



Writing a Syllabus

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Learning Objective: The student will be able to design and write a comprehensive educational syllabus.

Why write a syllabus? A well-written syllabus is the launch of a successful learning experience for all students and instructors. An effectively designed and well-written syllabus will prepare students to meet the learning objectives, clarify what they will be able to do when they have completed the course, and understand the grading plan.

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary (online edition), syllabus (syl•la•bus), noun, is a list of the topics or books that will be studied in a course; it is a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements.

Most educators will agree that a syllabus should contain an outline, a list of topics, and many more items of information specific to the course. The primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate specific curriculum information to the students, such as:

- What the course is about.
- Why the course is taught.
- Where it is going.
- What will be required of the students for completion with a passing grade.

Prepare to write the syllabus near to the end of the course design process by identifying all information that students need to have at the beginning of the course in order to complete the course successfully. Include all information that students need to have in writing; all significant information about the course should be in writing.

Content areas of a syllabus:

- Course information — course title, course number and credit hours.
- Are there any prerequisites?
- Is the permission of the instructor required?
- Include location of the classroom and the days and hours of instruction.
- Instructor information. (At the National Fire Academy, this would be the place to identify the training specialist responsible for the management of the curriculum where the course resides.)

Provide the students with detailed information about the following text, readings and materials:

- Textbook(s).
- Supplementary reading(s).
- Materials.
- Course descriptions/objectives.
- Course calendar/schedule.

Each syllabus should include the organizational policies for rules of participation, such as:

- Attendance.
- Class participation.
- Completion requirements for exams or assignments.
- Academic dishonesty. (Address questions related to cheating and plagiarism.)
- Grading systems. (If there is an appeals process, include the procedures here.)
- Available support services.

Resources: Designing and Improving Courses and Curricula in Higher Education (Diamond, Robert M.; 1988); Stating Objectives for Classroom Instruction (Gronlund, Norman E.; 1985); "Teaching Goals Inventory" in Classroom Assessment Techniques (Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P.; 1993); Creating Significant Learning Experiences (Fink, L. D.; 2003); Tools for Teaching (Davis, B. G.; 1993).

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