

## What Are SLOs?

The first step in the assessment cycle is for faculty to create assessable student learning outcomes. More specifically, they establish program learning outcomes for the programs their department houses during the first step of the assessment cycle and course learning outcomes for each program's required classes during the second step.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) is a generic term that refers to what students should know or be able to do upon the successful completion of:

- A course, also known as Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)
- A major, also known as Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)
- A degree, also known as Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)



Every SLO has a “hook” and “ladder.” The “hook” is an SLO’s introductory phrase. It can be any variation on this: “Students who successfully complete [name the learning unit] should be able to do the following:” Here are some examples: “Upon the successful completion of Philosophy 100, students should be able to demonstrate the following:”; “Graduates with a major in Computer Engineering will be expected to do the following:”; “Those who earn an undergraduate degree at EWU should have the following abilities:”.

The “ladder” is the list of skills and knowledge that students need to demonstrate to pass the course, complete the academic program successfully, or graduate. (The term “ladder” isn’t meant to imply a hierarchy or progression of skills; it’s just a term chosen as a visual reminder of a bullet-pointed list.) For the hook “Students graduating with a major in English should be able to do the following,” the ladder could be:



- Identify important literary periods
- Identify major writers
- Closely analyze literary texts using appropriate literary and critical vocabulary
- Synthesize theoretical knowledge to produce original written interpretations of literary texts
- Appropriately employ pertinent secondary sources in writing
- Demonstrate effective communication skills in academic, professional, or creative writing

Please note that program learning outcomes are sometimes confused with program outcomes. Program *learning* outcomes, as the name implies, specify the skills and knowledge the students will demonstrate at the end of the program. Program outcomes, by contrast, are the benefits that are expected to accrue to students as a result of graduating from the program. These include benefits such as the likelihood of obtaining employment in the field, getting accepted into a graduate program in the discipline, and passing a licensing exam in the profession.