

What to Look For in a Course Syllabus

A course syllabus is an important tool for success in college.

First of all, it is a contract between you and the professor, explaining what they expect of you, and what you can expect from them. On the first day of class it can give you an idea right away if you should keep or drop the course, and it can also give you a first impression of the professor's teaching style and personality.

It also gives lots of important information about the course that the professor will expect you to know as the course progresses. It is important to put all of your syllabi in a place where you can find them, and refer to them often. When you receive a course syllabus, here are some things you should be looking for.

Course information:

- What is the course name and number?
- How many credit hours does it have?
- When and where does the class meet?
- What are the prerequisites for the course (if any)?
- What type of students is the class designed for (majors, GE, etc)?
- What materials are required for the course, and where can you get them?
- Is there a website associated with the course?
- Are there any other resources available (tutoring, old exams, books on reserve at the library, etc)?
- What kind of information will the course cover?
- How does the course fit in with your area of study?
- What are the objectives of the course?

Professor contact information:

- Where is the professor's office?
- What are the office hours?
- What is his or her phone number and e-mail address?

Course policies and grades:

- Are any behaviors specifically forbidden by the professor (cell phones, eating, etc)?
- Are there health or safety issues that you should know about?

- How will your grade be determined?
- Does attendance and/or participation count toward your grade?
- Is there a penalty for arriving late to class?
- Where are exams given?
- Do the exams have a time limit?
- Are make-up exams permitted?
- Is the final comprehensive?
- What kinds of assignments are required?
- Are details of the assignments in the syllabus or will they be discussed later?
- When and where are assignments to be turned in?
- Are late assignments accepted?
- Is there any extra credit possible?
- Will the professor keep you informed of your grade, or is it your job to keep track?
- How much does each part of your grade count toward the final grade?

Class schedule:

- Are there reading assignments or other preparation due before you come to class?
- What topics will be covered?
- How is the material of the class divided up?
- When are the exams, and what do they cover?
- When are the assignments due?
- Are there any other activities involved in the course (field trips, etc.)?
- How much time should you expect to spend outside of class (homework, studying, etc.)?