

MONROE 1 BOCES

Defining Learning Targets



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*Learning has nothing to do with what the teacher covers
Learning has to do with **what the students accomplish.***
Harry Wong

The Power of Learning Targets (I Can Statements): Communicating the Purpose of Instruction

What Are Learning Targets?

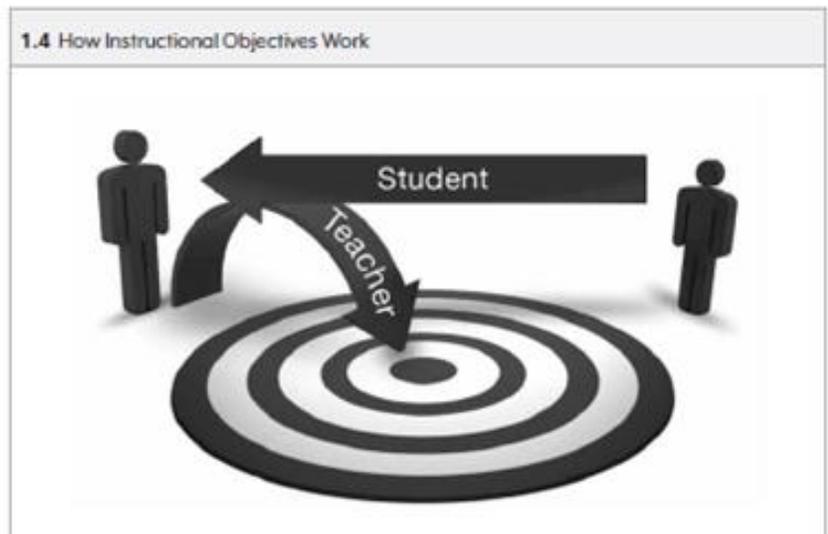
How many times have you heard, “What are we doing in class today?” We might answer – reading an article on climate change, analyzing a poem, summarizing stories, adding two two-digit numbers, learning about how Native Americans used their environment to survive. We work very hard to craft engaging lessons where students practice skills and show us what they have learned, each and every day. If you ask a student what they have learned, they might reply with some details from that enchanting story, the answer to that hard math problem, or ways the Native Americans used every part of the deer to survive. We will say, “You learned a lot today!”

However, as educators in the twenty-first century, we need to look long and hard at our practice and ask ourselves questions like the following if our students are going to learn at highly effective rates and develop as astute life-long learners and critical thinkers:

- Do all students *know how* they need to learn, know, or be able to do?
- What evidence do we have that they have learned as thinkers?
- Can students reflect on what I intended for them to learn today to assess their level of understanding?
- Do they understand what they were supposed to learn today as a thinker?
- Do they understand the process they used?
- Can they transfer their learning today to work independently tomorrow?

In addition to this full plate of learning, we need to make all different types of learning abundantly clear to our students so that everyone is aiming for the same learning. Often times, only teachers know what they want students to learn, evidenced by instructional objectives. In these classrooms, students do what the teacher says, often without fully realizing what it is they are learning or how to transfer

their learning. Moss and Brookhart state, “When teachers rely on instructional objectives, their energy is spent trying to get students to meet the instructional objective, while students expend energy trying to comply with what the teachers says.” *Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today’s Lesson* Connie Moss and Susan Brookhart (2012) p. 18



	Instructional Objective— Framed from the Teacher Point of View	Learning Target— Framed from the Student Point of View
Where does it come from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Derived from a standard and/or curricular goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Derived from an instructional objective.
Who uses it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used by the teacher to guide instruction during a lesson or over a group of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used by the teacher and the students to aim for understanding and assess the quality of student work during today's lesson.
What does it describe, and how does it describe it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content knowledge (concepts, understandings) and skills that students should be able to demonstrate. Uses teacher language (the language of curriculum and standards). May span one lesson or a set of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks, "What am I going to learn?" Uses student language as well as pictures, models, and/or demonstrations when possible. Asks, "What should I be able to do at the end of today's lesson? And how is it connected to yesterday's and tomorrow's lessons?"
How does it connect to a performance of understanding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generalizes to many potential tasks, from which teachers select one or several to be the performance of understanding for instructional activities and formative assessment for a series of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is connected to the specific performance of understanding that the teacher has chosen for today's lesson.
How does it promote evidence-based assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes criteria and performance standards in teacher language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes student look-fors—criteria and performance standards in student language—often accompanied by tools (e.g., "I can" statements, rubrics, checklists) and examples of work.

Checklist for Evaluating Learning Targets

A learning target contains ALL of the following characteristics. It must

- Describe exactly what the student is going to learn by the end of today's lesson.
- Be stated in developmentally appropriate language that the student can understand.
- Be framed from the point of view of a student who has not yet mastered the intended learning outcome for today's lesson.
- Be connected to and shared through the specific performance of understanding designed by the teacher for today's lesson (what students will be asked to do, say, make, or write that will deepen student understanding, allow students to assess where they are in relation to the learning target, and provide evidence of mastery).
- Include student look-fors—descriptive criteria that students can use to judge how close they are to the target, stated in terms that describe mastery of the learning target (not in terms that describe how the students' performance will be scored or graded).

Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson
Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart [© 2012 by ASCD. All rights reserved.]

One way to bridge the gap between what is in a teacher’s head about what students need to learn and what students are learning is to use learning targets such “I Can” statements which communicate the purpose of today’s learning. These statements are based on standards and written in kid-friendly language. They break down objectives written by adults, for adults, into understandable, transparent learning processes for students.

I Can statements have come into fashion in our recent past; Expeditionary Learning includes these statements in every lesson (and has done so for more years than the Common Core has been around!). Just do a Google Search for I Can statements and you will have a plethora from which to choose.

But beware....all I Can statements are not created equal. For example, taken from the website, The Curriculum Corner:

I can write and talk about the differences between poems, plays and fictional stories.

RL.4.5

<http://www.thecurriculumcorner.com/thecurriculumcorner123/2012/12/03/i-can-common-core-standards-k-5/>

Simply writing objectives in kid-friendly language doesn’t really help students understand what they are doing as learners. First off, this I Can statement example is so vast, students certainly aren’t going to learn about this in a day, or two, or three, nor do they know **what** they are doing to write and talk about differences between poems, plays, and fictional stories. We need to ask ourselves, to name but a few of the many questions, in this case:

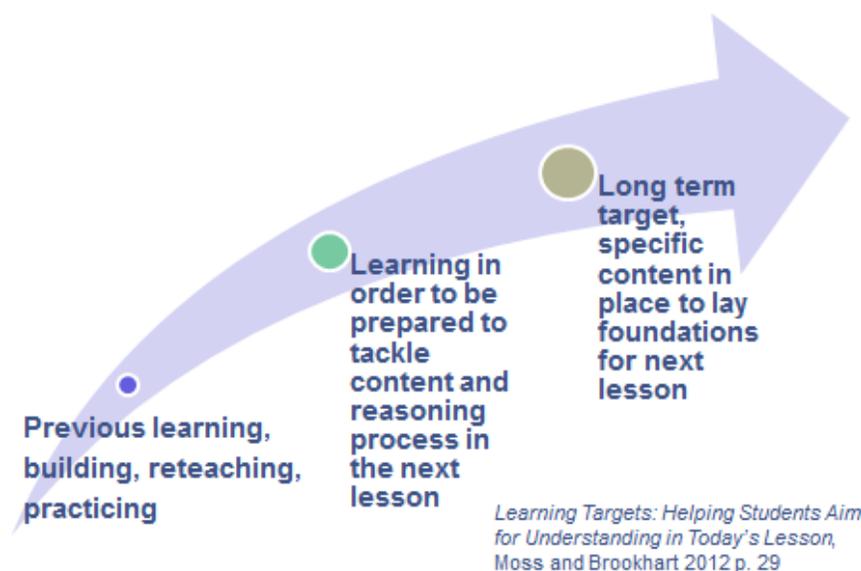
- What skills and knowledge do students need to possess in order to understand the structures of poems, plays, and fictional stories?
- Does the student know what differences they are looking for in these three (not to mention how many possibilities there are)?
- When they are writing, do they know the structure of the piece? The audience?
- What reasoning skills do they need in order to meet this standard?
- Do they interact appropriately when speaking about what they know?
- What is the student really learning here? Or is this an assessment?

As educators, we need to unpack, or deconstruct, these objectives to help students understand the **what** of what they are doing. This process takes the very broad Common Core standards statements and translates them into specific learning targets for



knowledge, reasoning, performing, habits of mind and/or producing, not merely rewriting the standards in kid-friendly language. Moss and Brookhart state the need for a deep understanding of the intended learning and determining the potential learning trajectory before crafting learning targets or I Can statements. Once you determine the skills, knowledge, reasoning, habits of mind, and products inherent in a long term target, you will be able to craft specific, lesson sized chunk learning targets that will allow students to understand the intended learning. These learning targets become the tools for their learning toolkits.

POTENTIAL LEARNING TRAJECTORY



For example, when unpacking this standard (discussing the differences between poems, plays, and fictional stories) for deeper understanding of the intended learning, a specific skill or knowledge might be to determine how theme is represented. We want students to recognize theme as a commonality and understand the different ways theme can be represented in different genres. Perhaps in the poem it is through imagery and in the story it is through characters' actions. Our I Can statement might look something like "I Can notice a poet's word choice and discuss the imagery it conjures in my mind. I can infer a theme based on that imagery." This specific target helps students understand **how** they will meet the long term target of discussing differences between poems, plays, and fictional stories.

Switch gears now to a long term target of understanding characterization. Think about how authors let us, the reader, know their thoughts about how their characters think, feel, and act. I Can Statements such as the following unpack author's craft so that our youngest students know **how** they learn about characters:

- I can read a character's name and think about how the name helps me learn about the character
- I can notice thought bubbles to learn about a character
- I can use the clues in pictures to predict the story setting (place, time, season etc)
- I can analyze character's expressions (clothing, appearance) in pictures to help me understand what the character is like
- I can use an author's word choice to help me describe (or understand) the characters feelings (moods, thoughts)
- I can notice details in illustrations that show how a character is feeling

- I can observe how other characters respond in dialogue to the main character's actions. I can describe how this helps me understand the main character
- I can notice the author's word choice to tell me about the character's thoughts

Our job is to make all types of learning exceptionally clear for students so they know exactly what it is they are learning. This is the most effective way for students to be able work independently, the ultimate goal for any educator.

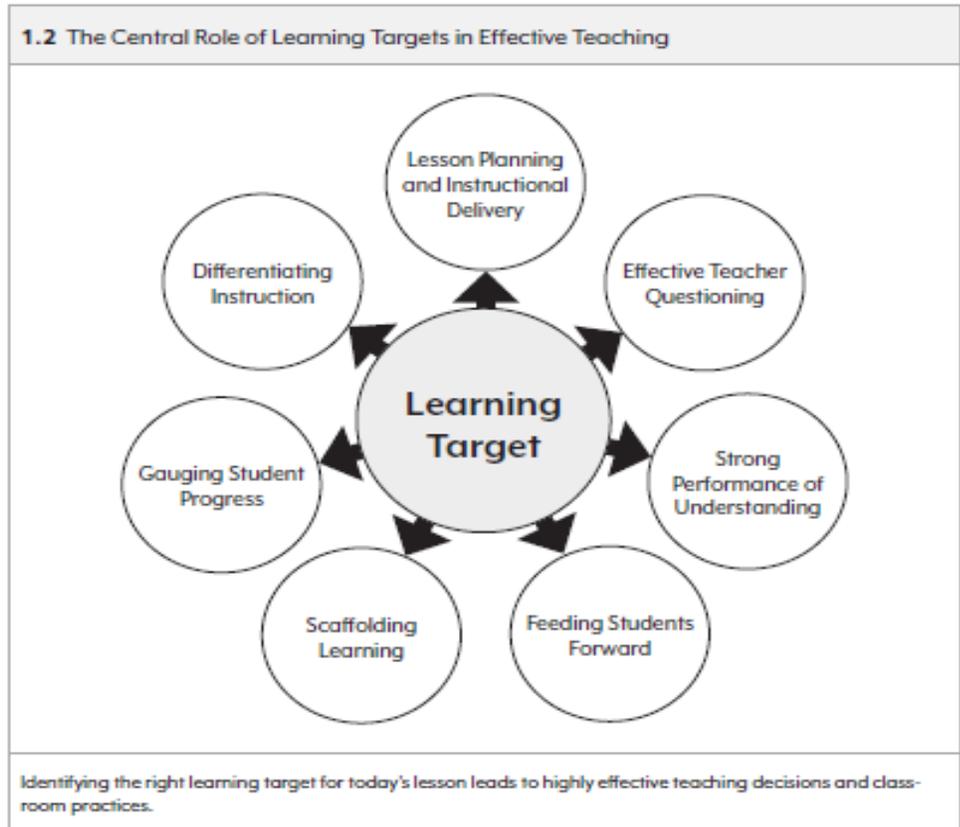
How Do I Write A Learning Target?

In order to write an effective learning target teachers must have a deep understanding of standards and long term targets. This deep understanding goes beyond the facts and concepts students should know, and includes different levels of understanding, reasoning, products, and habits of mind. By unpacking a standard or long term target, teachers can better define the learning trajectory, and thus distill lesson-sized chunks of learning. A process for unpacking a standard is pictured on page 12.



Knowledge and Understanding	Facts and concepts we want students to know, mastery
Reasoning	Using knowledge or understanding to reason and solve problems
Skill based	Development of proficiency in something when the process is most important, acting skillfully
Products	Using knowledge, reasoning, skills to create products and demonstrate learning
Habits of mind	Development of affective behaviors that students employ to support and sustain them in the learning process; attitudes about school and learning

Once you have determined effective, lesson-sized learning targets, designing a **strong performance of understanding** is equally important. This answers for both teachers and students, “How will I record my thinking and learning about this target?” “How can this tool deepen my learning about understanding of the target?” Strong performances of understanding then help students know where they are in relation to the target. This also provides evidence for teachers in order to provide feedback that will feed students toward the criteria for success. Without a strong performance of understanding, it is difficult to know what students are learning.



Utilizing **success criteria** is another critical component of this process. Students need to know where they are headed and be able to answer questions such as:

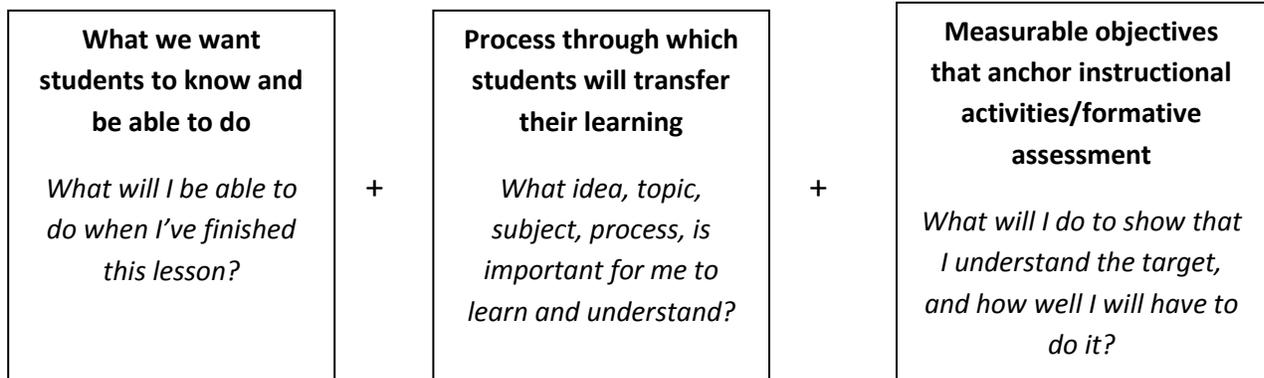
- What does quality look like?
- How will I know where I am in relation to the learning target?
- What are my next steps?

Determining success criteria allows for assessment **for** learning. Students can determine what progress they are making while the learning is happening where there is still time to be helpful (Rick Stiggins, 2005).

Moss and Brookhart present a 4 step framework for writing learning targets:

1. State the learning *We are learning to...*
2. Define the performance of understanding *We will show we can do this by...*
3. Provide success criteria *To know how well we are learning this, we will look for...*
4. Make it relevant *It is important for us to learn this because....*

Consider another framework:



Analyze the following learning targets to see if you can identify various components:

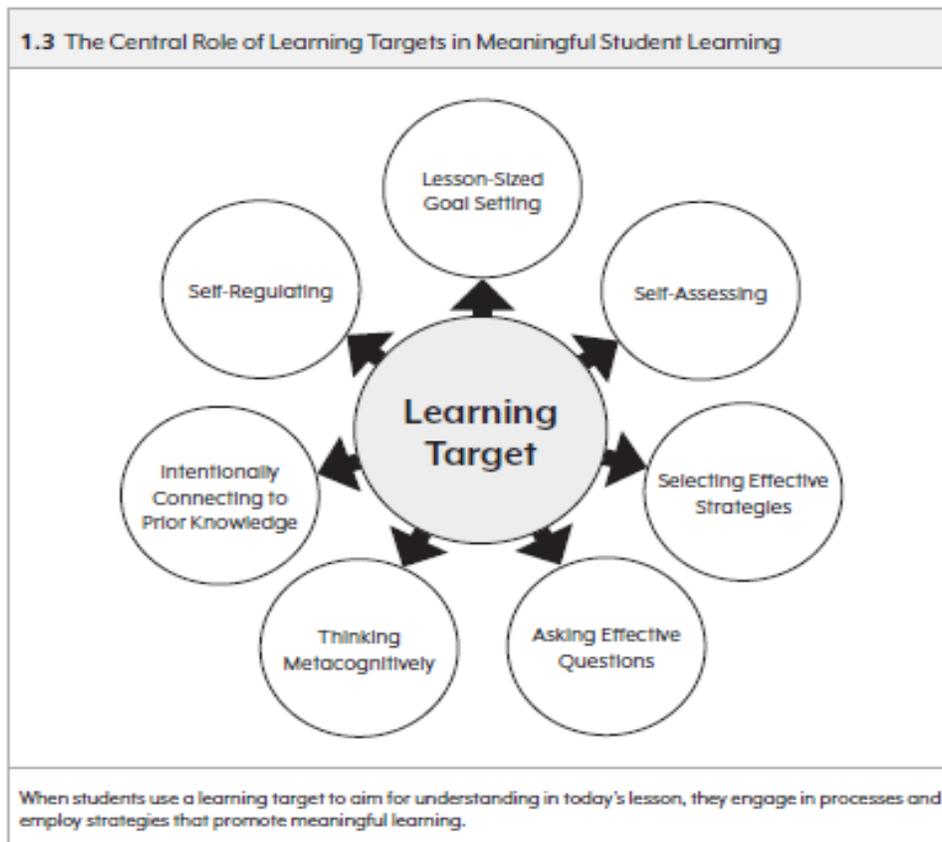
1. I can notice the author's word choice that helps me understand what a character is like. I can record at least five effective examples in a notecatcher and show what I have learned about the character. I will know what effective looks like by referencing the criterion and comparing my thinking. Noticing word choice to help me understand characters will help me understand characters when I am reading independently.
2. I can keep my papers organized by placing them in sequential order and making sure the papers aren't bent. My folder will be accurate whenever Mr. Doughty checks my folder. Keeping my papers organized helps me find what I need when I need it.
3. I can explain the effect that Ross Perot, a third party candidate, had on the election of President Bill Clinton. To be able to do this, I must learn and understand:
 - The characteristics of a third-party candidate
 - The economic conditions in the US in 1992
 - The platform and financial resources of Ross Perot

I will show I can do this by writing an essay on the role Ross Perot played in the 1992 election of Bill Clinton that includes three specific effects supported by documented facts from valid and reliable sources (*Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson* Brookhart and Moss 2012 p. 33)

Holding Students Accountable and Assessing Students' Learning

Learning targets also help students become more responsible for and reflective in their learning. By involving students in the learning process, they can be held more accountable for the outcome and thus more readily assessed against the specific, measurable target. Students and teachers can have conversations about their learning based on these targets; the target is no longer just in the teacher's head, but living in the classroom where every student is working toward that goal. It is the **what, how, and why** of every lesson. Teachers need to identify the long term learning target, unpack it, and then craft lesson specific learning targets that allow students to understand what it is they need to do as learners.

Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson Connie Moss and Susan Brookhart (2012)



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Articulating learning targets helps students have ownership in their learning because these statements help them understand what they need to do as learners. The statements create focus by communicating what is important and thus become a target for achievement. Remember the days of the SMART goals?

Specific, strategic
Measurable
Attainable
Results-oriented
Time-bound

When students are required to think about their own learning, articulate what they understand, and what they still need to learn, achievement improves (Black and William, 1998; Sternberg, 1996; Young, 2000 as referenced in <http://www.kenton.k12.ky.us/userfiles/922/Main%20elementary%20page/!%20can%20statements%20-%20website.pdf>)

Having a journal for students to record I Can statements and a reflection on their learning helps keep students responsible and is a specific way for teachers to measure students' progress.

Using a rubric from Marzano's playbook, think about how much clearer it is to assess students' learning when the learning itself has been made abundantly clear through I Can statements. Students can assess their progress towards the target which helps them assume ownership for their learning and define next steps for learning.

0	The student provides little or no response. Even with help the student does not exhibit a partial understanding of the knowledge.
1	The student provides responses that indicate a distinct lack of understanding of the knowledge. However, with help, the student demonstrates partial understanding of some of the knowledge.
2	The student's responses indicate major errors or omissions regarding the more complex ideas and processes; however they do not indicate major errors or omissions relative to the simpler details and processes
3	The student's responses demonstrate no major errors or omissions regarding any of the information and/or processes
4	In addition to exhibiting level 3 performance, the student's responses demonstrate in-depth inferences and applications that go beyond what was taught in class

In closing, learning targets are not merely a checklist of skills for students to work their way through. The statements are not meant to be a been-there-done-that or now-they've-learned-that-skill-so-I-can-move-on mentality, but as a way to make learning transparent and transferable for students, as well as clearly focus our instructional practices (including questioning, designing strong performances of understanding, gauging student progress, and offering growth-producing feedback) in targeted ways. Learning targets, or I Can statements, should be written so that students understand what they are doing as learners and thinkers so that students know how to learn and think tomorrow. Clear learning targets help us:

- Correctly identify what we want students to know, understand, and be able to do relative to their level of achievement
- Determine if formative assessments adequately cover and sample what we taught
- Plan next steps for instruction
- Give meaningful descriptive feedback
- Have students self-assess and set goals
- Keep track of student learning by target or standard

Utilizing learning targets empower students on their path to enlightened and engaged learning; without them, our students will not learn as effectively or efficiently.

How to Write a Learning Target from Standards

Deconstruction of Standards

- Think - Can your content standards stand alone and be used as learning targets or do they need to be deconstructed or 'unpacked'?
- Deconstruction involves taking a standard and breaking it down into manageable learning targets—Knowledge, Reasoning, Performance/skills, Habits of Mind, and/or Products—so that students and teachers can accurately identify what students should know and be able to do

Thinking through a Process for Deconstruction

1. Examine the standards by unpacking
 - Underline verbs; circle nouns
 - Think about Depth of Knowledge required (or use Blooms Taxonomy)
2. Deep Understanding of Intended Learning:
 - Determine knowledge, skills, reasoning, habits of mind, and products students will need in order to meet that standard
 - Do not think of how you will teach the standard or how you will assess it, ONLY about what students will need to know and be able to do
3. Define Learning Trajectory
4. Unpack and Define the Essential Content for One Learning Chunk
5. State learning target in student friendly language
 - What will I be able to do when I've finished this lesson?
 - What idea, topic, or subject is important for me to learn and understand so that I can hit the target?
 - What will I do to show that I understand the target, and how well I will have to do it?
6. Design Strong Performance of Understanding
 - What will I do to show that I understand the target?
7. Define Success Criteria and Measurability
 - How well will I have to do it?
 - Think about the format

Quick Quality Check:

Are your targets. . .

___ Doable in a single (1 hour maximum) lesson?

___ Written in student friendly terms?

___ Clearly aligned to an essential skill/concept from the standard?

___ A good anchor for instructional activities and formative assessment?

For more reading on the subject:

Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson Connie Moss and Susan Brookhart (2012)

<http://quality.cr.k12.ia.us/Presentations/NQEC/I%20Can%20Succeed.pdf>

<http://www.theartofed.com/2013/02/21/how-i-can-statements-can-work-for-you/>

<http://www.kenton.k12.ky.us/userfiles/922/Main%20elementary%20page/I%20can%20statements%20-%20website.pdf>

<http://turnonyourbrain.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/why-i-would-not-post-i-can-statements/>