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

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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 collaborative 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.”