

SETTING TARGETS IN STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

USER GUIDE

This document includes guidance about how to set targets during the Student Learning Objective (SLO) process. The pages that follow define terms, delineate different types of targets, and provide insight to help guide educators' decision making. It is intended to support teachers, administrators, and district leaders as they continue to strengthen the SLO process in their varied contexts.

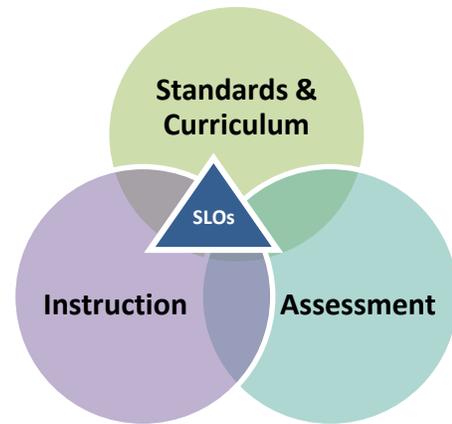
WHAT'S INSIDE

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 2 |
| A Conceptual Understanding of Target-Setting as Part of the SLO Process | 3 |
| What is a target and why is setting one an essential part of the SLO process? | 3 |
| How do you determine targets that are rigorous yet attainable? | 4 |
| <i>What does mastery or proficiency of the relevant course or grade-level standards and curriculum look like?</i> | 4 |
| <i>What amount of progress toward mastery or proficiency represents a year's worth of learning?</i> | 5 |
| <i>What are the implications if students make a year's worth of learning?</i> | 5 |
| The Process of Determining Targets for Student Learning Objectives | 7 |
| Frequently Asked Questions about Target Setting | 9 |
| <i>How do I know what the standard for proficiency should be for a local assessment?</i> | 9 |
| <i>How can there be comparability between local assessments?</i> | 9 |
| <i>Why isn't assigning targets the solution to comparable rigor?</i> | 10 |
| <i>How can I tier targets so that they are rigorous but attainable for all students?</i> | 10 |
| <i>Should I express targets in terms of progress or achievement?</i> | 13 |
| <i>How can I write targets if I include multiple measures?</i> | 15 |
| Resources to Support the Target Setting Process | 19 |



INTRODUCTION

As a goal-setting process, SLOs incorporate the core elements of teaching: they are based on standards & curriculum, their use and results help inform instruction, and they are monitored and measured using assessment. At the intersection of these core elements is strategic data use and SLOs. Through a variety of assessment techniques, teachers constantly use qualitative and quantitative data to monitor student learning and gauge the effectiveness of short and long-term standards-based instruction. The process of setting goals and monitoring progress toward those goals is simply part of strong instructional practice, and participating in goal-setting processes increases the impact an educator has on student learning.



In Rhode Island, educators create SLOs based on long-term learning goals for students. When writing an SLO, teachers ask themselves the following three Essential Questions:

- 1. What are the most important knowledge/skills I want my students to attain by the end of the interval of instruction?**
- 2. Where are my students now (at the beginning of instruction) with respect to the objective?**
- 3. Based on what I know about my students, where do I expect them to be by the end of the interval of instruction and how will they demonstrate their knowledge/skills?**

Once educators have answered the first two essential questions by identifying the Priority of Content and examining baseline data and information they are ready to answer the third essential question and think about where students should be at the end of the interval of instruction (targets) and how they will demonstrate their skills/knowledge (evidence sources).

A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF TARGET-SETTING AS PART OF THE SLO PROCESS

WHAT IS A TARGET AND WHY IS SETTING ONE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE SLO PROCESS?

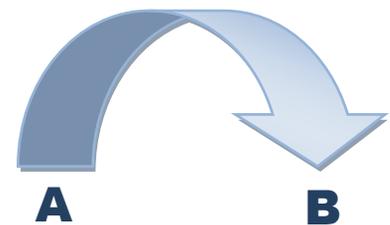
The third essential question prompts educators to articulate the level of content knowledge or skills that are critical for students to develop while in the educator's class; this is the target(s). Writing a target involves defining the level of content knowledge and skills that students will have at the end of the interval of instruction. A target is not simply a test score. A target may be expressed as a score on an assessment but that score must represent a level of performance that reflects students' performance on critical content knowledge and skills. Only after you define the knowledge and skills that students will develop can you find or create the right evidence source to allow students to demonstrate these knowledge and skills, along with defining cut scores, if necessary.

A target is not simply a test score.

Furthermore,

- There must be a target for each student in the class represented by the SLO;
- The target should be measurable; and
- The target should be rigorous yet attainable for the interval of instruction; in most cases, the target should be tiered to reflect students' differing baselines.

At its most basic, target setting for SLOs occurs when educators describe where students are, in regards to the prioritized content knowledge or skills, at the beginning of the interval of instruction (Point A) and then name a goal for where students will be in regards to that knowledge and skills at the end of the interval of instruction (Point B).



One Rhode Island school leader described the SLO process and the act of setting targets as follows: "An SLO is nothing more than a roadmap. We have a destination but there are pits and stops along the way where you pull over and use the map to reflect and to redirect where necessary so that you can get to that destination."

It is important to note that the three elements included in the three essential questions are interconnected.

In order to set rigorous but realistic targets, you need at least a basic idea of where students are starting; that is baseline data. Tool #2 in the *Assessment Toolkit*, along with the accompanying online module, discusses baseline data and information and how it can help with the target-setting process. For a link to the resources, please see page 15.

It is important to note that the elements included (knowledge/skills, baseline data/information, targets and assessments) in the three essential questions are

interconnected; targets are connected to student baseline data/information and also to the assessment an educator is using, all of which is related to the content and skills of the objective statement.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE TARGETS THAT ARE RIGOROUS YET ATTAINABLE?

While setting targets, educators and evaluators are encouraged to consider what is rigorous yet attainable for students. But, educators often ask, “How do you determine what is rigorous and attainable?” Setting targets that are too rigorous so that they are unrealistic hurts students and teachers alike. Conversely, setting targets that are not adequately rigorous can hurt students by lowering the expectations adults have for them and decreasing necessary urgency for significant progress. Finding a middle ground by trying to answer this question directly is rarely fruitful.

Alternatively, educators and evaluators should use the following three questions to guide them as they write, review, and approve SLO targets for students in the educator’s class or course:

- 1. What does mastery or proficiency of the relevant course or grade-level standards or curriculum look like?**
- 2. What amount of progress toward that mastery or proficiency represents a year’s worth of learning?**
- 3. What are the implications if students make a year’s worth of learning?**

Answering the three questions above can be challenging, but it’s a vital task for educators to engage in. Ultimately, it will help educators and districts as they simultaneously write SLOs, develop their comprehensive assessment systems, and work toward larger educational goals. As educators answer these questions they can utilize data from prior SLOs to better evaluate the breadth and depth of content, rigor of target, and student readiness for the next level of instruction.

For additional guidance on answering the three core questions that educators and evaluators should use to help them write, review, and approve SLO targets, see below:

1. WHAT DOES MASTERY OR PROFICIENCY OF THE RELEVANT COURSE OR GRADE-LEVEL STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM LOOK LIKE?

Once the content focus of an SLO has been set, the teacher should think about or, if possible, discuss with colleagues what it would look like for students to demonstrate that learning.

- What would students know and be able to do by the end of the interval of instruction?
- How can students demonstrate what they know and are able to do?

Does the evidence source selected for the SLO allow for them to demonstrate that knowledge and understanding? If so, the next step is to determine the level of performance on that assessment that would indicate basic proficiency by asking, “At what point would the teacher feel adequately confident that the student has progressed or learned enough to be positioned for success in the next course or grade level?”

2. WHAT AMOUNT OF PROGRESS TOWARD MASTERY OR PROFICIENCY REPRESENTS A YEAR'S WORTH OF LEARNING?

A rough metric that can be helpful for teachers to keep in mind when setting preliminary targets is the “year’s worth of learning.” Courses and curricula are aligned to standards that represent what is expected to be learned over the period of instruction. Teachers should first look to their standards and curriculum to determine the skills and content knowledge students should have by the end of the interval of instruction.

While the default target for any SLO should reflect mastery of the relevant course or grade-level standards, the reality is that not all students begin with the same level of preparedness. Educators need to determine what a year’s worth of learning would look like for students who enter significantly below or significantly above grade-level expectations and targets may be tiered to reflect differentiated expectations for learning. In all cases, educators should use their standards as a guide for understanding what students should be mastering year to year.

While the default target for any SLO should reflect mastery of the relevant course or grade-level standards, the reality is that not all students begin with the same level of preparedness.

3. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS IF STUDENTS MAKE A YEAR'S WORTH OF LEARNING?

If educators set targets that reflect a year’s worth of learning, as defined above, they should consider what the implications would be if students met those targets. Ultimately, if educators cannot say that targets support students in being prepared for the next level of instruction, narrowing or closing achievement gaps, or deepening their skills and content knowledge to a new and advanced level, then they are not rigorous enough.

For simplicity the following guidance is framed for educators whose interval of instruction is a full school year. However the guidance is equally applicable to educators who teach for an interval of instruction less than a year. Educators and evaluators should consider the following while reflecting on their targets for students:

For students meeting grade-level expectations, will they make enough progress so that they are ready for the next level of instruction (e.g., the next course or grade level)? Students who enter a course with the necessary prerequisite knowledge or skills should be expected to master the relevant course or grade-level standards. If they do not, they will fall behind grade-level expectations and an achievement gap will have been created.

For those students coming in behind grade-level expectations, does this amount of progress help each student narrow or close, maintain, or widen an achievement gap? While students in lower tiers may have a lower absolute target, reaching it may require them to make *more progress* than students with higher targets, resulting in a closing or narrowing of the achievement gap(s). At some point, these students

who begin the course behind will need to make more than “a year’s worth of learning” otherwise they will never catch up. Targets can be tiered, but they should not calcify achievement gaps. The need for fairness and appropriateness should be balanced by the need to challenge lower-achieving students and intensify their services and interventions to catch up to their peers. Obviously, this is a challenge that cannot be addressed solely by an individual teacher setting a target on an SLO. The school and district must identify resources needed to help students who have fallen behind catch up and close the achievement gap.

**Since targets can be tiered,
they should not calcify
achievement gaps.**

For students who are coming in ahead of grade-level expectations, does this amount of progress ensure that each student deepens their skills and content knowledge and continues to be challenged to a new and advanced level? Students who enter the course with prerequisite knowledge or skills that exceed what is expected or required should deepen their learning or advance to the next set of grade-level skills. If students do not make this amount of progress then they have lost their advanced development.

Targets for students who are English Language Learners or for those who have a disability require additional consideration. In some cases, evidence may need to be differentiated for English Language Learners to account for how they currently demonstrate content skills and knowledge. All teachers should ensure their content targets for English Language Learners are informed by students’ language comprehension and communication skills. Educators of students with IEPs should collaborate with other teachers and staff members to review present levels of academic and functional performance and historical data to set appropriate targets that narrow and ultimately close achievement gaps.

THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING TARGETS FOR STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

There are seven steps for writing an SLO (below) and they are explained in greater detail in *The Process for Writing a Student Learning Objective: A Guide for Educators in Rhode Island*.

STEPS FOR WRITING A STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

- 1. Write the Logistical Information**
- 2. Identify What's Most Important: Priority of Content**
- 3. Gather and Analyze Baseline Data and Information**
- 4. Determine Target(s) for Students**
 - a. Choose the most appropriate type of target to utilize**
 - The appropriateness of the type is very much dependent on the content addressed by the SLO and, in some cases, the instrument available to measure that learning. In addition, a single SLO might employ different types of targets for different groups of students. For more information on types of targets, see page 13.
 - b. Tier target(s) based on student starting points and supports**
 - Look at baseline data and information and consider what a year's worth of learning would look like for different students based on their starting points.
 - Consider the variety and level of supports students will receive throughout the year.
 - For more information on tiering targets, see page 10.
 - c. Ask the reflection questions**
 - For students entering on grade level, will they make enough progress so that they are ready for the next level of instruction (e.g., the next course or grade level)?
 - For those students coming in behind grade-level expectations, does this amount of progress help each student narrow or close, maintain, or widen an achievement gap?
 - For students who are coming in ahead of grade-level expectations, does this amount of progress ensure that each student deepens their skills and content knowledge and continues to be challenged to a new and advanced level?
 - d. Write a rationale for the target(s)**
 - The rationale does not need to be overly detailed or complex but should give context to the targets.
- 5. Describe your Evidence Source(s)**
 - a. Does your evidence source(s) allow students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in relation to the content addressed by the SLO and your targets?**
 - If multiple evidence sources are used, what is the relationship between them? For more information on using multiple measures, see page 15.
- 6. Review the SLO**
- 7. Use the SLO to Inform Teaching and Learning Throughout the Year**

This document focuses on **Steps 4 and 5**, though all the steps are interconnected and cannot be divorced from one another. While the factors described in steps 4 and 5 represent a logical process, one does not have to follow it in its exact order. That being said, all of them are important for educators and their evaluators to consider and set thoughtful targets. Short case studies that illustrate the different ways educators can set targets can be found on pages 13-14.

If educators are at Step 4 in the SLO writing process and are ready to determine targets for student learning, then they should have already considered factors that may impact targets like the following:

- Grade level or course standards and curriculum
- Baseline data and information, including historical data on the growth and mastery of past students, as well as national norms (if applicable)
- The interval of instruction

When writing or reviewing targets in an SLO, educators should consider three criteria to determine their quality, including:

1. **Are all students included in the SLO addressed by the tiers?** Every student in the class needs a target. If tiers are being utilized then every student in a specific tier has the same target, whether it defines the amount of progress or level of mastery students will achieve.
2. **Is the target(s) measurable?** Could you track the progress of the students (e.g. X# move from level A to level B) given how the targets are defined? If not, it's not measurable.
3. Based on the baseline data/information or assumptions about student mastery levels, **does the target(s) reflect a learning goal that is rigorous yet attainable for all students** by the end of the interval of instruction? In other words, are you able to answer positively to all three reflection questions?

These three criteria are included on the SLO Self-Audit for LEAs and Schools and are referenced in the SLO Quality Review Tool. Links to these resources are located on page 18.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TARGET SETTING

Many teachers in Rhode Island have been setting goals for students for a long time, so the process of selecting an instructional focus and articulating the objective of an SLO can feel familiar. Additionally, all teachers assess students and many have been deepening their assessment literacy in recent years through coursework, Professional Growth Goals, and district professional development initiatives. On the other hand, setting specific targets that capture students' progress throughout an extended instructional time is less familiar for most. Through state-wide surveys, trainings, workgroups, and conversations educators have reported that setting targets continues to be a challenging aspect of the SLO process for teachers and administrators in Rhode Island; this is understandable and has resulted in educators raising many important questions that get to the heart of teaching and learning.

Below are five questions that educators across the state have been asking as they write SLOs and set targets for student learning:

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT THE STANDARD FOR PROFICIENCY SHOULD BE FOR A LOCAL ASSESSMENT?

Standard setting is the process of selecting cut scores on an assessment that reflect the target knowledge and skills. A **cut score** is the score that defines the minimum performance required for a particular level of achievement on an assessment. In the most basic version, a single cut score might define the level of achievement or proficiency necessary to “pass” an assessment. The actual score can take many forms – a “3” on a 4-point rubric, a C on an essay exam, or a 70% on a 100-point test.

Whatever the form, the basic cut score should indicate the same thing: this student has demonstrated minimal proficiency needed to meet the expected performance. The number or letter itself is arbitrary without a strong link to the insight it provides about student learning. How high the standard should be set depends on the difficulty of both the construct (the material being measured) and the assessment's design. For instance, a health teacher might set a cut score of 90 on a multiple-choice quiz that assesses basic but critical knowledge. For that assessment, earning a score of 90 demonstrates minimal proficiency. In other cases, like an AP exam, minimal proficiency is set at 3 (on a 5 point scale). RIDE has developed *A Process for Local Standard Setting* that groups of educators can use to determine an appropriate cut score on teacher-created assessments. A link to this document can be found on page 18.

HOW CAN THERE BE COMPARABILITY BETWEEN LOCAL ASSESSMENTS?

Implementing educator evaluation in ways that are consistent and fair is important. Many evaluators want to ensure there is comparability across SLOs in terms of their breadth and depth, and the rigor of the assessments and targets. However, scores on different assessments represent very different amounts and types of learning. If one classroom's students all earn an 80 on one literacy assessment it isn't necessarily comparable to an 80 on a different math assessment. So, even if everyone in the state had the same cut score, it would not mean that the targets are comparable. Rather, comparability can be achieved when groups of educators work together to examine assessments to ensure they are of high quality and provide evidence of the desired target. Groups of educators participating in standard-setting processes and aligning targets vertically across grades and horizontally across classrooms within grades can also

enhance comparability between schools within, and ultimately among, districts. Most important to remember is that a target is not a score on an assessment; a target names the level of knowledge or skills students will attain, and a score on an assessment indicates whether students have demonstrated the extent of knowledge and skills you identified as the target.

WHY ISN'T ASSIGNING TARGETS THE SOLUTION TO COMPARABLE RIGOR?

Although setting targets is a challenge, it is also the case that assigning targets to teachers is not the solution. Most importantly, when districts, departments, or administrators assign targets educators lose the opportunity to engage, reflect, and learn from the work embedded in the SLO process. The questions and conversations that must be had as part of writing SLOs are meaty and important; in many ways they cut to the heart of teaching and learning. These conversations and the challenges they can unearth are not only worthy, but crucial, for educators, schools, and districts to grapple with.

Additionally, assigned targets often feel arbitrary and/or ill fitting for teachers, who may not have a clear understanding of why a particular target has been chosen by the district, their administrator, or even a group of their colleagues. It can feel more like something that was plucked from thin air than a meaningful guidepost for student learning (e.g., 80% of students will reach X and 20% of students will reach Y). When this occurs, the target feels disconnected from their work and, as a result, the SLO process ceases to be productive and informative.

This is why a key feature of Rhode Island's SLO model is that it encourages teachers, ideally in collaboration with their colleagues, to be actively involved in setting targets for their own students. The teachers' participation is critical to the target being both meaningful and appropriate.

HOW CAN I TIER TARGETS SO THAT THEY ARE RIGOROUS BUT ATTAINABLE FOR ALL STUDENTS?

As educators, we know that our students enter our classrooms with a range of knowledge and skills. In some courses, most students enter with very little background knowledge about the subject area, as in an introductory course to a world language, for example. In this case, the teacher would likely have similar expectations for what students will know and be able to do upon completion of the course. In other cases, particularly in courses that focus on more linear content that spans many grade levels, such as reading comprehension, students' background knowledge and skills will have significant bearing on their expected performance by the end of the course. When a group of students enters a course with great differences in how prepared they are to access the content, the teacher will likely want to set tiered targets. This means that different students or, more commonly, different groups of students, are expected to make different amounts of progress or reach different levels of proficiency by the end of the interval of instruction. All students in a course (including multiple sections, if applicable) should be included in an educator's SLO and all students are expected to meet their targets, but those targets should be tiered to be appropriate for each student.

All students are expected to meet their targets, but those targets should be tiered to be appropriate for each student.

Setting tiered targets based on students' prerequisite knowledge and skills helps to ensure that the targets are rigorous and attainable for all students. Students entering a course with high proficiency or robust prerequisite skills will need to be challenged by a higher target. For students entering a course with lower proficiency or lacking prerequisite skills, a more modest target may be appropriate in order to ensure that it is reasonably attainable within the interval of instruction. That said, the intent of tiered targets is not to solidify achievement gaps but to support their narrowing. The need for fairness and appropriateness should be balanced by the need to challenge lower-achieving students to catch up to their peers. Additionally, while students in lower tiers may have a lower absolute target, reaching it may require them to make *more progress* than students with higher targets.

Teachers can set as many tiers as is appropriate to help ensure that each student is appropriately challenged. While they have the option to set a different target for each student, in most cases that is not necessary because students can be grouped into tiers with peers who have similar prerequisite skills or preparedness. In some classes, there may be two distinct groups; in others, there may be four. However, a fairly simple approach that can be used to begin is to group students into one of three categories: those who are entering the course with the expected level of preparedness, those who are entering the course with a lower-than-expected level of preparedness, and those who are entering the course with a higher-than-expected level of preparedness. Of course, in order to do this, the teacher must have a sense of students' incoming knowledge and skills, which underscores the need for sound baseline data and information.

Figure 1 below illustrates this concept with a 6th grade math class which includes twenty-four students with three different starting places and targets.

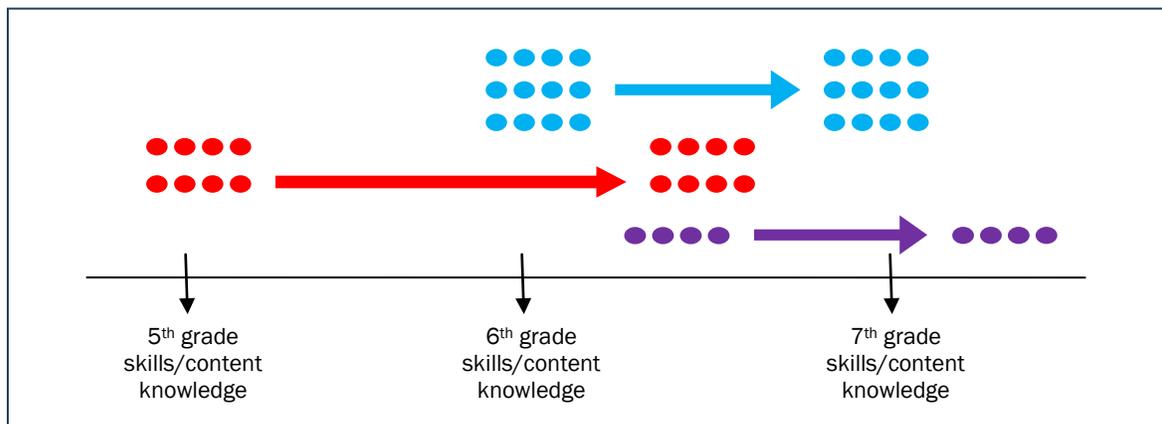


Figure 1

In the figure above, the group of students in blue began the year with the prerequisite skills and knowledge for 6th grade. Their targets would get them to a place where they could demonstrate preparedness for 7th grade skills and content knowledge. The students in red who arrived a year behind their on-level peers had targets that would narrow their learning gap. In this case it might have been unattainable to expect students to completely close the gap, but if they reach their targets and make a similar amount of growth the following year they will be able to eliminate the achievement gap and reach proficiency. The four students in purple who started the year with more advanced skills and content knowledge had targets that were comparable in growth to the blue students, setting the expectation that they will improve by a year's worth of learning. If the purple group met their target they would maintain their above grade level status.

As shown in Figure 1, it is unlikely that there will be an equal distribution of students across all three categories. There may not be any students who fall into one of these categories. Or, the teacher may decide that there are important differences among the students in one of the groups and it needs to be disaggregated into a fourth tier. The point of this exercise is not to permanently label students or create tidy groupings. Rather, the point is to give teachers a way to meaningfully differentiate targets so that they are adequately rigorous and reasonably attainable for all students.

Figure 2 below shows what can happen when one mastery target is set for all students. In this example, the target appears to be rigorous and attainable for the blue group, but it does not seem feasible that the red group would completely close their learning gap in a single year. Additionally, if these targets were met, the purple group would make little progress and lose the advanced status they started with.

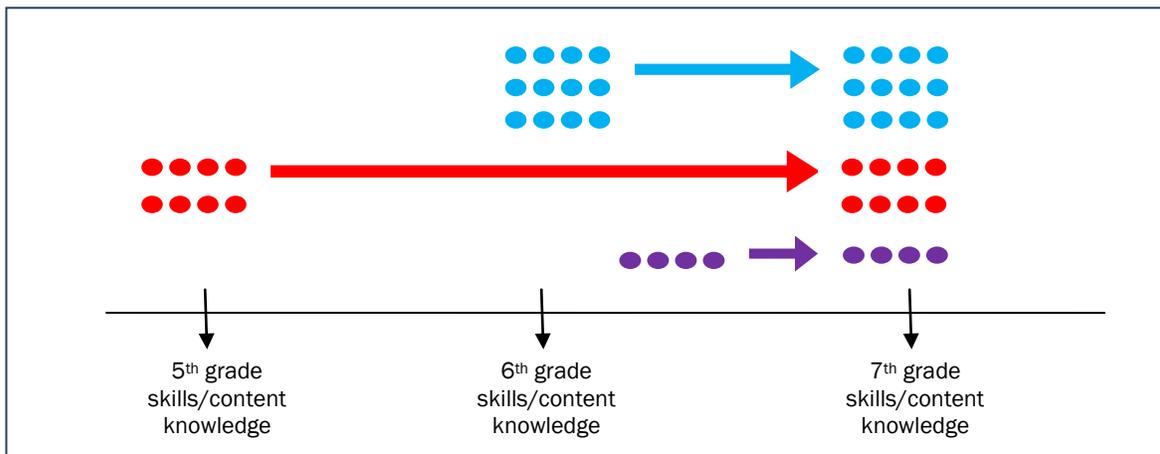


Figure 2

Figure 3 illustrates an example of an SLO with a common goal that all students make about a year's worth of learning. While this might be rigorous and attainable for some students, it sets the expectation that the red group, which is currently behind grade level, will not make any progress toward narrowing the achievement gap. In fact, in the example below the achievement gap will have widened for the red group. It is also important to consider what additional supports the group may receive or be eligible for. In other words, if it is important for the red group to make more than a year's worth of learning and they are receiving additional support, then it makes sense for them to have a more rigorous target.

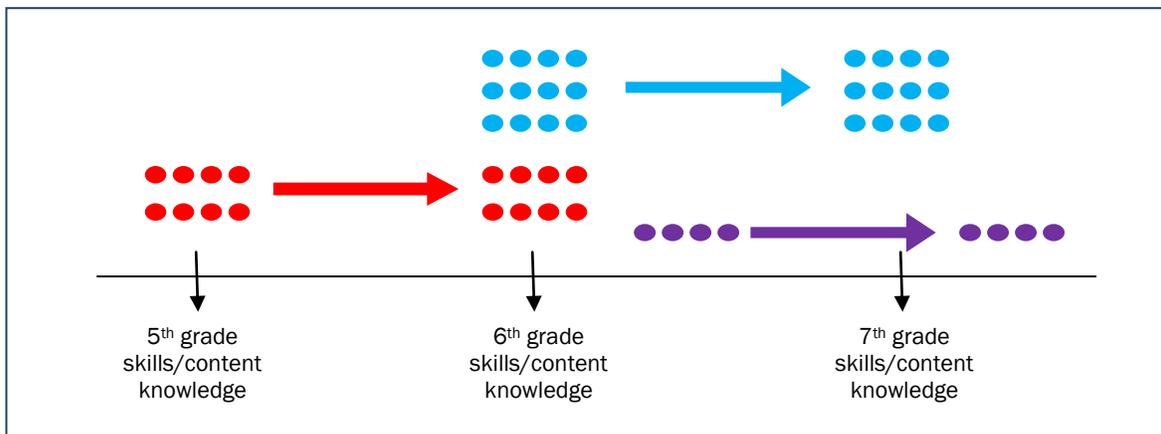


Figure 3

SHOULD I EXPRESS TARGETS IN TERMS OF PROGRESS OR ACHIEVEMENT?

There are two ways of expressing targets and neither is better than the other. Rather, it is essential that the type of target chosen fits the content and assessment being used. Each way of expressing targets shows students' progress toward the mastery of essential skills and knowledge. Below are descriptions for how targets can be articulated.

Each way of expressing targets shows students' progress toward proficiency on essential skills and knowledge.

Progress or the amount of improvement: A target can be expressed in terms of the progress or the amount of improvement the teacher expects the students to make from the beginning to end of a given interval of instruction. Given that they are based largely on students' starting points, describing a target this way is most appropriate for **constructs** (the content being measured) that are linear in nature or that clearly build upon pre-requisite knowledge and skills. Reading levels are a good example of this type of construct because there are many well-established scales that describe sequential levels of attainment. Progress targets can be individual or tiered but the critical piece is that the amount of progress should be based on asking the Core Questions and by following the steps outlined earlier on pages 7 and 8. Lastly, if expressing targets in terms of progress it is important to note that a true pre-test/post-test approach does not have to be utilized. For more guidance on when a pre-test/post-test approach would be appropriate, please see the Using Baseline Data to Set SLO Targets guidance document and online module, which are linked on page 18.

Achievement expectations: Targets can also be expressed in a way that describes achievement expectations students must meet by the end of the interval of instruction in order to be considered proficient or ready to advance to the next course or grade. Expressing targets in this manner by defining **mastery** of content knowledge or skills may be more appropriate for some content areas without well-established levels or scales (e.g., Chemistry, U.S. History, or Health). It should be noted, however, that the same level of mastery needn't be set for all students, just as the same amount of progress needn't be identical for all students. It may be appropriate, given students' differing levels of background knowledge or preparedness for the course, to expect different groups of students to meet different levels of mastery (e.g., Minimally Proficient, Proficient, Proficient with Distinction) or different levels of progress.

No single way of phrasing a target (whether in terms of student progress or achievement) is better or more rigorous than the other. Oftentimes targets can simply be rephrased from one form into another.

However a target is expressed there are a few key points that are necessary to highlight. First, no single way of phrasing a target (whether in terms of student progress or achievement) is better or more rigorous than the other. Oftentimes targets can simply be rephrased from one form into another. For instance, an elementary teacher with an SLO focused on literacy development could have targets aimed at increasing student reading levels. The following table illustrates that while the targets can be described in either of two ways, the targets remain the same.

| Student (or Tier of Students) | Baseline Data / Information | Target |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Reading Level P | Reading Level S |
| 2 | Reading Level R | Reading Level U |
| 3 | Reading Level T | Reading Level W |
| Target(s) expressed in terms of progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All students will make 3 levels worth of progress by the end of the year. | | |
| Target(s) expressed in terms of achievement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in Tier 1 will read at level S by the end of the year. Students in Tier 2 will read at level U by the end of the year. Students in Tier 3 will read at level W by the end of the year. | | |

The targets above are expressed in terms of a test score, but what they indicate about student learning is the key. While these targets may represent a “year’s worth of learning” the implications are that, if Student 1 is behind grade-level then the achievement gap will have persisted into the following school year. Note that in the example above all students made the same amount of progress (three levels) however, it may be appropriate for some students (like those in Tier 1) to show more progress than their peers, as discussed on pages 11 and 12.

The way you choose to express the target for an SLO should not be arbitrarily chosen, nor should it be selected wholesale for use across a district or school. The appropriateness of the type of target is very much dependent on the content addressed by the SLO. For example, content areas that focus more on the acquisition of a body of knowledge, such as Biology or U.S. History, may be less appropriate to express targets in terms of progress and more appropriately suited to express them in terms of student achievement. In fact, some teachers might have one SLO that is described through progress (e.g., improved reading levels) and another defined through mastery (e.g., mastery of ELA content such as literacy devices, narrative structure, character archetypes, etc.). In addition, a single SLO might employ differently worded targets for different groups of students. For example, a teacher might set a mastery target for the majority of the class and a progress target for a smaller group who are unlikely to meet proficiency within the interval of instruction due to a lack of prerequisite skills.

The appropriateness of the type of target is very much dependent on the content addressed by the SLO.

It is not appropriate to state that a percentage of students will meet a target and another percentage will simply “show growth” without having clear, measurable targets that are appropriately rigorous.

Whether expressing targets in terms of progress or mastery, all students must have targets that challenge them appropriately, whether they begin the course at, below, or above grade-level expectations. It is not appropriate to state that a percentage of students will meet a target and another percentage will simply “show growth” without having clear, measurable targets that are appropriately rigorous. If above grade-level students are expected to maintain a certain (usually high) level of proficiency across an interval of instruction, then their target should represent

student learning across that interval; it should not be the expectation that students will simply not lose

the knowledge or skills with which they entered the course. The expectation should be that students arriving above grade-level expectations maintain their high level of proficiency or performance on a new set of standards, on increasingly rigorous texts/content, or according to a more rigorous rubric or assessment.

HOW CAN I WRITE TARGETS IF I INCLUDE MULTIPLE MEASURES?

In some cases, a single assessment cannot measure the full breadth of an SLO and some educators may worry about putting so much stock in a single assessment. Rhode Island educators are encouraged to use multiple measures in their teaching and in their SLOs in order to gain a more complete picture of student learning. Targets with multiple measures can be interpreted in different ways and the following section attempts to differentiate and discuss the elements of each. Whenever any assessment is used as an evidence source for an SLO, whether it is a single assessment or a variety of assessments, the goal is always to offer students opportunity to demonstrate their skills and content knowledge and for educators to determine if students can perform at the desired level.

Whenever any assessment is used in SLOs, whether it is a single assessment or a variety of assessments, the goal is always to offer students opportunity to demonstrate their skills and content knowledge and for educators to determine if students can perform at the desired level.

Multiple assessments that measure different constructs: The most common way multiple measures are used in SLOs is when an educator has multiple assessments that measure different constructs (the content being measured). For example, an ELA teacher might have an SLO that focuses on student progress in narrative, argument, and expository writing. The SLO might be measured by three summative writing pieces, spanning these three types of writing. A World Language final exam might be made up of a written portion and an oral portion. Or, an art or science portfolio assessment might include many pieces of student work, representing a range of skills addressed by the SLO or indicating that students can *consistently* demonstrate a certain level of proficiency. In these examples, it is recommended that the multiple measures be conjunctive, rather than compensatory. Conjunctive measures are used in tandem, because they measure different content or skills that are both addressed by an SLO. Typically, the expectation is that the student will meet the target on *each source of evidence*.

Multiple assessments that measure the same constructs: A second way of having multiple measures is by using multiple assessments that measure the same constructs like if an elementary teacher assessing students' literacy skills used AIMSweb, DRA2, and STAR. While these three assessments are not identical, the skills they measure have great overlap. One important caution in this approach is checking to ensure students are not being over-assessed through redundant testing. If the assessments truly measure the same construct and new insight into student learning is not provided through additional assessments, then the higher-quality or better-aligned evidence source should be used.

If these assessments are used conjunctively as described above, then students are expected to reach targets on each independent measure. Educators should consider why it would be appropriate to require students to demonstrate the same knowledge and skills on multiple assessments. If used in a compensatory manner, then the assessments *compensate* for each other and high performance on one

measure offsets a low performance on another. If using multiple assessments that measure the same construct, educators should look across assessments to see what students typical level of skills are or to see students' typical behavior at the target level. In some cases educators might take an average score (a compensatory approach). However, while it might be possible to combine or average scores, taking this approach requires considerable thought and in many cases might be inappropriate.

In contrast, RIDE encourages educators to utilize multiple assessments that measure connected constructs within a larger content focus. For instance, if an elementary teacher is assessing the literacy development of students he or she might utilize Dibbels (decoding), DRA2 (fluency and basic comprehension), and writing samples in response to reading authentic text (deeper comprehension and writing in response to text). Together they provide a more complete picture of the range of skills and knowledge students have in reading.

Using multiple measures that allow the targets to be met on one "and/or" the other: Using multiple measures that allow the targets to be met on one "and/or" the other is strongly discouraged. If the two measures assess different constructs, meeting the target for one but not the other would indicate that the student has not learned all of the content or skills addressed by the SLO. Giving two or more assessments of the same construct but only using the results of one will not increase the reliability of the results and might contribute to over-testing.

Offering students multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge or skills: Sometimes a teacher may want students to have multiple opportunities to show what they know and can do across the interval of instruction. For example, when a curriculum is divided into units of study and each unit has a separate assessment, the SLO could be aligned to students' performance across unit assessments. In that example, the multiple opportunities may be most like the case of multiple assessments that measure different constructs described above. However, for courses in which there is a clear progression of knowledge and skills across units of study, successful student performance on later units might compensate for weaker performance on assessments of early units. The decision on how to combine results from assessments administered at different times throughout the year has to be aligned with the goal of the SLO; that is, what students are expected to know and be able to do.

Reassessing students on the same measure: There may be cases when a teacher wants to reassess a student using the same measure. While retesting may be permitted, this should be handled the same way as for any other local assessments. If the teacher has a compelling reason to believe that a particular student's results do not accurately reflect his/her learning—because of an illness or emotional distress the day of testing, for example—the teacher may offer the student the opportunity to retest. In general, reassessing a student using the same measure is not appropriate simply because the student scored just below the cut score needed to meet the target. That practice results in artificially inflating the number of students who have met their target by selecting only the most beneficial data (for SLO results). In this light, an educator should have just as much reason to retest students who scored just over a cut score as they would to retest students who scored just under the cut score. Retesting students should be fueled by a desire to support students in increasing their skills, so districts and schools should consider when retesting on the same assessment makes sense and when it does not.

Using evidence from progress monitoring tools: Effective educators consistently monitor students' progress throughout instruction. Some have articulated a target and an evidence source but have

included progress monitoring measures as additional sources of evidence in their SLO. While monitoring progress is best practice, educators should be cautious if students are showing very different skills and content knowledge on progress monitoring measures as compared to other summative measures. Educators should examine both assessments and ask a variety of questions like if the conditions were the same or if the rigor was comparable. Again, educators should use evidence to determine if students can consistently perform at the level identified for them so that they can be sure students will be successful moving forward.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE TARGET SETTING PROCESS

Many resources were referenced throughout this document that can support educators and evaluators with target setting. Please note that there are many more resources available on the RIDE website for the larger SLO process and all can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval.



WRITING SLOs

The *Process for Writing a Student Learning Objective: A Guide for Educators in Rhode Island* can be used by teachers to facilitate writing SLOs. It is recommended that groups of content or grade-level teachers come together to collaborate throughout the process, alongside administrators. Educators can also meet across grade-levels to vertically align expectations of student learning. While meeting, educators can use the guide as they discuss the student learning that takes place in their classrooms and subsequently draft, revise, and submit SLOs. This document can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/SLOs.

DATA ANALYSIS

After baseline data has been collected and summative evidence sources have been selected, educators must use best practices of data analysis to determine the most appropriate targets. The *Using Baseline Data and Information to Set SLO Targets Guidance Document, Worksheet, and Online Module* are resources intended to help teachers and administrators as they analyze student data to directly inform the SLO process, particularly with setting targets. These can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-OnlineModules. There is far too much research and too many quality resources on the general topic of analyzing data to summarize here. However, the *Data Use Professional Development resources and training materials* are a valuable starting place for deepening and refining teachers' data analysis skills. These can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/Data-Use-PD.

STANDARD SETTING FOR LOCAL ASSESSMENTS

The *Standard Setting for Local Assessments* document is intended for teachers to use as a tool for reflecting on, and engaging in standard setting for the local assessments they use with students. The guidance and protocol can be used in conjunction with the *Assessment Toolkit* resources, which address high-quality assessment guidance, using baseline data and information from assessments, reviewing assessments, and protocols for analyzing and scoring student work. These tools can be used by educators as they select and develop local assessments for any use in their classrooms, and can be helpful as they write SLOs. The *Assessment Toolkit* and *Standard Setting for Local Assessments* can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-OnlineModules.

TARGET SETTING

An online module titled *Setting Targets for Student Learning* to communicate the messages in this document has been created and can be used for individual or groups of educators to better understand the target-setting process. This online module and many others can be accessed at www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-OnlineModules.