

From Gobbledygook

to

Clearly Written Annual IEP GOALS



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IEP
RESOURCES

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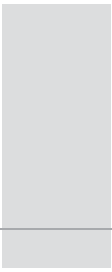
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Table of Contents

Author	5
Introduction to Gobbledygooks	6
From Gobbledygooks to Clearly Written IEP Goals	27
On Your Own	100
Finally, Good News	102

Table 1	
Types of Problems in Gobbledygooks	20
Table 2	
Topics of Gobbledygooks and Examples	21
Table 3	
Tips for Measurable Goal Development	25
Table 4	
Oral Reading Fluency	103
Table 5	
Hypothetical PLOPS & Corresponding Goals	24



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Introduction to Gobbledygooks

No one is born knowing how to drive a car or send an email. Some skills have to be learned. One of these is writing measurable goals. When we find goal writing difficult and frustrating, as so many do, it is because we haven’t been taught how to write goals easily and well. The good news is that writing measurable goals really isn’t hard, once the mystery is taken away and the steps revealed.

The purpose of this down-to-earth, plain English guide is to do just that — to strip away the mystique and demonstrate how to move our first, often foggy thoughts about a possible goal — we call that a Gobbledygook (GG) — to a clean, objective and truly measurable goal. Real IEPs are full of Gobbledygooks and for this book we have taken some — every one from an actual child’s IEP — and shown exactly how to convert each to a useful and measurable goal.

In converting each Gobbledygook (GG) to a useful, measurable goal we have tried to determine what the writer of the GG was trying to say, i.e., to be true to the intent of the original non-measurable goal. Some conversions are very simple, e.g., “Tim will cross the street safely 80% of the time,” becomes “Tim will cross the street safely 100% of the time.” Others are more difficult. We found one that totally defies translation — “Tyler will navigate the world in school.” Who could possibly know what the writer of that GG had in mind?

In the discussion that follows each GG we “think aloud” the actual process of fixing that particular GG. We have shared drafts of this material with real teachers who have to write IEP goals and who, like the writers of our GGs, have not had adequate instruction in writing measurable objective goals. Several teachers expressed difficulty in grasping why the commonly used “80% of the time” criterion is not measurable and how “80% of the time” is different from “80% (or 4 of

5) of the times” or “opportunities” a task is attempted. Another source of difficulty is “80% accuracy” in tasks such as initiating conversation. How would one determine whether a conversation was initiated with 80% accuracy? (In the discussions we deal with these and other common problems.) As we move in the following pages from each GG to the discussion and then to a real and measurable goal, we must always keep in mind the question “**How** can one determine whether the goal has been reached?” How can we **measure** the student’s performance? A well written goal makes very clear exactly how it can be measured. Each measurable goal below is followed by the “how” of determining (i.e., measuring) whether it has or has not been reached:

Goal: Weigh no more than 130 pounds on June 1.

Measurement: On June 1, step on a scale.

Goal: Read 110 “Easy Sight Words” orally in one minute with no more than two errors by June 1.

Measurement: Ask child to read aloud the 110 word list. Time him and count the errors, if any.

Goal: Interact appropriately with at least one peer for a total of 5 minutes during morning recess, for two consecutive days.

Measurement: Observe and time the duration of the child’s interactions during recess for two consecutive days.

The next examples are Gobbledygooks precisely because it isn’t clear how one could determine (measure) whether the goal had been reached:

GG: Be respectful 90% of the time.

Measurement: ?

“If a goal is explicit and transparent, how to assess whether it has been reached should be evident in the goal itself.”

GG: Take more responsibility for her behavior.

Measurement: ?

GG: Maintain one friendship with 80% accuracy.

Measurement: ?

After the discussion of each GG, explaining why it isn't acceptable, our new measurable goal is presented. Finally, for each measurable goal, a “test” is briefly presented in which we check to be sure the new goal contains the required elements of measurability — an observable behavior and an objective criterion.

Measurable goals are measurable goals, whether we talk about saving a certain dollar amount for our retirement nest egg, manufacturing a certain number of widgets per week, or orally reading so many words per minute correct from a third grade reader. All measurable goals must have an **observable behavior** (e.g., saving dollars, manufacturing widgets or orally reading words) and an **objective criterion** (e.g., 600 widgets per week or 80 words correct per minute). Some measurable goals also require a given or a condition, e.g., “given a third grade reader,” or “given access to the internet.” Often the given is implicit in the goal. With a street crossing goal it is not necessary to say “given a street . . .”

As just said, all measurable goals have observable behavior and an objective criterion stating the desired level of performance — how much must be done or how well it must be done to meet the goal. Some goals must also specify the condition under which the behavior is to be done.

Proper goals refer only to students' behavior (not that of teachers) and do not include instructions as a given because instruction is always assumed. Goals like “gains in height,” which ordinarily require the

passage of time rather than instruction, are also not appropriate for IEP goals. Whether the means of measurement should be included in an IEP goal is another related issue. If a goal is sufficiently explicit and transparent, the method of assessing whether it has been reached is almost always evident in the goal itself.

Every measurable goal (a) allows a clear yes or no determination as to whether it has been reached; (b) can be reliably assessed, i.e., different evaluators can agree on whether it was accomplished; (c) requires no additional information for assessment, unlike a goal of “improving X” which requires further explanation about the beginning point; and (d) tells the evaluators exactly what to do to determine whether the goal was reached, such as counting the widgets or measuring how high the bar is placed for the high jumpers. Measurable goals have these characteristics because they contain observable behaviors and definite objective criteria.

In addition to these basic features of all measurable goals, IEP measurable annual goals must have other characteristics in order to be useful and to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IEP annual goals must also:

1. Address all the student’s unique educational needs;
2. Project an amount of progress over the year which assumes intensive appropriate instruction and takes into account the child’s ability level;
3. Reflect the important, high priority skills or knowledge for the student at this point in time, as determined by parents, teachers and others who know the child and his or her needs; and
4. Be grounded in explicit, detailed and completely current **present levels of performance** (PLOPs). For example, if the goal is to “read

*“Since IDEA was revised in 2004, **measurable annual** goals are more important than ever.”*

orally fourth grade materials at 110 correct words per minute,” the PLOP must be in the IEP in the same terms, e.g., now “reads third grade material at 60 correct words per minute.” (Many examples will be provided later — for now the rule is that a measurable goal must have a corresponding measured present level of performance in the IEP.)

The Importance of Measurable Annual IEP Goals

Since IDEA was revised in 2004, measurable annual goals are more important than ever. Two of the purposes of IDEA 2004 are to “improve educational results” and “to assess and ensure the effectiveness of education for children who have disabilities.” In the IDEA 2004 findings Congress declared that “Improving education results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy . . .”

While emphasizing results and effectiveness (reaching goals) of special education, Congress paradoxically deleted, for two thirds of the special education students, the important requirement that each goal have measurable short term objectives (or benchmarks). The mandatory short term objectives remain only for those students who are assessed using alternate (i.e., not grade level) standards. Best practice, of course, still demands the use of short term objectives, and IDEA still requires that the child’s progress be meaningfully reported to parents at least every grading period. Without objective, measurable and measured objectives, benchmarks or other progress markers, one cannot fulfill this requirement to inform parents about the effectiveness of their child’s special education program. Thus both best practice and mandated progress measurement argue for continuing the use of short objectives, at least one per grading period.