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*Source:* [*https://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/designing-your-course/writing-a-syllabus.html*](https://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/designing-your-course/writing-a-syllabus.html)

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Writing a Syllabus

Getting started

* [Establish course learning outcomes](https://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/designing-your-course/settting-learning-outcomes.html). Consider what you would like students to know or be able to do as a result of taking your course.
* Design your course. This [Course Decisions Guide](https://www.cte.cornell.edu/documents/Course%20Decisions%20Guide.pdf) https://www.cte.cornell.edu/images/icon_pdf.gif can guide you in the process.
* Consult our [Syllabus Template](https://www.cte.cornell.edu/documents/Syllabus%20Template.doc) https://www.cte.cornell.edu/images/icon_word.gif to review some recommended best practices for syllabus construction. Type in your course material and information without having to format.
* Use this [Syllabus Rubric](https://www.cte.cornell.edu/documents/Syllabus%20Rubric.pdf) https://www.cte.cornell.edu/images/icon_pdf.gif as a tool for reviewing your course syllabus.
* Review the course description established by your department or syllabi of the same course from previous instructors.
* Check online for sample syllabi of the same or similar courses from colleagues at other universities.
* Consider questions students may have about the course (Davis, 2009).

Writing the syllabus

*The following ideas are adapted from Nilson (2010, p. 33-36).*

1. **How to set the tone for the course**

* Provide course information such as course number, location and time, prerequisites, and other requirements.
* Share your teaching philosophy.
* Announce office hours and location.
* Share some information about yourself, such as your educational and professional background.
* Describe how the course relates to the program, discipline, or field.
* Provide information about campus services that can aid students with their studies.
* Reflect on the overall tone of your writing: is it encouraging or punitive?

1. **How to communicate what, when, and how students will learn**

* Articulate course learning objectives.
* List major topics your course will cover.
* Provide a list of reading materials (briefly annotated).
* List textbooks and other course materials and where to find them.
* List all graded course requirements such as assignments, exams, attendance, participation, etc.
* Provide a detailed schedule, weekly or daily. Include what will be covered, assignment and test dates, learning activities such as group work or presentations, guest speakers, field trips, library information sessions, etc.
* Consider using a graphic syllabus to supplement your syllabus. A graphic syllabus is a “flowchart, graphic organizer, or diagram of the sequencing and organization of your course’s major topics through the term. It may also note the calendar schedule of the topics, the major activities and assignments, and the tests” (Nilson, 2010, p.38). See an example of [graphic syllabus](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/graphic-display-of-student-learning-objectives/27863).

1. **How to communicate what students need to do in order to succeed in the course**

* Next to learning outcomes, list what you believe students need to do in order to be successful (how many hours per week they should dedicate, class attendance and participation, etc.). Note that students may vary in their learning and that achieving course goals requires work on the students' part.
* Provide detailed information on how graded assignments or activities will be evaluated.

1. **How to communicate expectations in terms of student responsibilities**

* Next to learning outcomes, add a disclaimer stating that students may vary in their learning and that attaining competencies requires work on the student’s part.
* Establish ground rules for classroom interactions. Ask for student input and make adjustments to your original list of expectations.
* Make clear any course policies you may have on attendance, tardiness, missed or late exams or assignments, personal use of technology, and safety procedures in laboratories.

1. **How to deter misunderstandings about course policies**

* Articulate institutional, departmental or course policies on academic integrity, students with disabilities, and diversity.
* Detail examples of what constitutes violations of your policies and provide specific information on the consequences.
* Note that any of the course activities listed in your syllabus may be subject to change under certain circumstances such as by mutual agreement or to enhance student learning.

1. **How can you motivate students to refer to the syllabus?**

* Introduce the syllabus in class as a learning activity. Ask students to quiz each other, or conduct a jigsaw activity:
  1. Break the syllabus up into different sections.
  2. Divide students into different groups.
  3. Give each group a different section of the syllabus for review (expert groups).
  4. Re-form groups so that each group includes a member from each of the previous expert groups.
  5. Have the experts teach their section of the syllabus to their new groups.
* Be strategic in where you place the syllabus. You can include it in the student course pack or on a course website.
* If students ask questions that the syllabus answers, ask a student who has the course syllabus to find the answer on the spot.
* Ask students to contribute to the syllabus. Have them review it in class and make suggestions for changes.