Target Population

The substance of a course is derived from what the trainee or student already knows or is able to do from what the job requires him or her to know or do.

Course = What job requires    What he/she knows

The course is heavily influenced by the kind of trainee or student who shows up for the course. It is very important that the course is designed for the trainees as they really exist, not as management hopes they exist.

The major characteristics of the target population constitute the starting point for the course, not the finishing point. The following are some general descriptions that Robert F. Mager and Kenneth M. Beach list in their book, Developing Vocational Instruction (1967):

1. Physical Characteristics -- The physical nature of your trainees or students may influence the tools and procedures that can be included in the instruction. Describe the general nature of your population; indicate general handicaps as well as assets such as special strength, balance, or endurance.

2. Education. The kind of education your incoming students have had in the past will have a good deal of influence on the length of the course, examples you can use, vocabulary that will be understood, and the level of abstraction that might be meaningful.

3. Motivation. Are the students generally eager to learn the occupation you are teaching, or is motivation something of a problem? The less motivated you feel they are, the more you will have to concern yourself with keeping students interested at every step of the course.

4. Interests. What kinds of things are the students interested in? Knowing their interests will help keep them motivated. What are their special skills or aptitudes? Are they good at fixing cars? Are they short on manual dexterity? The answers to these questions will assist you in writing realistic prerequisites, and may have some influence on what you can reasonably expect in the way of terminal performance from your students.

5. Attitudes biases, and prejudices. Does your target population consist primarily of one ethnic group? What are their strong convictions and biases? This information may also influence the kind of examples you can effectively use, and may provide other clues to student motivation.
Example 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>Female; 18-40 years of age.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Average of two years of college, above-average</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Desire to learn a skill relative to husband’s occupations. Husbands are scientists and engineers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Civic activities, local politics. They attend local lectures and are active in garden and art clubs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes, biases prejudices</td>
<td>They prefer to associate, with educated people. Like to think of themselves as educated, but would rather tend to their clubs than to their children.</td>
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</tbody>
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Example 2

Male: 12-20 years old; physically strong, good stamina. High school dropouts; generally below-average intelligence. Few have been outside the county in which they were born. Know simple arithmetic operations, but cannot calculate rapidly or perform any algebraic operations. There is good knowledge of how simple machines work. Desire recognition, wheels, and women. They like to work with their hands; show good mechanical dexterity. Prefer to work outdoors most of the time. Interests are limited to immediate neighborhood and the things around them. Students live in a poor environment and are suspicious of everyone not exactly like themselves. They hate everything about school. Prejudiced about race and nationality is deep and widespread, but they are friendly and like to have fun. Abhor waste, and can make do with very little.

Summaries such as these provide a place to start in the description of the target population. But something more is required . . . information about specific knowledge relevant to the subject of the course. What do incoming trainees or students know that will make learning the subject easy? What do they know, or not know, that will make learning difficult? For example: If the student will have to handle instruments of various kinds, does he already know how to read scales? Does he know how to interpret scales? If so, that is a help. If not, these skills will have to be taught. The more you know about the target population, the more accurately you will be able to derive the content of the course . . . the more accurately you will be able to identify the difference between what is and what needs or ought to be.
TARGET POPULATION ANALYSIS

JOB TITLE: _________________________________  Date: ________________

COURSE: ______________________________________

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

EDUCATION:

MOTIVATION:

INTERESTS:

ATTITUDES, BIASES, AND PREJUDICES:

APPROVED BY SUPERVISOR: