



## Passing an Exam: A Program Objective?

**Clients participate in my extension program so they can pass an exam to obtain or retain a state license in their field. Can I use 'passing an exam' as a program objective?**

The short answer is **no**.

Here is the rationale. An objective has two functions. One of the primary functions of writing program objectives is to provide direction for developing a program. For instance, look at this objective.

Participants in the food safety program for the elderly will agree that out of the seven inappropriate safety practices discussed in the program on how to thaw foods safely, they will agree to eliminate at least one inappropriate safety practice within two weeks after the program.

The above objective fulfills this function because it clearly delimits what the instructor will teach, how to thaw foods safely, as opposed to say, food safety in general or how to cool or cook foods safely. An objective can also provide guidance for the preparation of instructional materials or class activities.

The above objective fulfills a second function. It indicates the quality of the performance that the client needs to achieve in order for the program to be considered a success. In contrast, look at a program objective that includes passing an exam, such as

Participants in the pesticide education program will pass the state license exam within two months of the extension program.

Even though this objective sets a criteria of passing the exam, it does not describe what the client has to do to achieve the pass i.e., the quality of the performance. Additionally, this objective does not delimit the subject matter content that the instructor needs to include in order to be able to teach the content necessary for participants to pass the exam.

Further discussion can be found in: Mager, R. F. *Preparing Instructional Objectives*. Rev'd Second Edition. Pitman Learning, Inc. Belmont, CA. 1984.

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