

Content Standards & Learning Goals: What's the difference?

Standard benchmarks—statements of what students should know and be able to do—often describe learning requirements at the level of concepts and processes (which can be somewhat abstract), or at the detailed level of specific facts or skills (which may not clearly link to the larger picture). They do not designate specific curriculum or instructional approaches.

Classroom learning goals—which link content standards to curriculum—have the specificity and precision teachers need to plan classroom teaching, learning activities, and assessments that standard benchmarks alone do not. Through a structured process for writing learning goals, adapted from the work of Rick Stiggins and the Assessment Training Institute, teachers are able to breathe life into standards and connect them to the classroom. Teachers do this by joining the benchmark(s) or portions of the benchmark(s) to specific curriculum. To do this successfully, teachers must have an idea of the curriculum they will use to support students in achieving the learning required by the benchmark.

Learning Goals Checklist

1. The learning goal truly calls for *learning* in the content areas, and not an instructional strategy or merely an activity for students to accomplish.
2. The learning goal includes a large enough portion of the selected benchmarks to be *worth* assessing.
3. The type of learning (knowledge, reasoning, skill, performance/product) identified in the benchmark(s) is the same in the learning goal.
4. The learning goal sentence begins with reference to the benchmark and ends with the reference to the classroom curriculum *if at all possible*.
5. The type of assessment (selected response, extended written response, performance assessment, personal communication, etc.) selected to measure the

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classroom learning goal is appropriate for the type of learning.

6. The evaluative criteria applied to student assessment products align with the kind of learning identified in the learning goal.