

Feedback on the Learning-Objective Quiz

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Feedback is provided after each question. The best answers are shown in bold.

1. Juno is an instructional designer for Saturn Fiberoptiks. She is known for her brilliant elearning programs, but has been challenged recently by one of her younger colleagues about how to utilize learning objectives. Which of the following types of learning objectives--those presented to learners--will create the best learning results?

- Objectives include specifics on the desired performance, conditions, and criteria.
- Objectives are written in a conversational tone that engages learners.
- Objectives are worded to include salient words to be encountered in the learning.**
- Objectives include job-relevant descriptions of task specifics.

Feedback:

The research shows that learning objectives work when they are written using the same words that learners will encounter during the learning. They are much less effective—or are not at all effective—when they are written in language that is too general to guide attention.

A learning objective that says, *“You will learn how to champion change,”* is unlikely to produce any benefits at all. A learning objective that is more specific, for example, *“You will learn how to utilize the Delta-Dawn four-step change process”* is much more likely to help guide learner attention toward those aspects of the learning material that are relevant. Of course, a stronger attention-guiding effect would likely arise from a focusing objective that is even more specific, for example, *“You will learn that the first step of the Delta-Dawn four-step change process—‘Surveying the Swamp’—is critical to help you ensure that all stakeholders are included.”*

2. You've just been hired as the new chief learning officer with Ripley-Bion Bank. As you peruse your new direct reports training methods, you note that they utilize learning objectives in a manner you hadn't seen before. What they do is present learning objectives before each topic area, not just at the beginning of the day. Moreover, they ask learners to rate each objective on its relevance to their current job. You aren't sure whether to be impressed or worried. What is your best course of action? You can choose more than one option.

- Tell your new direct reports that you're impressed with the way they encourage learners to engage with the learning objectives.**
- Tell your new direct reports that you're concerned that learners are spending too much time focusing on learning objectives.
- Tell your new direct reports that you like the way they ensure that the learning objectives will be relatively accessible in long-term memory.**
- Tell your new direct reports that learning objectives are not as effective in supporting learning as once thought.

Feedback:

Focusing objectives—the kind presented to learners—work by being accessible in long-term memory. Presenting them in the beginning of the day may work in the morning, but by afternoon the memory traces will have faded. Thus, it's a nice innovation to present learners with objectives before each topic—as long as they don't get bored with them. In this case, your new colleagues are utilizing a reasonable method to get learners to actually engage the learning objectives, by having them rate the relevance of each objective.

3. One day, Khalid, your coworker, just snapped. "I'm tired of using these silly learning objectives. I refuse to put them into any more of our learning programs. We can replace them all with other learning methods." You decide to sneak Khalid out of the office to watch Clint Eastwood's war movie American Sniper to calm him down. It works. Afterwards, both of you sit down over hot chocolate and decide whether it's okay to stop presenting your learners with learning objectives. Is it okay or not? What's the best way to think about these types of learning objectives?

- Learning objectives should almost always be presented to learners before learning.
- Learning objectives are useful, but they can be replaced with other learning methods.**
- Learning objectives are not useful, and can be replaced with other learning methods.
- Learning objectives are often harmful when presented to learners before learning.

Feedback:

The research shows clearly that learning objectives can provide benefits. Well-written focusing objectives can guide learner attention toward critical learning concepts. On the other hand, since we know that focusing objectives primary purpose is to guide attention, it should be obvious that we can also utilize other methods to guide attention. Indeed, learners need variety. Forcing them to always process learning objectives is just bad design.

4. Suppose you and your team crafted an extremely well-conceived and well-written set of learning objectives. Who should you share these learning objectives with?

- Learners AND learning-design team members.
- Learners only.
- Learning-design team members only.
- Another answer would be better than these options.**

Feedback:

Since most learning teams write one set of objectives for everyone—learners, learning designers, trainers, organizational leaders—the scenario above is typical of the real world. Unfortunately, it’s also a major problem in creating faulty guidance to one of our stakeholder groups or another. It often doesn’t make sense to have one set of objectives to guide the dissimilar behaviors of different parties.

The best thing to do here is to first decide what learning objectives are appropriate for each different audience. For our learners, we might want focusing objectives to help guide learner attention. For our design team, we might want (a) evaluation objectives (to know how we would hold ourselves accountable), (b) performance objectives (to clarify the end-state performance desired), (c) situation objectives (to guide us to create learning that aligns with specific workplace contexts and cues), etc.

5. Jessej and her team have created a new elearning course that covers three topics. For each topic they've created six focusing objectives (learning objectives presented to learners). 18 learning objectives in all. Unfortunately, her boss tells her she's only allowed to utilize up to six learning objectives. What would you recommend that Jessej do?

- Abstract the key concepts into broader learning objectives to reach six objectives.
- Advocate for the benefits of utilizing all 18 learning objectives--show the research.**
- Utilize the top two most important learning objectives for each of the three topics.**

Feedback:

Of course Jessej should try to advocate, but I've chosen to highlight the third answer as the next best alternative. The main point of this question is to emphasize that it is not acceptable to utilize broadly-worded learning objectives because they simply won't be effective!

6. While Jessey was right to advocate for more specifically-worded objectives, she lost her battle and now has to choose six learning objectives from only one of the topics--Topic A. Yes, her boss is punishing her, which is tragic, but another story....So, given that Jessey is presenting six focusing objectives on Topic A, but none on Topics B and C, what is the most likely result--in comparison with not using any objectives at all?

- Learners will learn MORE of Topic A, but LESS on Topics B and C (than they would if they were given no objectives).**
- Learners will learn MORE of Topic A, but will learn ABOUT THE SAME amount on Topics B and C as they would have had they received no objectives.
- Learners will learn MORE from all the topics, A, B, and C (compared to not getting any objectives).
- Learners will learn LESS on all the topics combined (compared to not getting any objectives).

Feedback:

Well-designed learning objectives are double-edged swords. They help learners learn more about the information targeted by the objectives. They also hurt learners in learning the information in the learning material not targeted by the learning objectives.

Two critical design implications arise from this finding. First, it is critical to prioritize learning objectives to the most critical information. Don't even think about covering every learning point with a focusing objective; you'll quickly have more objectives than your learners will tolerate.

Second, realize that focusing objectives, on their own, cannot do the whole job in guiding learner attention. We need to utilize other attention-guiding learning methods as well.

7. What other ways can you guide learner attention?

Feedback:

Remember, learners attention wanders. Sometimes our learners will be completely riveted to what we're saying. Sometimes they'll be off daydreaming. This is normal. Our goal is not necessarily maximum attention all the time. Attention is exhausting! Instead, we'd like to ensure that learners pay attention when it's really important.

Of course, there are many ways to guide learner attention. Here's a short list:

1. Tell or hint to the learners about when to pay particularly close attention.
2. In visual communications, use white space to make the words pop out.
3. Use headings, bold, italics or other highlighting mechanisms.
4. Use appropriate animations.
5. Repeat concepts—not verbatim—to send a signal about what's important.
6. Use relevant tasks and examples.
7. Provide decision-making practice.
8. Et cetera.