Syllabus Preparation Quick Reference Guide

This is a quick reference to preparing an effective syllabus that informs as well as inspires. The first page describes the campus requirements, and the second details ways to enhance your syllabi with language and elements that are engaging, welcoming, and supportive of student success.

Syllabus Essentials

Cal Poly’s Academic Senate provides a page that details the information that should be included on all syllabi: [http://www.academicksenate.calpoly.edu/content/faq-syllabi](http://www.academicksenate.calpoly.edu/content/faq-syllabi). We have converted this information into an easy-to-use checklist below to help you prepare your syllabus for each class. NOTE: Departments may have additional requirements, so double check with your respective departments to ensure your syllabi meet both University and department requirements.

**Content**

- Instructor’s contact information including office hours and office locations
- List of required text(s) and supplementary material for the course
- Course learning outcomes that are approved by program faculty and aligned to the program learning objectives
- Methods and expectations for assessing/grading student performance for the course
- Attendance requirements and make up policy (if applicable)
- Other information the instructor deems necessary to assure students’ understanding of the nature, requirements, and expectations of the course

**Distribution**

- Every instructor shall make available to each student in her/his class, during the first class meeting, a written course syllabi.
- Every instructor shall be required to spend a portion of the first meeting of the class discussing the course syllabus.

In addition, the CTLT encourages you to consider the following:

- Clarity and inclusiveness of your language
- Accessible formatting for online posting ([www.csuchico.edu/tlp/accessibility/syllabus/checklist.shtml](http://www.csuchico.edu/tlp/accessibility/syllabus/checklist.shtml))
- Include syllabus statements:
  - Academic integrity: campus and course policies ([www.osrr.calpoly.edu/plagiarism](http://www.osrr.calpoly.edu/plagiarism))
  - Support for students with disabilities ([www.drc.calpoly.edu/content/resources/syllabusstatement](http://www.drc.calpoly.edu/content/resources/syllabusstatement))
Enhanced Syllabus

Language

A traditional syllabi often reads like a cold legal contract. While detailing course policies and procedures is important, using impersonal, legalistic language misses an essential opportunity to establish a warm and engaging connection to your students from the very outset. The language that you use matters! It shapes students’ perceptions of you, the instructor, and the course in surprising ways. This section provides ideas to convert your cold legal contract to a warm invitation to learn.

Ken Bain (2004) introduced the idea of the “promising syllabus” that uses inclusive, positive language and frames the course in terms of students’ learning opportunities. James Lang (2006) explained that promising syllabi usually contains three components.

1. It offers an explanation of the course’s promise to the students: What will they have gained, in terms of knowledge or skills, by the end of the semester? The focus moves away from what the teacher will cover to what the student will take away from the course.
2. It describes the activities in which the students will engage in order to help them fulfill that promise: the readings, the class activities, the assignments.
3. It launches a conversation about how the teacher and the student would best come to understand the nature and progress of the student’s learning.

Here are some places that you can infuse more inviting language into your syllabi:

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A promising syllabus does more than copy the course description from the university catalog. A promising syllabus invites students into the course with the instructor’s personal introduction. Descriptions that convey engagement and passion for the subject are especially effective.

**COURSE EXPECtATIONS**

Along with providing specific course learning goals and objectives, your syllabus can provide a useful overview that frames the goals and expectations.

**COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Regardless of your specific policies for attendance, late work, food in class, etc., it is helpful to provide students with the grounds for your policies, rather than just listing a set of rules and prohibitions.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

It is important to provide students with details and deadlines for course assignments and the grading criteria used to assess them. It is also helpful to articulate the purpose and context for doing the assignments. Statements that offer a rationale for the assignments help students grasp the link between course work and course mastery.