



# Teaching Toolkit

---

Learning Outcomes

---

Author: Paul Surgenor

Email: [paul.surgenor@ucd.ie](mailto:paul.surgenor@ucd.ie)

Date: January 2010

## Learning Outcomes

A learning outcome is a statement of what the learner should know and, more importantly, be able to do to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, skills and/or competences at the end of a module or programme. Since the roots of our outcomes-based curriculum are behavioural, the effects of learning should be physically and objectively discernible.

Learning outcomes should therefore be expressed using verbs that specify exactly what the student will be able to do to demonstrate their mastery of the skills or materials. Learning outcomes generally begin with:

*If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes... It is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does.*

*(Shuell, 1986, p429)*

*"On completion of this [module/programme] students will be able to..."*

Biggs (2009) reported that learning outcomes should refer not only to content to be learned but also what's to be done with that content, and to what standards. They should be:

- Statements of what students are expected to be able to do after studying a module or programme
- Expressed from the students' perspective
- Expressed in the form of action verbs leading to observable and assessable behaviour
- Related to criteria for assessing student performance

Curriculum design is subsequently tailored to ensure that these outcomes are directly addressed and developed through the module or programme through the process of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2002).

Outcomes should also address a variety of cognitive levels, ensuring that students are required to exceed basic recall and comprehension to more complex activities such as integration and evaluation. A list of verbs and assessment activities that can help with this is presented in Figure 1.

## Learning Outcomes Checklist



*Does each begin with an action verb?*



*Have they been stated in observable and measurable terms?*



*Are words such as “know”, “understand” avoided?*



*Do they address of variety of cognitive levels?*



*Are outcomes at the appropriate level?*



*Do all the outcomes fit within the aims and content of the module?*



*Are they realistic and achievable in context?*

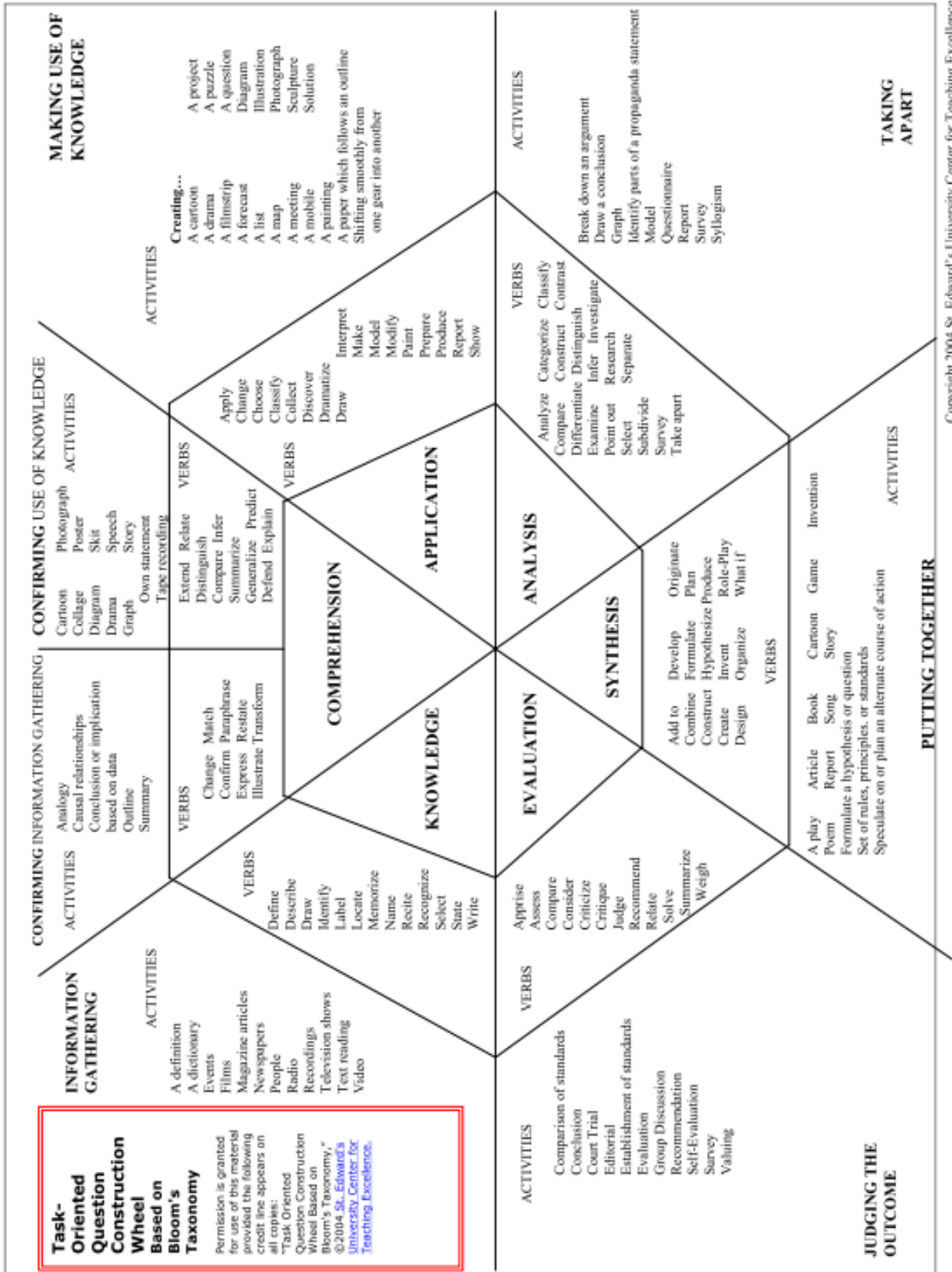


*Are they clear to staff and students?*



*Do they align with the programme outcomes?*

**Figure 1: Verbs and Assessment activities for Varying Cognitive Levels**



Copyright 2004 St. Edward's University Center for Teaching Excellence