

Syllabus Construction Basics

This presentation is largely borrowed from:
Slattery, et al. Best Practices in Syllabus.
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Syllabus Basics

- Contract
- *First impressions are important. Research shows that students make up their minds about you within the first 10 minutes of the first class meeting!*
- A well-thought-out syllabus sends students a message

Basic Information

- **No brainer stuff:**

- Course Title

- Course ### - Section ##

- Class location

- Class meeting time(s)

- Instructor's name

- Office location

- Office hours

- Email

- Phone number

Take advantage to show students that between office hours, email and voice mail you are very available to them.

Course Description

- The course description is listed in the academic bulletin.
- What **YOUR** section of the course is like.
- **Additional details**

Optional Information

- Your teaching methods.
- Your teaching philosophy.
- Can make the syllabus long.
- Consider two versions

Learning Outcomes

- Make sure these align with department expectations
- Make sure these align with college SLOs

Textbooks, Readings, Other Materials

- **full bibliographic information**
- **List other reading materials**
- **List other materials needed**

Course Policies

- Clearly state your expectations and procedures

Course Requirements/Assessments

- exactly what students will have to do in the course
- nature and format
- Be specific
- Tell students **WHY** you have these requirements.

Provide the **rationale for assignments to help motivate students**. This is taken from my syllabus:

(1) Exams: Formal exam information

Why do we have exams? Well, this is a good way to assess what you are learning in terms of course content. I try to mix up the content so there are always many different types of items, including multiple choice, short answers, drawings.

(2) Quizzes. 10 items over readings. At the end of the semester I will drop the 5 lowest grades. Don't stress over missing a quiz!

Why do we have quizzes? **Research shows** that for classes in which students have frequent quizzes the amount and how long the information is retained is greater. Frequent quizzes minimize procrastination.

Course Outline / Course Schedule

- Create a schedule
- A spreadsheet format allows for rows (dates) columns (assignments, topics, etc.)
- flexibility in the schedule is advantageous
- exam dates should be fairly fixed

Course Outline (subject to change as necessary!)

Class date	Topics & Readings	See webCT for Module Details	Assignment Due
Jan 25 (Tu)	General Introduction & Film on Research Methods	Module 1: Research Methods in Psych	
Jan 27 (Th)	The Scientific Method, Cozby ch 1	Module 1	Newspaper/Magazine Article
Feb 1 (Tu)	Library Research, Literature Search	Module 1	
Feb 3 (Th)	Where to Start - Cozby ch 2 & P&B ch 1-3	Module 1: Where to Start	
Feb 7 (M)	Literature Search assignment due	Module 1	Library Database Search
Feb 8 (Tu)	Writing Research Reports-Cozby, P&B, & APA Manual	Module 2: Writing in APA Style	Hypothesis Homework
Feb 10 (Th)	Ethical Concerns - Cozby ch 3	Module 3: Ethics in Research	Ethical Dilemmas
Feb 15 (Tu)	Exam I—Modules 1, 2, 3		
Feb 17 (Th)	Studying Behavior, Cozby, ch 4	Module 4: Behavior Basics	Operational Definitions
Feb 18 (F)	Rank Order Online Experiments		Experiment Choices
Feb 22 (Tu)	Observational Methods - Cozby ch 6	Module 5: Non-Experimental Methods	Observational Study Idea

Setting the Tone for the Syllabus

- “Warm” syllabi are desirable
- They...
 - establish expectations about authority,
 - affect learning and motivation, and
 - affect perceptions of approachability.

Setting the Tone for the Syllabus

- Students want to know THEIR fundamentals: (what do I have to do get a particular grade....)
- You can tell them coldly, or warmly: “laying down the law,” vs collaboration
- Extensive legalisms create an adversarial relationships

Warm Syllabi Affect Learning & Motivation

- Experimental comparison of positive vs. negative presentations of syllabus suggest
 - student control and
 - student responsibility for their own learning

Warm Syllabi Affect Perceptions of Approachability

- **Positive framing** of policies affects perceptions of **approachability**.
 - Late papers lose 10% **versus** late papers are eligible for 90% of available points.
- Student perceptions of teacher as “caring” affect willingness to participate and talk more in class and seek help outside of class.
 - Students more likely to seek help when syllabus included **explicit offer of help**

A Warm Invitation to the Course

○ I recently ordered a t-shirt from <http://shirt.woot.com>. This is the email I received after I placed my order:

○ Welcome to **the warm embrace** of Woot, the first, best, and most hygienic daily deal site! Sit still a minute because you need to know this stuff:

○ **Typical orders** take up to 5 business days to ship from our warehouse (except for overnight t-shirt orders). If you order an item during peak times it can take a little longer. Once we ship it, delivery time to your door depends on FedEx or SmartPost.

○ Once the item ships out, you can **access your tracking data** by going to Your Account and clicking on the order number. If you have a problem receiving your order, or receive the wrong item, contact service@woot.com.

- If you receive your item and it doesn't work, contact the manufacturer first. They made the junk. Let them deal with it. If they turn out to be total tools, contact service@woot.com and we'll **grudgingly** provide some further assistance.
- If you receive your item and decide you don't like it, take it to eBay or pawn it off on one of your so-called friends. **We don't want it, either.**
- Bear with us a moment more and we can all get on with our lives. If you email service@woot.com, **make sure you include your order number and/or username**. We'd hate to have to track you down through other, less savory means. And this last bit of information is critical: when you look at your order history and panic because you don't see an order you placed, make sure you are logged into the Woot site you purchased it from. Your Wine.Woot orders won't show up in your order history if you're looking at it on Shirt.Woot, and so on. **And you'll be upset, and we'll be upset, and we'll each say things we don't mean, and even though we'll eventually work it all out, things will never be the same between us again.**
- Last but certainly not least, happy Wooting

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- Like a syllabus, this email provides both:
 - an introduction and
 - the rules of engagement.
 - They got me to read the entire email despite some un-customer-friendly policies, e.g., no returns.
 - How did they do it?

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- **Enthusiastic.**
 - **Use of humor.**
 - **Written in the first person.**
 - **Easy to read.**
 - **Clear expectations.**
 - **Rationale for rules.**
 - **Need a another example: Check out the Trader Joe's flyers!**

Strategies to Improve Syllabus Tone

- Share Personal Experiences with your Students

- **Humor** can help with tone, but can be **tricky** and requires tact.

- Convey understanding and empathy regarding attendance and assignments.

Strategies to Improve Syllabus Tone: Let's Practice

- **Opening Statement:**

- **Cold:**

- This course is an introduction to....

- Students will be required to examine

- **Warm:**

- Add a personal connection:

- We will explore...

- You will have an opportunity to examine....

Strategies to Improve Syllabus Tone: Let's Practice

- Contact Information

- Cold:

- If you need to contact me, you may email me or contact the department and leave a message. I will return your call.

- Warm:

- I look forward to seeing you during office hours. Stop in. If you can't make my office hours, then individual assistance is always available by appointment. Email and voice are available 24/7.