

Basic Information: Instructor and Course

An effective syllabus should provide the student with basic information about both the instructor and the course. Not only does this information establish a tone for the course, it illustrates the instructor's commitment to the student's progress.

Increasingly, instructors use electronic communication, including computer conferencing, to give students easy access to faculty. If this is encouraged, describe the procedures in the syllabus as well as in class.

While information about the course may be found in the college catalog or course schedule, it may bear repeating thus assuring all students have the same information.

Instructor Information

- Instructor's full name, title
- Office location and telephone number
- Office hours*
- Home telephone
- Electronic address and communication procedures
- Instructor's accessibility*
- Teaching assistant name(s), phone(s), office address(es)

Course Information

- Course title/number/credits
- Class meeting times and place
- Catalog description
- Prerequisites for the course
- Students for whom the course is intended

*Items seldom included, but important to communicate.

Content Outline

Some instructors outline the course content in considerable detail, listing a topic for each class session and specifying the expected reading for that particular class. Others provide only a listing of broad topics to be covered during the semester. One dilemma of providing a detailed content outline is that the course structure may be seen as inflexible and the instructor as unable to accommodate student needs and interests. On the other hand, detailed outlines let the instructor clarify relationships for students as well as provide them with a course structure. Instructors might consider providing a general topic outline the first class session, and a revised, detailed outline that reflects student interests in later sessions.

Instructors may also choose to describe the rationale underlying their choice and sequence of content. We have found that content selection and sequencing decisions are strongly related to academic disciplines. By describing the rationale underlying content and sequencing decisions, students may more effectively grasp the intellectual flow of the course and its relationship to the academic field in general.

- Topic outline for course
- Sequencing of course content* (see Appendix C)
- Rationale for course content* (see Appendix D)
- Definition of the discipline (see Appendix E)
- Substantive component (assumptions of the discipline)
- Syntactical component (mode of inquiry of the discipline)
- Conjunctive component (the relationship of the discipline to other fields)
- Symbolic component (the language of the discipline)
- Skill component (the skills to be applied)

*Items seldom included, but important to communicate.

Assignments and Course Calendar

When they receive a syllabus, many students look immediately at the list of assignments since these represent their workload. Students frequently comment that instructors describe neither expectations for work nor the relationship of assignments to course purposes in enough detail. Including this information in the syllabus helps students understand their academic responsibilities for the semester. It also reduces unwelcome surprises and helps students understand your assignments. Some faculty may wish to meet with the class several times before specifying all of the course assignments. In this way, student characteristics may be incorporated into the course planning. The course calendar lets both the instructor and the student plan the semester's work.

Student Assignments and Purpose

- Readings
- Papers
- Required documentation style, if any
- Tests/quizzes
- Projects
- Laboratories
- Clinics
- Field experiences
- Relationship of course goals to assignments*
- Relationship of specific objectives to assignments*

Calendar

- Dates for major assignments
- Dates for exams/quizzes
- Dates for projects
- Dates for vacations
- Dates for field trips or special activities

*Items seldom included, but important to communicate.