

Principles for Creating a Syllabus to Enhance Student Learning and Engagement
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- Students value clarity: they want to know when assignments are due and how much time they'll need to devote to them, so include a detailed schedule.
- Students have pre-conceived ideas of what the course will be like: consider using your syllabus as a tool for discussing students' expectations coming into the class.
- University students are adult learners: avoid treating the syllabus too much like a legally-binding contract. If you detail responses to every possible infraction, the tone of the syllabus can become too authoritarian.
- Students value relevancy: where possible, lead students to connect the course content with their professional goals or personal lives.
- Students appreciate your context and values: consider including a short teaching philosophy statement to help your students understand your teaching approach.
- Ask yourself whether the assignments and the way you assess students truly reflect the course objectives. If not, adjustments to assignments and exams are in order.
- Remember that your syllabus sets the tone for your class; if you want your course to involve active learning and collaboration then your syllabus should reflect that. Likewise, if you want your students to take ownership of their own learning and have a positive attitude toward the course content, your syllabus should treat students as responsible adults and should model respect.
- Think about the various ways that your syllabus will be used—as an official record of what you taught, as a communication tool of expectations, as an organizational tool for students—and make sure that you create it with various audiences in mind (administrators, other faculty, students). Remember that it can function as a learning tool for your students and that you shouldn't let its other functions overshadow this primary use.
- Students appreciate having options: structure your class in a way that allows students some choice in their assignments and how they will be assessed.
- When students and instructors work together to create a shared vision of a course, learning improves. Consider allowing your students to contribute to the syllabus in some way, by creating course policies or determining some of the readings, for instance.

References

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