

Breaking Big Skills into Manageable IEP Objectives

Purpose & Overview

Annual IEP goals can sometimes feel overwhelming: “Student will improve written expression” or “Student will solve multi-step math problems” are too broad to teach, measure, or monitor effectively.

IDEA allows (and encourages) teams to break down these broad goals into **objectives or benchmarks**, which act as the “stepping stones” toward mastery.

This worksheet provides educators with tools, examples, and templates for breaking complex skills into manageable, trackable objectives.

Why Objectives Matter

- **Clarity:** Objectives define the smaller steps required to reach mastery.
 - **Progress monitoring:** Frequent, incremental data points help ensure students stay on track.
 - **Instructional planning:** Teachers can design lessons that target specific sub-skills.
 - **Student motivation:** Students experience success more often, building confidence.
 - **Legal compliance:** Objectives align with IDEA’s requirement to provide measurable progress indicators.
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Characteristics of High-Quality Objectives

1. **Specific:** Each objective should target *one sub-skill*.
 2. **Sequential:** Objectives build upon one another toward the annual goal.
 3. **Measurable:** Each can be tracked with data collection tools.
 4. **Achievable:** Attainable within a short timeframe (6–9 weeks).
 5. **Instructional:** Objectives guide day-to-day teaching.
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Breaking Goals into Objectives: Examples

Reading Goal Example

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, Student will read 120 correct words per minute from a grade-level passage with 95% accuracy across 3 consecutive probes.
- **Objectives:**
 1. Increase oral reading fluency from 60 to 80 CWPM with 90% accuracy.
 2. Increase oral reading fluency from 80 to 100 CWPM with 93% accuracy.
 3. Increase oral reading fluency from 100 to 120 CWPM with 95% accuracy.

Writing Goal Example

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, Student will write a 5-sentence paragraph with topic, 3 details, and conclusion in 4 of 5 opportunities.
- **Objectives:**
 1. Write complete sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation in 4 of 5 opportunities.

2. Write compound sentences using conjunctions correctly in 3 of 5 opportunities.
3. Use a graphic organizer to plan and write a paragraph with at least 3 sentences.
4. Independently write a full paragraph with topic, 3 details, and conclusion.

Math Goal Example

- **Annual Goal:** Within 36 weeks, Student will solve multi-step word problems involving addition and subtraction with 80% accuracy across 3 probes.
- **Objectives:**
 1. Accurately solve single-digit addition and subtraction facts to 10 with 90% accuracy.
 2. Accurately solve double-digit addition and subtraction with regrouping at 85% accuracy.
 3. Use a problem-solving checklist to solve single-step word problems with 80% accuracy.
 4. Solve multi-step word problems involving addition and subtraction with 80% accuracy.

Behavior/Self-Regulation Goal Example

- **Annual Goal:** Student will independently use a self-regulation strategy (deep breathing, break card, or counting) in 4 of 5 opportunities across 3 weeks.
- **Objectives:**
 1. Identify feelings using a visual chart in 4 of 5 opportunities.

2. Select a preferred calming strategy from a visual menu in 3 of 5 opportunities.
3. Use a calming strategy with 1 prompt in 4 of 5 opportunities.
4. Independently use a calming strategy in 4 of 5 opportunities.

Quick Reference: Objective Starters

- **Academic:** “Student will [skill] with [accuracy/criteria] given [support].”
- **Behavioral:** “Student will [behavior] within [time/condition], measured by [tool].”
- **Functional:** “Student will [daily living skill] in [# of opportunities/timeframe].”

Common Missteps When Writing Objectives

Misstep	Better Practice
Writing objectives that mirror the annual goal	Break into smaller, sequential sub-skills .
Overstuffing one objective with multiple skills	Focus on one sub-skill per objective .
Writing vague objectives like “Student will improve math skills”	State specific, measurable criteria.

Writing objectives not aligned to the annual goal	Ensure objectives are <i>directly tied</i> to the larger goal.
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Action Starter: Try Tomorrow

- Select one current annual goal that feels too broad.
 - Break it into **3–5 measurable objectives** that build toward mastery.
 - Share with your team to confirm alignment and feasibility.
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