

Building a Strong Syllabus

Benefits of a Syllabus

1. **A Syllabus is a Contract** - Though not in the legal sense, it allows you to spell out course expectations and assignments early in the term. As a written document, a strong syllabus prevents ambiguities more than a spoken presentation would (and you can refer students who missed early classes to the syllabus).
2. **Central Reference for Students** - Students benefit from a central document containing detailed assignments, readings and schedules throughout term in order to keep themselves on track.
3. **Effective Planning Document** - A detailed syllabus stating course goals and learning objectives will help instructors better plan the most effective presentation of course content. A poorly-written syllabus can affect student attitude, performance and civility
4. **Repository for Other Instructors** - A strong syllabus can be used by other instructors to plan similar or related courses they may be teaching

General Tips

1. **Be specific** - Specify specific details about assignments, readings, grading policies, attendance, course goals, learning outcomes and other information and expectations. These should include due dates, page length, samples and more. In some cases, it may be more sensible to provide more specific details later, but even specifying that details are coming in the syllabus better prepare students.
2. **Maintain a Positive Tone** - A syllabus should not frighten a student with warnings or threats. A syllabus which clearly lays out policy but maintains a positive tone will make students more comfortable from the beginning.
3. **Review the Syllabus on the First Day of Class** - During the first class, discuss the syllabus. Use the first 10 minutes of class for a quick review. Even though course policies are carefully stated, they will often need clarification. Students appreciate openness in discussing the rationale behind the policies. In some cases student questions may lead to a beneficial exchange about course goals and philosophies.
4. **Announce Changes in E-Mail** - If for some reason, a date or other item in the syllabus must be changed, the course director should send an email as soon as possible to the students so that everyone has a "written" record. Changes or

modifications should also be announced in class. Students should be given adequate notification of any changes. Assessment measures should not be modified unless absolutely necessary. A good rule of thumb when considering changes to the syllabus is to remember that changes should do 'no harm' to the students.

5. * **Syllabus Subject to Change Statement**

- "This syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class." All changes will be communicated via OHSU email and verbally in class.

Tips

1. **Note the weighting scale** for different types of assessment measures/assignments.
2. **Indicate non-compensatory grading** if implemented. Put it in writing
3. **Identify extra-credit options** if available, and how they will be applied toward final grades.
4. **Specify which types of exams will be given** (essay, multiple choice, etc.). This gives students a better indication how to prepare for an exam.
5. **Provide requirements for papers and projects**, including what you look for in a paper or project for it to be considered Passing.
6. **Avoid major grading policy changes** as much as possible.
7. **Specify policies for remediations** and what remediations will include.
8. **Include Attendance Policy/Class participation policy**
9. **Revisit the Integrity Statement** and Penalties for Academic Dishonesty.
10. A middle course between leniency and strictness is recommended.

Sample of action verbs to use when considering Learning Objectives

1. **Knowledge:** arrange, cite, communicate, define, duplicate, give, label, list, memorize, name, order, provide, quote, recall, recognize, relate, remember, repeat, reproduce, state
2. **Comprehension:** allocate, assign, classify, describe, designate, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, match, paraphrase, recognize, report, restate, review, select, sort, tell, translate
3. **Application:** apply, chart, choose, demonstrate, distribute, document, dramatize, employ, execute, illustrate, implement, interpret, operate, order, perform, practice, present, produce, record, schedule, sketch, solve, train, use
4. **Analysis:** analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, determine, diagram, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, inventory, investigate, question, survey, test, verify
5. **Synthesis:** arrange, assemble, collect, compose, compute, conduct, construct, control, coordinate, create, design, develop, devise, discover, establish, extend, find, formulate, generate, integrate, invent, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, synthesize, write
6. **Evaluation:** appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, conclude, critique, decide, deduce, defend, derive, diagnose, estimate, evaluate, judge, manage, measure, monitor, negotiate, predict, prescribe, rate, recommend, score, select, support, theorize, troubleshoot, value, hypothesize, infer, interpret

10 important lessons for effective classroom presentations

1. Don't talk at students. Involve them.
2. Encourage positive group dynamics. Reform and move students into groups as needed.
3. Allow students to discover data for themselves.
4. Ask students to keep an action or idea list, and revisit it throughout the session.
5. Learning is directly proportionate to the amount of fun you have.
6. Change the pace. Listening with retention only lasts about 20 minutes at a time.
7. Design your class so participants leave impressed with themselves and what they learned.
8. Allow adults learners to use their expertise by leaving time to share experiences.
9. Don't offer material only one way. Recognize your participants will learn differently.
10. Teach the things you have a passion for

*Seven is the maximum number of ideas, facts or issues that students can actively focus on at one time. The number of items recalled will decrease as complexity of information increases. (Miller 1965)

The [Teaching and Learning Center](#) provides helpful information for faculty. Check out their webpage.