

Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Learning intentions describe what learners are expected to understand, know or be able to do through a learning episode. Success criteria make the relevant features of successful performance visible. Together they orient teaching, learner activity, self-monitoring and feedback towards a shared educational purpose.

Posting an objective and a checklist is insufficient. Learners need to understand the intention and develop a usable conception of quality through explanation, questions, exemplars, comparison and sometimes co-construction. Criteria should clarify quality without reducing complex work to disconnected boxes ([Wiliam, 2011](#)).

Design and Use

1. **State the learning:** Express the intended understanding or performance, not merely the activity to complete.
2. **Identify quality:** Describe observable and relevant features that would indicate successful learning.
3. **Develop meaning:** Use contrasting exemplars, modelling and dialogue so language becomes intelligible.
4. **Guide evidence:** Align questions, activities, self-assessment and feedback with intention and criteria.
5. **Revisit:** Ask learners to monitor progress, explain evidence and adjust their approach.

Examples in Practice

For a policy briefing, the intention is to evaluate competing evidence for a defined audience. Students compare two briefings and derive criteria concerning synthesis, justification, uncertainty and accessibility; they then use these during drafting and peer review.

Why It Matters

Shared intentions and criteria reduce avoidable ambiguity and support learner agency. Yet excessive specification can encourage compliance rather than judgement. Educators should preserve space for legitimate variation, disciplinary interpretation and qualities that are better understood through exemplars than exhaustive wording. The intention may remain stable while criteria evolve as learners encounter sophisticated examples and disciplinary expectations ([Black & Wiliam, 2009](#)).

Further Reading

6. Wiliam, D. (2011). [Embedded formative assessment](#). Solution Tree Press.
7. Moss, C. M., & Brookhart, S. M. (2012). [Learning targets: Helping students aim for understanding in today's lesson](#). ASCD.
8. Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). [Developing the theory of formative assessment](#). Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 21(1), 5–31.

Related Terms: Constructive Alignment | Rubrics | Formative Assessment | Evaluative Judgement