling techniques…
    Given practice on the resuscitation doll…

Don't Describe Type of Test

A common trap is to describe the type of test. Merely stating the type of test is distinguished from a well-written condition which describes test information.

NOT RECOMMENDED:	**RECOMMENDED:**
<u>Type</u> of Test	Test <u>information</u>
Given a true-false test…	**Given a diagram of the jail**, the trainee will identify the 5 emergency exits within 60 seconds.
Given multiple choice items…	

Step Three: Criterion

Specify the criterion. As with condition, select the level of achievement closest to that required on the job. Set an acceptable level as the minimum standard, (not perfect or optimal levels – unless that is also the minimum required). Use a reasonable approximation of success with which others in the profession would probably agree.

When describing the criterion, avoid imprecise words. Instead, use words that minimize the possibility of misinterpretation.

Imprecise	**Precise**
• Effective	• All of the following…
• Acceptable	• At least 9 out of 10…
• Properly	• In accordance with…
• Average	• Procedures defined in…

Occasionally, it is impractical to include a criterion that quantifies behavior. For example: "to express four empathic responses during a 30-minute interview." Empathic responses may vary in depth and pertinence. In these cases, either omit the criterion or rework the objective to describe a less qualitative aspect of the course.

REFINING THE OBJECTIVES

Common Errors

There are some common errors to avoid when writing instructional objectives. One error is to describe the instructor's behavior rather than the trainee's.

<u>Example:</u> "Five strategies of self-defense will be presented."

Another fault is to describe the learning process versus the learning product.

Example: "Each trainee will practice CPR on the resuscitator doll for 15 minutes."

Still another pitfall is to describe the course content vs. course intent.

Example: "An Update of Adult and Juvenile Law."

Level of Specificity

Performance objectives should represent the major training accomplishments expected but not to be an all-inclusive list of behaviors for each trainee. The following breakdown illustrates levels of specificity:

- To communicate in writing
- To write a pre-sentence court report
- To construct complete sentences

For a court report writing course, the second level of specificity, to *write a pre-sentence court report*, is the most representative level.

Stay Close to the Action

When practical, write a performance objective that requires the trainee to demonstrate rather than merely identify or describe a behavior. For instance: "Given a cloth and a stick, the trainee will apply a tourniquet to a classmate's leg." Is more compelling evidence of skill attainment than merely, "The trainee will describe how to apply a tourniquet."

Meaningful Performance Objectives

When developing performance objectives, consider their worth. Include need-to-know rather than nice-to-know items. To decide if a performance objective is worthwhile, examine whether the skill described in the performance objective is one that is deemed important to use back on the job. Example:

The trainee will be able to describe the procedure for obtaining Criminal Identification and Information (a CII Report).

The trainee will be able to interpret a CII Report.

It could be argued that to interpret the CII Report, one must be able to obtain it: but, the more meaningful objective is to able to use it. Make sure the goal of the training is linked to an important job task.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND TESTING

Performance objectives and testing go hand-in-hand. Performance bjectives describe outcomes of training; testing measures the outcomes. Testing should be closely linked to the performance objectives.

PEFFORMANCE OBJECTIVES, TESTING AND LIABILITY

Training providers should consider testing for knowledge or skills that are closely linked with potential liability (e.g., false arrests, the wrong physical restraint technique). If failure to properly train is alleged in litigation, well-written performance objectives and test results may substantiate that the trainee was trained in and demonstrated the correct skills at course completion. For further documentation of adequate training, tightly formulated performance objectives with testing are the safest choice.

CONCLUSION

Constructing well-written performance objectives requires practice. As with most other elements of course development, the process itself often leads to a clearer perspective for the developer/instructor and a better learning experience for the trainee. The pay-off is well worth the effort.

APPENDIX

ACTION VERBS

(Examples of behavioral words):

Write	List	Restore
Recite	State	Test
Find	Operate	Identify
Solve	Prepare	Install

Adjust	Translate	Debate
Repeat	Inventory	Discuss
Relate	Categorize	Report
Restate	Review	Plan
Examine	Purpose	Interpret
Compose	Apply	Formulate
Tell	Arrange	Use
Design	Demonstrate	Organize
Employ	Draw	Illustrate
Create	Collect	Sketch
Match	Differentiate	Rate
Express	Answer Orally	Appraise
Explain	Answer in writing	Select
Assign	Locate	Contrast
Repair	Construct	Measure
Remove	Trace	Dramatize
Name	Replace	Manage
Describe in writing	Clean	Schedule
Isolate	Conduct	Distinguish
Ascend	Descend	Revise
Calculate	Assemble	Experiment
Underline	Define	Choose
Record	Recall	Criticize

Inspect	Analyze	Diagram
Set up	Score	
Practice	Compare	
Evaluate	Assess	

CHECKLIST FOR WRITING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

___ Is the language precise and not open to interpretation?

___ Is the condition as close as possible to realistic, on-the-job conditions?

___ Did I describe what the trainee will do vs. what the instructor will do?

___ Are my performance objectives specific and at the appropriate level of competency?

___ Did I write performance objectives that reflect the overall intent and scope of the course?

___ Can I easily write a test item that will measure this objective?

___ Did I describe the learning process instead of the product?

___ Did I describe the course content instead of the performance objective's conditions?

___ Have I structured the performance objectives in a logical sequence?

___ Is the behavior something I can observe or measure at the end of the course?

___ Have I used an action verb? (See list on Page 7)

DON'T USE THESE NON-PERFORMANCE VERBS		
know	be aware of	think
comprehend	learn	have knowledge of
enjoy	really understand	remember
be familiar with	perceive	be acquainted with
understand	sympathize with	develop appreciation
appreciate	grasp significance of	recognize

REFERENCES

The following books are good sources of additional information.

Recommended Reading

Gronlund, Norman, Stating Objectives for Classroom Instruction, The Macmillan Company, NY, 1978

Mager, Robert, Preparing Instructional Objectives, Third Edition, The Center for Effective Performance, Inc, Alanta, GA, 1997

Sullivan, Howard, Teaching for Competence, Teachers College Press, NY, 1983.

Hoffman, Frank, "Training Technology's Next Frontier: On-the-job Performance Objectives," Training, September, 1983

Beich, Elaine, ASTD HAND BOOK for Workplace Learning Professionals, American Society for Training and Development, Danvers, MA, 2008