

Preparing Your Course Syllabus

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There is no single format that applies to every university course syllabus. However there are a number of factors to consider when creating such a document that can make it informative, useful and engaging. Note that the syllabus has at least four separate functions: (a) a contract and guide for students, (b) a vehicle an instructor can use in designing a new course or revising an existing course, and (c) a document that serves as an archaeological record of the course after it has been given, and (d) a source for the external review of your teaching. Therefore your course syllabus should be engaging and informative to students; it should reflect the overall your organization and design of the course; it should be a structured snapshot of the course that you can preserve in your teaching dossier; and it should represent a basis of evaluating your teaching.

With these factors in mind, the following are some tips can serve as a backdrop for preparing your syllabus:

- Engage the students by avoiding an authoritarian tone. Where possible Use “I”, “we”, and “you” instead of “students” and “instructor.”
- Where possible, use the active rather than passive voice (*e.g.* “I will assess you...” rather than “students will be assessed...”).
- Where possible, present the course positively, *i.e.* as a series of opportunities rather than as a series of hurdles.
- To avoid your being viewed as a distant, all-knowing master or guru, include information about yourself: your relevant background, teaching experience, research interests, or other characteristics that provide you with a persona.
- Indicate the course goals, not merely in terms of what material will be covered but in terms of student learning outcomes (*e.g.* “As a result of taking this course, you will be able to...”)
- Indicate how your methods of assessment (*e.g.* assignments, tests) align with the course goals and proposed student learning outcomes.
- Provide rationales or explanations for assignments in terms of how they support the course goals.
- Consider the option of including a concept map or graphic syllabus of the course that visually reveals the structure of the course beyond the linear sequence of course topics.

The following is a checklist of possible inclusions in your syllabus. Not all of them have to be included, and you might include items that are not on this checklist.

Basic Course information

- Course number and title
- Classroom location
- Days and hours of class meetings
- Web site information
- Any required or recommended prerequisites
- For each staff member: email address and office phone
- Moodle site

Information about course coverage and goals

- Course description, possibly also including “popular” topics the course does **not** cover
- Your end-of-course student learning objectives (outcomes)—*i.e.* what students will be able to do at the end of the course that they could not do before

Information on the readings

- Required and recommended books and articles, with complete citations (author(s) or editors(s), title, date, edition, publisher, journal, *etc.*) as well as price and where available, if relevant
- Existence of a “class pack” and where to purchase it
- Why you chose these readings, at least the required ones

Other required course materials

- Supplies, special calculators, clickers, software, *etc*
- Approximate costs
- When they will be needed

Course requirements and grading

- Graded course requirements
- How many of what types of assignments and their rationale
- Number and types of quizzes and tests
- Group component of individuals’ grades, including peer evaluation procedures
- Class participation
- Electronic communication
- Standards/rubric by which you will grade papers, problem solutions, other written work, electronic communication, and in-class participation
- Study and assignment aids to be distributed —study guides, review questions, directions for writing papers, lists of possible paper/project topics, *etc*
- Percentage of the grade (and/or number of points) for each component
- Course requirements aside from those you compute in the grades —For example: “*I expect you to participate in and contribute to discussion.*” “*I will occasionally give unannounced, ungraded quizzes to monitor that you are comprehending the readings and*

lectures.” Or: “In-class activities will include ungraded writing exercises and classroom assessment techniques.”

- Any extra-credit options
- University support services available to help students through the course, along with their locations (*e.g.* Writing Centre, Math Aid Centre, Counseling Services)

Course policies

- Policies on missed and late exams and assignments, with rationale
- Policies on attendance, tardiness, class participation, and classroom decorum
- Policies on academic integrity, including in collaborate work
- Policies on lab safety and health, if applicable

Course organization and schedule

- Overall course organization or “flow” and your rationale for it (*e.g.* Concept Map or Graphics Syllabus)
- Class-by-class or weekly course schedule—preferably in a grid format or with an alternative graphic representation (*e.g.* a graphic organizer) attached—with as much of the following as possible:
 - Substantive topics
 - Readings, papers, or other homework assignments due for each class
 - In-class activities and formats (lecture, group meetings, class discussion, role playing, simulation, debate, student presentations, case studies, field trip, film, video, slide show, visiting speaker, review session, exam, announced quiz, *etc.*).
- Possible legal caveat or disclaimer: For example: *“The above schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.”*