What is a syllabus and why is it important?

A syllabus (plural: syllabi) is a summary of the expectations and policies that will govern a course and an overview of the work you will do in that course. The syllabus will typically inform you about the goals of a course, the materials you will need, how you will be graded, how you can contact your instructor, and other information necessary to help you succeed. Reading through your course syllabi will help you plan your semester.

Where do you find your syllabi?

Some instructors hand out paper copies of syllabi, but many post their syllabi on Blackboard. Look for Syllabus or Course Information in the left-hand menu in Blackboard and you will likely find this essential guide to your class.

See below for a guide to the pieces of information you will commonly find on a syllabus.

Instructor Information

Your instructor’s name, email address, office location, phone number, and office hours will be listed. Office hours are periods of time set aside by instructors to meet with their students outside of class.

Course Description

The course description typically provides a general overview of the course, including learning outcomes, prerequisites, and a description of the types of work that will be required to fulfill the goals of the course.

Textbooks / Required Materials

This section will list the textbooks and materials required for your course. Textbooks can refer to print or digital books. Materials might include items such as notebooks and calculators or certain types of computer software.

Assignments / Schedule

Many instructors will list major assignments and their point values. Your instructor may also include a schedule of when homework and major assignments are due. This section might include crucial information about how to submit your work, including specifics about whether work is submitted in person or online and whether or not assignments should be submitted in certain file formats.
Grading / Evaluation

This section will inform you about the factors that determine your final grade in the course. In addition to addressing the instructor’s grading policies, this section might provide details on what percentage of your final grade is based on the various pieces of coursework, such as quizzes, tests, essays, class participation, or attendance.

Attendance / Other Policies

The syllabus will describe the attendance policy for a course, including what constitutes attendance, whether or not your grade is affected by attendance, whether or not absences are excused, and whether or not you will be dropped from a course for non-attendance after you have missed a certain number of classes. Read the policies section carefully for information on course participation, late work penalties, and academic integrity and plagiarism policies.

Additional Resources

Many syllabi include information about resources provided to you by the College, such as tutoring from the Academic Support Center, and other campus services that can help support your success, such as the Counseling Center and the Access Services office.

The syllabus is the roadmap to your course. You should read the syllabus for each of your courses at the beginning of the semester to help you plan your work, and review syllabi during the semester to stay on track with homework and major assignments and to remind yourself of course expectations.