

Building Learning Objectives and SMART Goals

To be useful, learning objectives should be SMART:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Results-Focused
Time-Focused

Learning objectives focus your learning on specific areas and can help you maximize your time spent in an internship. Further, discussing your learning goals with your supervisor helps to ensure that you will spend your time productively during the internship and that all parties involved are aware of the learning you are trying to achieve.

What are learning objectives?

Learning objectives can fall into the following categories:

- **Knowledge or Skills Acquisition:** Knowledge or skills you hope to acquire during the internship such as learning to use appropriate procedures, equipment, or methods.
- **Personal/Professional:** Skills you hope to apply or cultivate such as interpersonal skills, professional meeting/email/telephone etiquette, networking, written communication, relationships with supervisors, presentation skills, etc.
- **Career Knowledge:** Gaining new information regarding the company, the industry, or job duties. A specific training on an area in your industry may be another addition.
- **Other:** Depending on the internship, there may be additional categories of learning objectives.

Consider your field of choice and the critical knowledge/skills you would like to obtain. You will also need to check in for specific learning requirements from your Department.

Steps to writing learning objectives:

For each objective, answer the following three questions:

1. *What do you want to accomplish?*
2. *How are you going to accomplish it? (What steps will you take to accomplish your objective? What activities will you do? How will you acquire the learning? Under what conditions will the learning occur?)*
3. *How you will measure your objective? (What evidence will you have to demonstrate that learning has taken place? What criteria will be used to evaluate your evidence? Who will do the evaluation?)*

It may be helpful to connect with your internship supervisor to create these SMART goals.

SMART Learning Objectives

In each case below, the same objective is stated in two different ways. In the "Vague" description, the objective is either too general or not sufficiently measurable. In the "Specific" example, the same objective has been stated SMARTly (in a manner that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-focused, and Time-focused).

| OBJECTIVE TYPE | VAGUE | SPECIFIC |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Skills Acquisition | I will learn how to troubleshoot IT issues for my company. | By December 15th, I will be able to troubleshoot office software, including Microsoft Word and Excel, over the telephone with less than 3% error rate. |
| Skills Acquisition | I will evaluate the effectiveness of my organization's marketing. | By March 12th, I will develop, distribute, gather, evaluate, and report on a customer survey related to my organization's marketing. |
| Knowledge Acquisition | I would like to know more about the chemical make-up of common drugs used in the hospital. | By the middle of my internship, I will list the 40 common medications I observe being used by referring to patients' charts, then research their chemical composition, and record this data in my database. |
| Personal / Professional | I want to learn how to deal with irritable customers. | I will develop four different responsive conversation techniques and briefly describe each in my log. I will record reactions of customers to these techniques and report by May 28. |
| Career Knowledge | I want to better understand the hospitality industry. | By the end of the internship, I will have interviewed a professional who has been in the hospitality industry at least four years and ask them about typical career paths, job duties, professional associations, and ways to advance one's career in this industry. |
| Skills Acquisition | I want to assist some children to learn a new skill. | By the middle of my internship, I will have taught a group of ten children ball throwing athletic skills. The children will demonstrate their skills by achieving at least a minimum score which I will determine as a proficiency level. |