

Preparing A Course Syllabus*

A syllabus is the basic document developed by instructors to reflect their plan for a course. The chief purpose of a syllabus is to help the instructor present an organized, coherent, and academically responsible course. It also provides structure for students taking the course and serves as a guide for TAs.

What is the rationale for syllabi?

The rationale is based on information from instructors who have successfully developed syllabi for their courses. Most instructors agree that an effective syllabus accomplishes the following:

1. requires instructors to organize early (experienced instructors know that this is essential to a successful class);
2. helps students know what is expected of them and efficiently plan their semester;
3. reduces opportunities for capricious grading charges;
4. presents a positive image to students (a well-prepared syllabus is evidence that you take teaching seriously);
5. provides pertinent information about the course to your department and colleagues.

How do you get started?

Begin by studying syllabi from other instructors. Request copies from colleagues with reputations for being successful teachers. Ask colleagues what has and has not worked for them.

Once you have examined a number of syllabi, your next step is to determine a format that suits you and your course. There is no one correct form to follow. Familiarize yourself with university policies and regulations about examinations, academic misconduct, and other issues that affect your students, TAs and you. Check the calendar for holidays and other events potentially relevant to your students. The school calendar is available in the quarterly *Time Schedule*.

Information about academic standards is provided in the *University Handbook* available on UWIN. The Student Conduct Code is also available on-line through the UW homepage: www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html.

What should you include in your syllabus?

Your syllabus can include as little or as much as you want. Experienced instructors include more rather than less material. Instructors generally agree that certain topics should be considered.

1. *Information about the course*

- current year and quarter
- course title and number
- meeting time and location
- instructor's name, phone number and email address, office location and office hours

2. *Clear statement of course objectives*

Course objectives are unambiguous statements of learning outcomes. Phrase them in terms of what the student is expected to learn or accomplish rather than in terms of what the instructor will do during the quarter.

3. *Description of how students will meet the course objectives*

This is *not* to be confused with a list of assignments. Instead, it is a description of activities that the course will include. The description might include such activities as field trips, readings, lectures, discussions, research projects, laboratory work, problem sets, group presentations, case studies, or guest lecturers. You might also include estimates of student study time with each activity.

4. *List of resources available to students*

The most important item to be included in this section is the required text(s) and reading assignments. Optional or supplemental readings should be included here as well. If you plan to make other materials available to students (e.g. sample tests and projects, tapes, or readings) mention these items in this section.