



Advice for Creating a Syllabus

Gannon, K. (2019, August 16). How to create a syllabus: Advice guide. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus>

In the August 16 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kevin Gannon, professor of history at Grand View University and director of its Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, offers some helpful advice for creating a syllabus. Whether you are revising a course or preparing to teach a new one, care should be given to creating a syllabus that casts a good first impression of you and the course and that sets a tone for the rest of the semester. Gannon's article gives good advice for creating a syllabus that does not only that but also motivates your students to read it.

A good place to start is to ask yourself, "What do I want to say to my students?" One message to convey is that we want them to be engaged and motivated to succeed, and the syllabus can be an instrument for helping them do that. Not only does it set the tone, but it also provides students a map for the course and explains what they must do to succeed.

Thus, a good syllabus contains the following elements:

- *Basic course information* provides details about course-identifying information; a course description; prerequisites, if any; and an explanation of the format, such as online or hybrid.
- *Information about you* could include a brief bio; your qualifications to teach the course, interests in the field, teaching philosophy, view of learning, and expectations about teacher and student roles; office hours; and your preferred method of contact.
- *Course goals/outcomes* communicate to students where you expect them to be at the end of the course. Through backward design, you can then make sure all key course elements are in alignment (i.e., objectives, assignments, tests, activities). You can also create expectations and motivation by communicating to students what they can hope to achieve as a result of this course.

- *Course materials and requirements* include how to access them, their cost, and any suggestions for easing the financial burden.
- *Course policies*, which are the "what" and "why" of the course, should include such aspects as your expectations for students, institutional requirements, attendance policy, policy on late or missed work, and a statement on academic dishonesty. Regarding the latter, Gannon recommends avoiding an adversarial posture by emphasizing equity, not punishment. Help students understand that is only fair to give credit to the person who created the document. Gannon also gives suggestions for discouraging plagiarism bred out of procrastination by breaking assignments into smaller components due at various times in the semester. Additional policy issues include technology etiquette and accessibility and inclusion.
- *Grading and assessment*. The syllabus should list and describe all types of assessments, how student performance will be assessed, your grading scale, and any unconventional policies you practice (e.g., retakes, resubmissions).
- *Course schedule/calendar* should list topics/unit descriptions, due dates, any exceptions to the schedule, and campus deadlines.

Additional suggestions from Professor Gannon include the following:

- Be creative with your syllabus (e.g., create a graphic syllabus or put it on Prezi).
- Make sure to accommodate students with disabilities.
- Motivate students to read the syllabus by referring to it or giving a low-stakes syllabus quiz.
- Assess and revise the syllabus by asking questions about what to change and what to keep.
- Avoid sloppy editing.

By following the guidelines in Gannon's article, you probably stand a better chance of having your students not only read your syllabus but also benefit from it.