

# Goals, objectives, outcomes, purpose, and success (GOOPS)

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When considering the development of your online course there are some key terms to understand for yourself: goals, objectives, outcomes, purpose, and success (GOOPS). It is important to start by clearly defining each term and giving the relationship between them.

## Goal

The first two terms are often thought of together and may seem identical to many people. *Goal* is the overarching destination toward which an endeavor is directed. It is where you are trying to go or the end that you hope to reach.

## Objective

Next is the term *objectives*, which are the smaller sub-goals that are set and worked towards in order to help attain the overall goal. In turn, if the smaller tasks become the context being examined, then the objectives become the goal of those smaller projects that are intended to help achieve the main overall mission that was set by the individual or group. It is how you are going to get to your final destination or the steps and milestones along the path you are traveling. For some people, objectives are larger than goals and so goals become the steps along the path. Though either can work, for this text we will assume goals are larger aims than objectives

## Outcome

The third term is *outcome*, which is the result of an undertaking. If the goal is attained, the outcomes will be what has been produced or accomplished. The outcome is what happened when the task was attempted.

## Purpose

The final term is *purpose*, which is the reason behind the undertaking and the motivation for undertaking the task. It is why you are working towards the goal and the objectives. Creating the outcomes is often the purpose of an endeavor and thus the focus of the goals and by examining the outcomes it is possible to gain insight into the purpose of the process being examined.

You might think of the goal as answering the questions, who is going where and when to obtain what? The objectives are how you want to reach the goal. The outcome is what happens when you try. Purpose is why you did it. Though we know the definitions, it is important to highlight the distinctions that are drawn and realize distinctions may be a matter of preference or convention. A goal may be thought of as a larger scope than an objective. Not everyone would agree but some choice must be made. Another distinction is that goals are planned actions while outcomes are the results of actual tasks that have been undertaken.

## Examples

To help better understand how these words are used and related, let us look at an example. Imagine you look at your watch and see it is nearing lunchtime. You decide to go to the local market and buy something to eat. You can set the goal of purchasing something to eat at your local market. Some objectives that help get you to the store might be getting dressed, driving to the store, deciding what to purchase, and actually buying lunch.

The purpose of buying lunch could be that you are hungry or perhaps just want to pass the time by shopping. Finally, the outcome of this endeavor will be actually having some food for lunch. If the intention was to get food for lunch, no matter the reason why or how it is to be accomplished, the outcome of having food or not is how the effectiveness is going to be judged. If the goal is reached, the undertaking was successful. How successful is another matter, however.

If the goal was changed, the other terms might change as well. If your goal was to get food, you might not go to the store at all. Your objectives might be to find food, raise money, cook, or something else. Knowing these terms can assist while working through the process as it will assist the curriculum-maker to be clearer about the various aspects of the process being undertaken.

## Consider assignments given in class.

If the measure of the goal were simply completing the task assigned, the outcome to be measured would just be if something were submitted. If something were submitted, full credit would be given. Usually, this is not how it works. Many smaller objectives are set as part of the overall process of an assignment. The larger and more important an assignment is, often the greater the number of objectives that are included. A homework assignment may only require a set of problems to be completed or a short summary submitted. Larger assignments have other specifications, such as research to be cited, format to be followed, etc. In these cases, the measure of the outcome cannot be simply “yes” or “no.”

The outcome is graded on a scale that moves from A to F. Would it be fair for the teacher to grade everyone who was not as perfect as having failed? This question is related to the purpose of the assignment. Homework, tests, and other assignments are given for varying purposes. Hopefully, everything is done as a way to increase learning and the overarching aim is to educate. However, the grading is both a way for the teacher to measure how far one has come as well as inform students how the teacher sees their progress.

Knowing the purpose of an assignment along with a clear understanding of the goals and objectives helps everyone involved match outcomes with the desired goals. Many times, not everyone shares the goal and this can lead to problems. If students and teachers are working with different sets of goals and objectives, or they have a different idea of the purpose of an endeavor, the entire process may not attain the desired outcome.

## Success

This brings us to the term *success*. For many, the idea of success is a measure of outcomes compared with goals. If the goal matches the outcome then the task is successful. However, this may not be true. For others, if the purposes are met partially or completely, then the task was successful. A problem might arise when the task is judged and depends on who oversees the measuring process. Many people would most likely not wish to be judged on the all-or-nothing measure of success that the first situation presents and would also dislike the highly subjective nature of the second. A third option is to measure success by how many objectives are met and how well each is accomplished.

## Disclaimer

All of this may be oversimplified, but at the heart of the idea of success is the fact that someone will be measuring actions taken in a specific situation and judging if it meets the criteria determined to be that of a successful outcome.

## Citation

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