A Guide for Effective Learning Targets

Effective learning targets guide instruction and learning for a single classroom lesson (approximately one hour). When designed well, learning targets

- focus on appropriate content/grade level standards from the common core, college readiness or core content (for science and social studies),
- use student friendly language and
- include measurable objectives that anchor instructional activities/formative assessment.

The learning targets below have been annotated to demonstrate varying degrees of effectiveness and to provide additional guidance to secondary teachers as they develop and refine learning targets for their students.

Sample Target #1: Ineffective *
Course: Advanced English 10
Target(s): Be able to identify the adverbs in the sentences.
Be able to discuss the main characters in Night.

While the two targets above are certainly doable in a single class period, neither offers specific guidance to students regarding what significant concepts will be learned and practiced in class. The phrases “identify adverbs” and “discuss the main characters” lack specificity and do not link directly to any appropriate grade level standard. The phrases “be able to” and “discuss the main characters” are not measurable objectives for students.

Sample Target #2: Somewhat Effective*
Course: English 11
Targets: I can identify correct noun-pronoun-verb agreement.
I can identify major conflicts in Act 2 of The Crucible & their relationship to the plot.

These two targets offer a clearer indication of what is to be learned in class than sample target 1. Here, the teacher has narrowed the focus for students to a portion of a text (Act 2) and included more specific, standards-based concepts directly in the targets (i.e. “conflict relationship to plot” [KCAS RL3;11-12] and “noun-pronoun-verb agreement” [CRS CU;28-32]). The “I can” phrasing of these targets is also more student-friendly and specific than sample target 1. While sample target 2 includes effective elements, it lacks measurable objectives to assist the student in assessing his/her progress toward the target. To accomplish this, the first goal above could be adjusted to read, “I can identify major conflicts in Act 2 of The Crucible and explain how each conflict impacts the plot using examples from the text.”

Sample Target #3: Effective*
Course: English 9
Target: I can revise sentences to ensure correct subject verb agreement (in compound and complex sentences).
I can explain how the ideas in Kurt Vonnegut’s editorial On Competition in American Society connect to the ideas in his short story, Harrison Bergeron.

These two targets clearly focus on concepts/skills from appropriate standards (KCAS RI3-9-10 and CRS CU 16-19). Each target also provides a measurable objective written in student friendly language (i.e. revise sentences for correct subject verb agreement and explain how ideas connect across two works) that will drive instruction and assessment during the lesson.

* Prior to beginning the lesson, teachers must post the learning target, read it aloud and elicit feedback/questions from students in order to effectively guide and focus instruction.