

APPENDIX 3A

VERBS COMMONLY MISUSED IN DIDACTIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES

IDENTIFY

Used in objectives, "identify" usually means that students have to recognize an object among a group of objects.

Identify is acceptable if the context of the objective indicates how students will identify something. For example, "Given a diagram of the respiratory system, the student will identify the major organs" **is acceptable**. Students will identify the illustration of each major organ on a diagram. "Label" would be more specific in this instance, but identify is acceptable.

"The student will identify the major organs of the respiratory system," on the other hand, **WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE**. It isn't clear in this case whether students are supposed to list the organs, recognize them in an anatomical model or diagram, or pick the names out of a list. The ability that students are demonstrating is different in each case. Listing the major organs indicates that the student has memorized the names of the organs, but may or may not know anything about the relative positions of the structures. Picking the names out of a list merely indicates recognition of the names.

RECOGNIZE

The discussion of the use of "identify" also applies to "recognize."

DESCRIBE

"Describe" is usually vague, and frequently misused. For example, "...describe the major organs of the respiratory system..." raises more questions than it answers regarding student performance. What is supposed to be described? The physical location of the organs? The internal structure?

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Similarly, "...describe the procedure to _____" is not particularly informative. If the intent is to make sure that students know the steps of a procedure, then "...list the steps of the procedure to _____" is a better objective because students are no longer left guessing what exactly needs to be described. Normally, "state," "name," or "list" can be used as more specific verbs than "describe."

"Describe" should be used only when you want students to give you a verbal picture of something. If a verbal picture is necessary, specify the type or limits of the description students are supposed to provide. For example, you might require students to list and describe the layers of the skin in terms of functions and components.

EXPLAIN

"Explain" usually indicates a response to a "why" or "how" question. "Explain the purpose of procedure X" would thus be marginally acceptable. Students are expected to state why a particular procedure is performed. In this particular example, "State the purpose..." would be better because it is more specific.

"Explain the procedure to..." is **NOT ACCEPTABLE** because it isn't clear what students are supposed to explain. If explain is being used as a more formal way of saying "tell me how you would do the procedure" then "list the steps of the procedure to..." would be more appropriate.

As with describe, if you do want students to explain something, make sure that it is clear what the students are to explain. For example, "...explain the relationship between the respiratory and cardiovascular systems in terms of providing oxygen to the brain..." is fairly specific. "Explain the function of the respiratory system..." is not. The function of the respiratory system can be stated fairly simply, but the explanation of that function could be very complex if limits aren't placed on it.