

Designing a Syllabus Workshop
Rutgers TA Orientation, Teaching Assistant Project
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Part 1: Designing a Syllabus

What are the purposes of a syllabus?

- communicate expectations
- communicate purpose of the course
 - how it fits into the curriculum, why it's important, where it leads
- serve as a contract with students
- allow students to manage their time
- minimize misunderstandings

What are the parts of a good syllabus?

1. Logistical material

- course name, number, meeting days, time, and place
- any prerequisites for the course
- instructor's contact information
 - email, phone, mailbox and office location
- when and where instructor's office hours are
- online presence of course
 - URL of course website, name and URL of any course management software

2. Substantive material

- course description and objectives
- course guidelines
 - can include mention of respecting others' opinions, class participation, etc
- schedule - as detailed as you can make it, or "subject to change"
 - including assignments, exams with due dates and relative grading weights
- list of any field trips, guest speakers (if known)
- readings and where to find them
 - on reserve at the library? books to buy?
 - list number of pages in each reading

3. Policies and procedures

- procedures for submitting work

- electronically? via a course management program? paper only?
- grading and exam policies
 - policy on late work, what qualifies as an A
 - policy on make-up exams
- attendance policies
- classroom behavior policies
 - no cell phones, policy on texting, laptops, etc
- academic integrity policy, and consequences for failing to follow it
 - See the University's policy here:
<http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>
- accommodations for disabled students policy
 - See Disability Support Services page here:
<http://studentaffairs.rutgers.edu/disability>

Tips:

- Don't forget to proofread!
- Look at other syllabi for ideas on both formatting and content.
---> How to attribute sources?

Part 2: Designing a Course

- A course is a work of art!
- Begin by locating, or creating, course description and course objectives.
- Look at similar syllabi in your field.
- Deciding what sort, and how much, homework to assign
 - readings versus problem sets, etc
 - do undergrads only do the reading if...
 - it's short?
 - it's connected to an assignment?
 - there's a chance that there'll be a pop quiz?
 - textbook chapters (1-2 per week?), supplemental articles
 - time spent on homework per week = time spent in class per week?

main principle: challenge but don't overwhelm
- Remember that you're a student too. Balance the grading you'll have to do with anticipated schoolwork of your own, especially around exam time.

Tips:

- Set up an online discussion board (via a course management program or Greatest Journal, etc) and have students post comments on the readings prior to class meeting. Read student comments and incorporate them into that day's lecture and discussion!
- Use course management programs or Rutgers University Libraries (<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu>) to put copies of readings on electronic reserve - especially useful for first week, to avoid "I haven't gotten my book yet" excuses. (A form for electronic reserves is available at library circulation desks.) Plan ahead - the libraries tend to be very busy in the first weeks of the semester.

Part 3: Distributing a Syllabus

- Create an annotated copy of the syllabus for yourself, to help draw attention to major points.
- Remind your students to look at both the front and back of the syllabus, and/or that the syllabus has multiple pages!
- Consider posting your syllabus online (many departments have web space for this purpose)
 - convenient for students
 - help students decide if this is the course for them
 - consider including "cuts" to jump to various parts of a long syllabus
- Consider these first-day-of-class activities:
 - play a reading-the-syllabus game
 - ask students to sign a sheet stating that they've read and understood the syllabus

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Appendices:

- Sample syllabus - Materials for Children, SCILS, Fall 2007
(to save paper, visit this syllabus online here:
<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~jratzan/547fall07/547fall07syllabus.html>)
- Sample confirmation sheet