

Department of History
TA Orientation, Autumn 2005
Section Syllabus Advice

The following suggestions for section syllabus construction are not meant to be exhaustive, but just some helpful guidelines.

The section syllabus usually functions as a supplement to the instructor's main course syllabus. In this way, your creative license must work within the parameters set by the professor. Any conflict between your syllabus and the main course syllabus must be resolved in favor of the main one, though it is obviously best to avoid conflicts in the first place. Your syllabus will be your way to leave a distinctive mark on the class and it will help to define your approach to the discussion sections you will lead.

Now, the section syllabus is also a sort of contract with your students, so consider what you put in it very carefully. It is vitally important that you include a statement somewhere that says that you reserve the right to change the syllabus at any time!

Here are some items that you should consider including in your syllabus:

- Name, office location, office hours (min. two hours per week), office phone number, course website (if applicable)
- Email address – it is also vitally important to give some indication of how often you check it and then adhere to this schedule!
- Brief description of the purpose of the section
- Guidelines for contact, electronic submission of assignments, etc.
- Late penalties – some instructors set these, so be sure that your rules are in line with the main course syllabus
- Expectations for discussion – it is often useful to make a few remarks about classroom etiquette.
- Information/Policies regarding rough drafts, attendance, participation grading
- Some syllabi often include some guide to your editorial comments when grading
- Plagiarism policy
- Reminders on when course assignments are due

The length of section syllabi varies greatly in our department. Some prefer long ones that spell out everything imaginable, while others restrict theirs to a single dense page. There is no general consensus on which is better.

A section syllabus is not required by our department, but most TAs agree that it is an important part in establishing and maintaining your authority in sections. It is usually a good idea to have the course instructor look over the syllabus before you distribute them to your students.

Finally, there are numerous examples of section syllabi on file in the Lead TA office. Please feel free to make use of them in constructing your own.