

## Job Aid for Writing Exercise Objectives

Objectives are a critical part of exercise design, execution, and evaluation. This job aid highlights key information about writing exercise objectives, but does not cover every detail. Please contact HSEM [Training](#) and [Exercise](#) staff for further assistance.

### What is an exercise objective?

An exercise objective is a written description of the performance expected from exercise players to demonstrate competence.

#### ***Discussion-based and Operations-based exercise objectives***

- Discussion-based exercise objectives for seminars, workshops, tabletop exercises and games usually focus on *familiarizing* players with (or *developing* new) plans, policies, procedures and agreements.
- Operations-based exercise objectives for drills, functional and full-scale exercises usually focus on *testing* and *validating* plans, policies, procedures, and agreements. The exercise objectives help clarify roles and responsibilities and identify resource gaps.

### How are exercise objectives written?

There are many methods for writing exercise objectives; the process below highlights some common approaches.

#### ***Break it down***

**Three steps** make it easier to accomplish objective writing:

1. Choose a *Core Capability* to evaluate
2. Break it into *desired outcomes*
3. Set *target tasks* to achieve the desired outcome

#### ***Example:***

“Within 15 minutes after the evacuation notice is given, the Local Communicator in the EOC will complete notification procedures to school administrators per the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).”

In the example, the chosen *Core Capability* is Operational Communications. The *desired outcome* is timely notification. The *target tasks* indicate what needs to get done for timely notification to happen.

#### ***Make it clear***

**Four characteristics** make the intent of the objective clear. The example shows *who* should do *what* under *what conditions* and according to *what standards*:

1. *Who?* The Local Communicator in the EOC
2. *Should do what?* Complete notification procedures to school administrators
3. *Under what conditions?* After evacuation notice is given
4. *According to what standards?* Within 15 minutes

### ***Make it SMART***

**SMART** stands for:

- **S**pecific — Who, what, where, when, why
- **M**easurable — Quantity or quality of actions or outcomes
- **A**chievable — Within the control, influence and resources of exercise play and participant actions
- **R**elevant — Does it make sense? Does it follow capabilities-based planning?
- **T**ime-Bound, *Task Oriented* — Must be achievable and have a clearly defined timeframe; must be clear tasks that are readily identifiable

Each SMART element is fulfilled in the example objective:

*Example:*

“Within 15 minutes after the evacuation notice is given, the Local Communicator in the EOC will complete notification procedures to school administrators per the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).” (Core Capability: Operational Communications)

- **S**pecific — *Who?* The Local Communicator  
*Where?* In the EOC  
*What?* Will complete notification procedures  
*When?* Within 15 minutes after the evacuation order is given  
*Why?* Per the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)
- **M**easurable — Notification procedures are in the EOP and can be checked off (measured) as they are completed.
- **A**chievable — Per the EOP, the completion of notification is an assigned duty for the Local Communicator. This means it is within the Local Communicator’s control, the actions are expected, and the resources to complete the task are available in the EOC.
- **R**elevant — The objective was based on a communications task under the Core Capability of Operational Communications.
- **T**ime Bound, *Task Oriented* — The objective sets a time frame for completion and a parameter for when to do the task (within 15 minutes after the evacuation notice is given). It is also task oriented: “...will complete notification procedures...”

### ***Choose words that clarify***

Use concrete words that ensure objectives are clear and unambiguous. Pay particular attention to the verbs that describe participant performance.

*Use action words* such as assess, clarify, define, determine, demonstrate, establish, evaluate, examine, explain, identify, inspect, list, notify, operate, prepare, record, report, show and test.

*Avoid vague verbs* and phrases such as know, understand, appreciate, show the ability to and be aware of.