Learning Outcomes

At Roanoke College, all syllabi require student learning outcomes. Most courses use 3-6 LOs. Courses taught in multiple sections normally share common learning outcomes. Check with your department if you are teaching such a course. INQ courses have established common learning outcomes that can be found on the Guidelines for each course available at <https://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/academic_affairs/faculty_information/course_proposals_and_syllabi>

Course learning outcomes can help you and your students articulate what is truly important in a course. If you have a well written set of outcomes, you should be able to use them throughout the semester to remind students why they are doing certain assignments, how the readings hold together, etc. When you design a new course, start with learning outcomes and build readings and assignments to support them.

Learning outcomes are statements describing what students should know or be able to do by the end of a course or upon completion of a program. These statements need to be specific and measurable outcomes of the students’ experiences in the course. They should represent core content knowledge or abilities that will be present in successful students. Well-written learning outcomes should be stated simply and use active verbs. They can focus on simple or complex intellectual tasks. Learning outcomes follow a standard format: “Students will be able to . . .” and then articulate

* How students demonstrate knowledge
* What students should be able to do

Some well-worded learning outcomes

Students will be able to

* Deliver an effective oral presentation using PowerPoint.
* Identify reliable sources and use them to write a well-organized, cohesive research paper.
* Assign selected musical works to their appropriate eras and explain on what bases these assignments were made.
* Compare and contrast the platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties.
* Explain the theoretical bases of various dramatic genres and illustrate them with examples from plays of different eras.
* Articulate the value of listening to disparate opinions on the topic of gun control.

Phrasing to avoid  
Don’t use vague or unmeasurable verbs such as students will be able to

* Appreciate modern art.
* Enjoy a variety of musical genres
* Learn the phases of mitosis
* Know how physical properties are determined by molecular structure
* Understand the cultural context of . . .

If you find these tempting, ask yourself how you will know that students do these things. Use the new verb that describes how students demonstrate these abilities for a better learning outcome.