

DEFINITION

A written learning guide that describes the intended performance outcomes (what), suggests learning activities or strategies (how), and designates assessment requirements (when). A learning plan addresses one or more competencies and the related outcomes; it is written to the learners. There may be multiple learning plans within a given course, project, or learning experience.

Learning plans help your learners navigate through the learning process. A learning plan links what learners will learn with how they will learn and when they will know they have achieved competence. When you develop learning plans, you provide your learners with a handbook for learning. A single learning plan addresses one or more competencies and/or outcomes. There may be multiple learning plans within a given course or learning experience.

USES OF LEARNING PLANS

Learning plans are handy tools to be used in several ways.

- You might incorporate learning plans into a study guide for learners to purchase or receive at the beginning of a course.
- Learning plans are also useful if a learner misses a class meeting, falls behind, or wants to work ahead.
- You can post your learning plan online either in an online course or as a companion to a face-to-face course.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

We represent the learning process as a cycle. There are four major stages: motivation, comprehension, practice, and application. Each stage supports one or more of the five thinking processes: attention, encoding, rehearsal, retrieval, and metacognition. When you select the learning activities for a learning plan, choose activities that provide a framework for guiding learners all the way through the cycle.

Motivation

At the motivation stage you facilitate the attention process by inspiring learners to learn and answering the question, "Why do I want to learn this information or skill?"

Comprehension

During the comprehension stage you facilitate encoding and processing in the working memory by clarifying performance expectations and helping learners access the information they need to perform the target competency.

Practice

In the practice stage you need to provide guided practice—elaborative rehearsal, giving feedback to facilitate encoding to long-term memory.

CHECKLIST

- ✓ Learning plan addresses 1–3 related competencies
- ✓ Learning plan includes a title and overview or introduction
- ✓ Learning plan includes a series of learning activities that help learners master the competency or group of related competencies
- ✓ Learning activities begin with an action verb
- ✓ Learning activities support the learning cycle (motivate, comprehend, practice, apply)
- ✓ Learning activities are varied and require active learner involvement
- ✓ Learning activities address all of the learning objectives
- ✓ Learning plan includes assessment activities

Application

Finally, at the application stage, foster retrieval from the long-term memory to enable working memory processing on demand. During the application stage learners need to show that they can apply what they have learned to real world problems and decision-making. It is during the application stage that you build in assessment.

When you design learning plans, try to move learners through the complete learning cycle: motivation, comprehension, practice, and application. However, learners need to swing back and forth between the comprehension and practice stages before moving on to application. By doing this you help them avoid cognitive overload by chunking the learning into manageable pieces and punctuating it with frequent practice.

SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- _____ 1. LOCATE your residence using a plat book.
- _____ 2. COMPLETE the "Land Measurement" activity provided by your instructor.
- _____ 3. PARTICIPATE in a discussion on the soil surveys and plat maps.

ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Assessment activities specify for learners what they must complete in order to demonstrate achievement of the competencies. A learning plan may have more than one assessment activity. You can direct learners to both homework assignments as well as major assessments.

Begin your assessment activity with a verb such as: complete, submit, produce, hand in, arrange with the instructor, make sure you have, etc. The statement may direct learners to a more complete assignment sheet or performance assessment task.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

- _____ 1. SUBMIT your completed "Soil Survey" to your instructor for evaluation.
- _____ 2. ARRANGE with the instructor to obtain a check-off on the venipuncture lab.

TEACHING NOTES

Teaching notes are created to help the instructor facilitate the activities in the learning plan. While the learning plan is designed for the learner, the teaching notes are designed for the instructor.