

# TRANSMITTING YOUR AGENCY'S MISSION TO THE FRONT LINES OF SERVICE DELIVERY:

## Writing Behavioral Measurable Goals and Objectives

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### INTRODUCTION

To an increasing degree, regulatory agencies and funding sources require accountability through measurable outcomes. Approaching this task can be intimidating for human services managers. However, you can learn to write behavioral and measurable goals using a few basic steps. Done correctly, this process can move your agency from “talking the talk” of its mission statement to “walking the walk”. There is powerful evidence for the effectiveness of such goal setting in mobilizing the actions of staff and clients. It can help you and your staff agree on where to begin in meeting new challenges, and how to get feedback on your progress. In short, learning to write behavioral measurable goals and objectives can help you manage your organization effectively in the current competitive, results-oriented culture of human services.

### WRITING IN BEHAVIORAL TERMS

Behavioral terms describe “behaviors”:  
observable actions of a specific actor\*.

1. To be sure that what you describe is observable:
  - a. Make it something you can either:
    - see : e.g., “wear a tie”, “sign ‘hello’ in American Sign Language”, “arrive for a meeting on time”, or...
    - hear: e.g., “speak loudly enough to be heard”, “make an assertive request”, “summarize job experiences”
  - b. Describe the actor saying, doing, or writing something (e.g., “tell his wife how he feels”, “list thoughts that occur after talking to her brother”) to demonstrate things that occur inside his/her head (e.g., the actor thinks, learns, feels, or knows something).
2. To be sure that what you describe is an action:
  - a. Use active verbs (e.g., “walk”, “explain”), not:

θ passive verbs (often involving possessing something, e.g., “receive”, “listen”, “have”, “get”, “keep”)

θ nouns (e.g., “exercise”, “explanation”).

- b. Be sure your description passes the “Dead Person Test”: “If a dead person could appear to be doing it, it’s not an action” (e.g., a dead person can appear to read, attend a meeting, or to act out most passive verbs).

3. Include sufficient detail for a person unfamiliar with the actor or situation to accurately enact the behavior you are describing.

- a. Use descriptive verbs to specify the action:

θ avoid abstract (vague) nouns, e.g., write:

Λ “compliment the client” instead of “provide reinforcement”

Λ “paraphrase her husband’s statements” instead of “use active listening”

Λ “ask questions to guide the client toward solutions” instead of “offer counseling”

θ minimize the use of vague verbs, e.g., write:

Λ “demonstrate” or “review the list of steps” instead of “teach”

Λ “suggest possible resources and solutions” instead of “help”

Λ “state positive expectations and compliment progress” instead of “encourage”

Λ “list” instead of “identify”

Λ “write out” instead of “develop”

- b. Use examples to clarify what you mean.

## WRITING IN MEASURABLE

### TERMS

Measurable terms clearly identify a number which represents the degree to which an actor accomplishes a goal or objective.

1. Decide what you will measure or count to arrive at the number.

- a. Numbers may be:

θ amounts

θ frequencies

θ distances

θ ratios

θ percentages

θ durations

etc.

- b. Choose a goal or objective the status of which can be:

θunambiguously described  
θrealistically monitored  
θconsistently assessed

2. Describe the limits or boundaries of your observations of the action of interest.
- a. Delineate clearly when measurement will take place.  
θstarting when?  
θfor how long? (e.g., what is the deadline for completion of the action)
  - b. For ratios and percentages be sure that the denominator is clearly specified and realistically measurable (e.g., do not state that the actor will do something “75% of the time” without specifying of what time).

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\*“Actor” refers to the person whose actions the goal or objective describes (e.g., a client or staff member).