

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION'S GUIDE TO CREATING LEARNING PLANS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As part of some EE experiences you are expected to create a learning plan which will outline what skills you will enhance and new information you will acquire through your experience. This resource has been created to assist you with developing a meaningful learning plan that will be useful both as you plan and proceed with your experience and as a source of reflection at the end of your experience.

What is a Learning Plan?

Basically, a learning plan identifies where you want to go, how you will get there and how you will know if you are successful. It will help you determine how you will be “different” once you have completed your experience.

A learning plan typically consists of the following items: (1) a number of learning objectives; (2) strategies that will be undertaken to achieve each objective; and, (3) criteria by which you will assess the completion of each objective.

Why Create a Learning Plan?

Creating a learning plan is a way for you to identify, measure, and reflect on what you are gaining through participating in various experiences and activities.

Learning plans can benefit you in several ways:

- * Provide direction and insight as to what you will gain from your experience;
- * Show others that you have considered what you will be gaining from your experience, and that you are serious about the opportunity. (This is especially important when applying for activities through a competitive process as your learning plan can set you apart from other applicants); and,
- * Act as a tool to reflect back on to help articulate skills and achievements in resumes and interviews.

What is a Learning Objective?

A learning objective is a written statement describing achievable goals you want to accomplish and usually contain a verb (action word).

Learning Objectives typically focus in three areas:

Knowledge: acquiring new information

Skill: developing new or existing skills

Personal/Professional: achievements related to your own personal or professional development

For the purpose of learning plans for any Experiential Education activities, we ask that you only refer to knowledge or skill learning goals, but feel free to develop personal/ professional learning objectives for your own purposes outside of your assigned learning plan.

To be effective, learning objectives should be SMART:

Specific:

- * your objective is detailed and straightforward;
- * your objective leads to the results you are striving toward;
- * you avoid words like enjoy, realize, be aware of, etc., as they are more ambiguous; and,
- * you include more concrete words like: demonstrate, implement, produce, express, etc.

Measurable:

- * your objective allows for you to track your progress;
- * you can demonstrate that you will know that a change has occurred; and,
- * where possible, your objective quantifies your goal (e.g. increase fundraising target by 10%).

Achievable:

- * you have the ability to accomplish this objective;
- * you have taken into consideration any limitations/constraints that may exist; and,
- * your objective is appropriately related to what you will be doing during your activity.

Realistic:

- * you have the resources and means to achieve your objective; and,
- * your objective is relevant to you.

Timely:

- * you have stated your time frame for achieving this objective; and,
- * you can achieve your goal within the given time frame.

Here are two examples of SMART learning objectives:

Learning Objective	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Timely
KNOWLEDGE: Identify and describe the benefits of 4 strategies used to create effective written surveys within 1 month of beginning my placement	Identifying/ describing specific strategies used towards the creation of <i>one</i> type of survey	You can list the number of strategies utilized to measure your success	Your job description identifies that you will have access to resources that will enable you to achieve your objective	This objective can be achieved within your specifications (4 strategies within 1 month)	Your timeline is appropriate for the next step identified in your job description - creating a written survey

SKILL: Enhance facilitation skills needed for working with groups for whom English is not a first language	Identifying the <i>type</i> of skill to improve	Can be measured by the effectiveness of communication in and success of the group being facilitated	There are enough opportunities to participate in facilitation for you to be able to see improvement	The organization hosting your placement has agreed to allow you to facilitate discussion groups	The length of your placement is sufficient for this skill to be achieved
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What is a Learning Strategy?

A learning strategy is a plan to meet a specific learning objective. It must be specific and based on what is realistic within your time frame. Normally, you will have more than one strategy to meet a learning objective.

Consider our previous examples:

Learning Objective	Learning Strategies
Identify and describe the benefits of 4 strategies used to create effective written surveys within 1 month of beginning my placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Review literature recommended by supervisor on survey writing. * Arrange a time to discuss strategies and obtain feedback on appropriateness and use with a colleague/supervisor who is currently using surveys as a method of gathering information. * Create a sample survey utilizing specific strategies and gain feedback from supervisor.
Enhance facilitation skills needed for working with groups for whom English is not a first language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Research the demographic of the group I will be working with to gain an understanding of which languages will be represented (talking to staff, reading available resources, internet research, etc.) * Educate myself of cultural communication norms of the individuals who will participate in my group (talking to staff, reading available resources, internet research, etc.) * Talk to staff and volunteers with more experience to gain insight into effective facilitation methods used in past * Request that another staff or volunteer with more experience sit in on my session so as to provide feedback after the session * Review written tools and handbooks to best familiarize myself with the content of the session I will be facilitating

What is the Evaluation/Assessment of the Learning Objective?

The evaluation of the learning objective answers the question, “How do I know that I have achieved this objective?” More specifically, it answers the questions “What do I *now* know?” or “What am I *now* able to do?”

Again, consider our examples:

Learning Objective	Evaluation/Assessment
Identify and describe the benefits of 4 strategies used to create effective written surveys within 1 month of beginning my placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Ability to identify and describe 4 strategies used to create effective surveys and how they are used to a colleague/supervisor* Ability to articulate the effectiveness of these strategies* Ability to provide examples of the use of these strategies in both existing surveys and my own sample surveys
Enhance facilitation skills needed for working with groups for whom English is not a first language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Feedback from other staff or volunteers will be positive/ indicate success* High “participation” rates by group members will indicate an ability to understand the material presented and an interest in engaging in the group* participant feedback on evaluations will be positive* I will feel more confident in facilitating a session with non-English-speaking participants

How is My Supervisor Involved with this Process?

The Experiential Education activity you are completing your learning plan for will determine how it is reviewed. If it is for an internship, you should sit down with your supervisor and review your first draft. This discussion may result in changing and/or defining new objectives, learning strategies, or methods of assessment. For other EE activities such as Student Experience Grants or USRA, we recommend that your faculty supervisor or mentor review your learning plan before you finalize it.

Sample Learning Plan Practice Chart: (not for submission purposes)

Name: _____ Supervisor: _____

Project/Position Title: _____

Learning Objective (What do I intend to learn?)	Strategies and Resources (How can I best learn this? What resources are available?)	Criteria for Evaluation (How will my goal be assessed?)

(Adapted from Centre for Teaching and Learning, University College Dublin, from November 2007)