



Tools for Teaching

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Creating a Syllabus

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Provide basic information. Include the current year and semester, the course title and number, the number of units, the meeting time and location. Indicate any course meetings which are not scheduled for the assigned room. List your name, office address (include a map if your office is hard to locate), office phone number (and indicate whether you have voice mail), email address, website URL, fax number, and office hours. For your office hours, indicate whether students need to make appointments in advance or may just stop in. If you list a home telephone number, indicate any restrictions on its use (for example, "Please do not call after 10 P.M."). Include the names, offices, and phone numbers of any teaching or laboratory assistants. (Sources: Altman and Cashin, 1992; Birdsall, 1989)

Describe the prerequisites to the course. Help students realistically assess their readiness for your course by listing the knowledge, skills, or experience you expect them to already have or the courses they should have completed. Give students suggestions on how they might refresh their skills if they feel uncertain about their readiness. (Source: Rubin, 1985)

Give an overview of the course's purpose. Provide an introduction to the subject matter and show how the course fits in the college or department curriculum. Explain what the course is about and why students would want to learn the material.

State the general learning goals or objectives. List three to five major objectives that you expect all students to strive for: What will students know or be able to do better after completing this course? What skills or competencies do you want to develop in your students? (Source: Johnson, 1988)

Clarify the conceptual structure used to organize the course. Students need to understand why you have arranged topics in a given order and the logic of the themes or concepts you have selected.

Describe the format or activities of the course. Let students know whether the course involves fieldwork, research projects, lectures, discussions with active participation, and the like. Which are required and which recommended?

Specify the textbook and readings by authors and editions. Include information on why these particular readings were selected. When possible, show the relationship between the readings and the course objectives, especially if you assign chapters in a textbook out of sequence (Rubin, 1985). Let students know whether they are required to do the reading before each class meeting. If students will purchase books or course readers, include prices and the names of local bookstores that stock texts. If you will place readings on reserve in the library, you might include the call numbers (McKeachie, 1986). If you do not have access to the call numbers or if it makes to reading list look too cluttered, give students as their first assignment the task of identifying the call numbers for the readings. Let students know that this will make it easier for them to locate each week's readings, and more importantly, it will give them practice in using the library's electronic resources.

Identify additional materials or equipment needed for the course. For example, do students need lab or safety equipment, art supplies, calculators, computers, drafting materials? (Source: Altman and Cashin, 1992)

List assignments, term papers, and exams. State the nature and format of the assignments, the expected length of essays, and their deadlines. Give the examination dates and briefly indicate the nature of the tests (multiple-choice, essay, short-answer, take-home tests). How do the assignments relate to the learning objectives for the course? What are your expectations for written work? In setting up the syllabus, try to keep the workload evenly balanced throughout the term. (Source: Lowther, Stark, and Martens, 1989)

State how students will be evaluated and how grades will be assigned. Describe the grading procedures, including the components of the final grade and the weights assigned to each component (for example, homework, term papers, midterms and exams). Students appreciate knowing the weighting because it helps them budget their time (Altman, 1989). Will you grade on a curve or use an absolute scale? Will you accept extra-credit work to improve grades? Will any quiz grades be dropped? See "Grading Practices."

List other course requirements. For example, are students required to attend an office hour or form study groups?

Discuss course policies. Clearly state your policies regarding class attendance; turning in late work; missing homework, tests or exams; make-ups; extra credit; requesting extensions; reporting illnesses; cheating and plagiarism. Include a description of students' responsibilities in the learning

process and the professor's and graduate student instructors' responsibilities. You might also list acceptable and unacceptable classroom behavior ("Please refrain from eating during class because it is disturbing to me and other students").

Invite students with special needs to contact you during office hours.

Let students know that if they need an accommodation for any type of physical or learning disability, they should set up a time to meet with you to discuss what modifications are necessary.

Provide a course calendar or schedule. The schedule should include the sequence of course topics, the preparations or readings, and the assignments due. For the readings, give page numbers in addition to chapter numbers-- this will help students budget their time. Exam dates should be firmly fixed, while dates for topics and activities may be listed as tentative. Provide an updated calendar as needed.

Schedule time for fast feedback from your students. Set a time midway through the term when you can solicit from students their reactions to the course so far. See "Fast Feedback" for ways to get feedback from students.

List important drop dates. Include on the course calendar the last day students can withdraw from the course without penalty.

Estimate student work load. Give students a sense of how much preparation and work the course will involve. How much time should they anticipate spending on reading assignments, problem sets, lab reports or research?

Include supplementary material to help students succeed in the course. For example consider providing one or more of the following:

- Helpful hints on how to study, take notes or do well in class
- Glossary of technical terms used in the course
- References on specific topics for more in-depth exploration
- Bibliography of supplemental readings at a higher or lower level of difficulty, in case students find the required text too simple or too challenging
- Copies of past exams so students can see at the beginning of the term what they will be expected to know at the end
- Information on the availability of videotapes of lectures
- A list of campus resources for tutoring and academic support, including computer labs
- Calendar of campus lectures, plays, events, exhibits, or other activities of relevance to your course
- Online Resources that may be helpful to students

Provide space for names, telephone numbers, and email addresses, of two or three classmates. Encourage students to identify people in class they can contact if they miss a session or want to study together. (Source: "What Did You Put in Your Syllabus?" 1985)



References

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