

LAST MINUTE SYLLABUS TOOLKIT

Effective syllabus and course design take time and planning. This toolkit is not meant for syllabus-design, but a quick guide to help you double-check your syllabus, especially if you are a new faculty member at Oberlin College. Each section has a few quick tips drawn from the scholarship on teaching. It is a work-in-progress.

Elements of a Syllabus Checklist

- Basic Info:
 - Title
 - Meeting Time, Classroom
 - Professor's Info
 - Office/Student Hours, Office Number
 - Course Description
 - Remember to note that your syllabus might change
 - [Course Goals / Learning Outcomes](#)
 - [Course Structure](#)
 - [Course Materials / Learning Resources](#)
 - [Course Assessment Information](#)
 - [Classroom Dynamics / Policies](#)
 - [Attendance Policy](#)
 - [Honor Code](#)
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Course Goals / Learning Objectives

What will students learn to do in this course? How will this course prepare them for your specific discipline? What metacognitive skills will they learn, practice, or develop through the semester?

Keep in Mind:

- Your course goals are your class's broader objectives—to learn, understand, appreciate X about a topic. Your learning objectives are the measurable outcomes of what a student will be able to do after taking the course. These are not necessarily differentiated in a syllabus.
- An effective course goal and learning objective is student-centered, concise, meaningful, achievable and measurable.
- Remember that your assignments, tests, etc., and your in-class activities measure and assess a student's fulfillment of the proposed course goals and learning objectives.
- Consider the formal, metacognitive and practical skills students will practice and develop in your class—are they giving presentations? For what audience are they writing? Are they working in pairs? All of these hint at objectives, too.
- Course goals and learning objectives benefit you, as a teacher, too. They provide a framework and rationale for your decisions and support your assessment of student learning.
- Ask your Departmental colleagues to share their course goals and learning objectives if you are at a loss. In fact, always ask your colleagues. Many of our syllabi are effectively works of bricolage.

Course Goals Examples:

- You will understand basic economic concepts such as Supply and Demand, Opportunity cost, and Marginal Analysis, and how they impact decision-making.
- You will be able to understand and apply analytical methodologies used by historians.

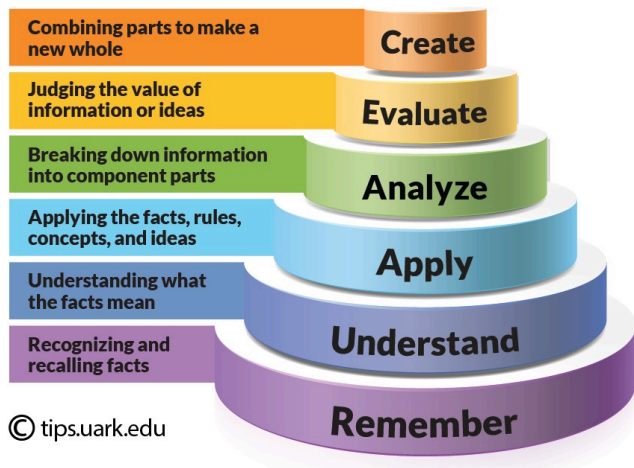
Learning Objectives Examples:

- Students will be able to interpret and produce economic data and graphs.
- Students will be able to analyze how Mexican foreign policy history relates to current trends in Mexican foreign policy.
- Students will gain a conceptual, mechanistic, and mathematical grasp of biomolecular interactions, such as binding and catalysis.

- Students will develop the ability to construct and substantiate an argument in written and oral form.

Suggestions:

- Some people conceptualize their course goals and organize them through Bloom's Taxonomy. Here's a [useful resource](#), and [here's a list of Bloom's taxonomy verbs](#) that could be useful.



[Graphic by Jessica Shabatura](#)

Course Structure

Is there anything in particular your students need to know about how the course is structured, or about your teaching philosophy? Does your classroom respond to any particular pedagogic approach—flipped classroom, project-based learning, experiential learning, etc? Is your course heavily dependent on group-work? Does your course have any required sessions outside of class time (field trips, TA sessions, film screenings, etc)?

Keep in Mind:

- You can address course structure in your course description. That said, some prefer to address this separately, in order to emphasize or clarify particular dynamics.
- Clarity and transparency go a long way in helping students excel in your classes. For example, if you require students to come to office hours however many times a semester, make sure to make this explicit somewhere in your syllabus.
- Make the implicit, explicit. Take a moment, in your syllabus or in the classroom, to address what preparing for your class looks like. Do you expect students to complete assigned problem sets, or read a text twice, or bring a question to class, or identify one or two substantive quotes in a reading?

- Example: "How can you best succeed in this course? Engage in active reading of the assigned text. (I will explain what I mean by active reading below.) The purpose of the lectures is to amplify, explain, and demonstrate the material presented in the text. There will be some overlap between the text and the lectures, but there will be a substantial amount of material that is unique to each. Your understanding of each lecture will be best if you have done the reading before the lecture". (Harnish, O'Brien, McElwee, et al, "[Creating the Foundation for a Warm Classroom Climate](#)")

Course Materials / Learning Resources

What materials will students need to participate and be successful in your course? Will you provide a calendar in your syllabus or can they find it online? If so, where? How will they access material?

Keep in Mind:

- Make sure to have your course materials available at the beginning of the semester.
- If students need to purchase course materials, consider addressing why these are necessary for success. Making explicit the rationale behind a selected reading or assignment can be pedagogically productive.
- If students need to purchase course materials, make sure to provide alternatives (pdfs, etc) during the first weeks of class (especially during Add/Drop). Students may need additional time to access funds to cover all class materials.
- Consider the cost of your materials, and the availability of alternatives to purchasing (are there copies in the library? Is there a rental/sharing program?).
- Consider open educational resources (vs. traditional textbooks). Research suggests that students achieve "the same or better learning outcomes when using [open educational resources] while saving significant amounts of money" (Hilton, 853).
- Make sure to provide a calendar, whether in the syllabus or online. The clearer the calendar, the easier it will be for students to prepare.
 - Tuesday / Thursday classes [meet 27 times in Fall 2024](#).
 - Monday, Wednesday, Fridays classes [meet 43 times in the Fall of 2024](#).
- Some dates to keep in mind:
 - **First Day of Classes:** Thursday, August 29
 - **Add/Drop Ends:** Tuesday, Sept. 10
 - **Yom Kippur:** Saturday, Oct. 12
 - **Fall Break:** Sat., Oct. 19 to Sun., Oct. 27
 - **Thanksgiving Break:** Thur., Nov. 28 to Sun., Dec. 1
 - **Last Day of Class:** Wed., Dec. 11
 - **Reading Period:** Thursday, Dec. 12 to Sunday, Dec. 15
 - **Exam Period:** Monday, December 16 to Friday, December 20

Course Assessment Information

How will you assess your students' growth? How do you measure their attainment of your course goals and learning objectives? Do you subscribe to any particular grading practices, such as contract grading, upgrading, standard-based gradings, summative assessments? Do you give exams? If so, when and how? Is participation graded? Do you receive late work? What's your grading scale?

Keep in Mind:

- List all the elements you will be using to assess your students' growth. Whether you are giving out exams, assigning essays, or presentations, make sure to be explicit in the syllabus about what you will ask students to do in the course. You can break down assignments by categories.
- Define each item or category.
 - If assigning exams, explain what these look like, where students take them, whether they are open-book, etc.
 - If assigning essays, make sure to be explicit about what you mean by "essay"—are you looking for a scholarly paper? If so, what does a scholarly paper look like in your discipline, what is its goal and its audience, what sort of bibliography you require, what is its length, etc.
 - If assessing "participation", explain what active involvement in a particular class session looks like.
- Whenever possible, provide dates or deadlines. Students are juggling many classes and extracurricular duties, and having dates allows them to plan.
- Some faculty and students find it useful to provide an item's purpose or outcome. For example, "exams allow me as a faculty to assess your understanding and proficiency with whatever particular grammar point we have covered in the preceding unit".
- If dates are subject to change, say so.
- If group work is essential to any item, make sure to be explicit about whether assessment is collective or individual, etc.
- If you subscribe to a particular grading practice (contract grading, upgrading, standard-based gradings, summative assessments, etc.), use your syllabus to explain how it works.
- Include your grading scale.
 - Letter Grades: What's your scale?
 - For example: A+ [100-98], A [97-93], A- [92-90], B+ [89-87], B [86-83], B- [82-80], C+ [79-77], C [76-73], C- [72-70], D [69-60]

- Pass / No Pass: "All passing work (A+ to C-) is given the uniform grade of Pass (P). Work below C- is considered not passing and is given a grade of No Pass (NP). The grades of P and NP do not enter into the GPA calculation." [From [Oberlin Website](#)].

Classroom Policies / Dynamics

What are the rules of engagement for your course? Why? Do you have an attendance policy? Can students use their laptops in class? How many classes can a student miss? Do you accept late work?

Keep in Mind:

- Clear policies facilitate your students' learning.
- A syllabus serves (sort-of) as a contractual document, but it is not a contract. It is also a symbolic text that sets the tone of the class, and an organizational tool. Avoid an adversarial tone. Frame your policies in constructive language that places its emphasis on the rationale and benefits of each policy.
 - "Conceptualizing the syllabus as a contract, . . . , also introduces a number of obstacles for the creation of an inclusive classroom. Perhaps most obviously, using the syllabus as a defensive tool to protect instructors from students can create an adversarial relationship that can inhibit belonging in the classroom. The contractual approach can also reinforce power disparities between instructors and students, further challenging the creation of a community of belonging" (Addy, Dube, et al, [What Inclusive Instructors Do](#) 49).

Attendance Policy

- Attendance policies vary throughout the College. Whether yours is lax or strict, make sure to be able to explain it.
 - ***An example of a "three unexcused absences" policy:*** "You should attend every class. I understand that extenuating circumstances arise that can make this difficult, but please let me know before class if you cannot attend. If circumstances make you miss more than 3 classes during the semester, you may have overextended yourself and you should consider dropping the class" (Harnish, O'Brien, McElwee, et al, "[Creating the Foundation for a Warm Classroom Climate](#)")
 - ***An example of a "it's up to you, but beware" policy:*** "This course respects students' autonomy with regards to attendance. That said, missing class will have consequences, as the course content and your ability to complete assignments depend on the material covered in class. Frequent absences are noted by the professor and your classmates and can negatively impact your progress in class".

- **An example of an "attendance is required, but no limits set" policy:** "Regular attendance and active participation are key to effectively engaging with the material and receiving feedback on your progress towards our course objectives. The weight of in-class activities and assessments on your overall grade highlights the importance of being present. A high number of unexcused absences or consistent tardiness will lower your engagement grade. If any serious issues impact your attendance, please reach out to me so we can talk about your situation."
- **An example of a brief "talk to me policy":** "Class attendance is required. If you are going to miss class, talk to your professor in advance to come to an arrangement."
- **An example of a mandatory attendance policy, with caveats:** Because Bard College Berlin has an intensive, student-centered and seminar-based educational model, attendance at all sessions of courses is mandatory. However, you may encounter circumstances that prevent you from attending classes for which you may be excused, meaning that the absences will not impact your grade. These circumstances include illness, religious observance, military obligation, attendance at a conference, a Bard Network event, a civic engagement initiative, a research trip or another compelling circumstance outside of your control (i.e. court appearance, visa appointment, death of a family member). Optional non-academic travel, hosting visiting family and friends, or work schedules are not grounds for excused absences. You will be allowed to self-report your absences four times, meaning that a notification informing your instructor about the reason for your absence before or within 24 hours of the class is sufficient. If you miss class more than four times, you will need to provide your instructor with appropriate documentation in order to be excused (i.e. a doctor's note). All unexcused absences will lower your final grade by one step (i.e. if your final grade is a B, you will be downgraded to a B-). Seven unexcused absences will result in automatic failure of the course. If you are facing the unusual situation of long-term, serious medical or personal emergencies (generally lasting more than two weeks), you can request a Leave of Absence, to be approved by the Deans, the Head of Student Life or the Director of Academic Services. (Bard College Berlin)
- An argument for attendance policies: "Students who attend class reliably learn more than students who do not. One landmark meta- analysis that encompassed data from over 21,000 students found that attendance is a stronger predictor of college GPA (grade point average) than any other known factor, including measures of preparedness (e.g., SAT scores), work ethic (e.g., study habits), and effective study skills (27). Yet, many students skip class when given the freedom to do so." (Cullen and Oppenheimer, "[Choosing to learn](#)" 1).

- An argument against strict attendance policies: "Attendance policies, and the process of securing exemptions from them, may also place disparate burdens on students with certain types of mental or physical health conditions or students who observe religious holidays." (Addy, Dube, et al, [What Inclusive Instructors Do](#) 67).

Accessibility

- It is the policy and practice of Oberlin College and Conservatory to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that present barriers to your inclusion or an accurate assessment of your needs to best complete course requirements (e.g., time-limited exams, inaccessible web content, use of videos without captions), please communicate this with your professor and contact the Office for Disability and Access to request accommodations. Office: 440-775-5588, Mudd Center 205. Students can learn more about the accommodation process on the ODA's website: www.oberlin.edu/disability-access.
- "Appropriate and reasonable accommodations are best determined through an interactive process that includes the student, ODA staff, course instructors, and other faculty or staff members as appropriate. Students are expected to make accommodation requests in a timely fashion as accommodations cannot be applied retroactively." (Oberlin Website).
- You should consider accessibility at every level of your syllabus. Yet, it is important to include a section in your syllabus where you encourage students to inform you about any accommodations that they might need. Formal accommodations have to be disclosed early in the semester.

Honor Code

- Make reference to the Honor Code in your syllabus.
- You can either be brief or expand on what you mean by academic integrity. The latter is always suggested.
- The College suggests: "An "ounce of prevention!" As you prepare your syllabi for the coming semester, explain how the Honor Code applies to specific kinds of assignments in each of your courses". ([Honor Code - Academic Integrity - Oberlin](#))
- "Remind students that they are expected to write and sign the Honor Pledge on all academic exercises. The new pledge reads: "I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."[\(Honor Code - Academic Integrity - Oberlin\)](#)
 - "Honor Code violations include cheating, plagiarism (failure to acknowledge via appropriate citation the sources for written, visual, on-line, and other sorts of material), fabrication, multiple submissions (e.g., submitting the same or substantially the same paper for two or more courses without prior approval of all instructors), and falsifying, forging, or destroying, hiding, improperly removing, or retaining library and other materials with the intent of denying access to others. The revised charter includes co curricular work and exercises, as well as

documents that affect the educational experience." ([Honor Code - Academic Integrity - Oberlin](#))

Technology Policy

- Some faculty have specific technology policies, others do not.
- You can encourage the use of laptops, ban electronic devices altogether, or propose some guidelines for the respectful use of laptops in class.
- Whatever your policy, consider the effect of your policy regarding student inclusion and accessibility.
- If you do not have a technology policy, you can always wait until you know your students and their needs, and specify, in class, if and when students should put away their devices.
- Here are for samples (pulled from From Boston College's Center for Teaching Excellence):
 - ***Use of devices contingent on class dynamics:*** "You are welcome to use a laptop or tablet in this class as long as it contributes to your learning. This class, once again, is discussion based. This means that all students are expected to actively listen to one another in order to participate in classroom activities. If you are unable to contribute to the discussion or are otherwise distracted by your computer, cell phone, or tablet, I will ask that you refrain from using it in class. There will be some class sessions where we will use technology together, and in those instances, all students should make arrangements to bring a laptop or tablet to class. If you have any questions or concerns, please be in touch with me". ([University of Chicago syllabus](#))
 - ***Use of devices contingent on class dynamics:*** "I know many of you read online or take notes on your laptops or tablets, however, electronics are a major distraction in class and disrupt class discussion. There is literature that supports this claim, one of which includes: Fried, C.B. (2008). In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning. *Computers & Education*, 50(3), 906-914. But, because we often read online, I will allow them. However, if I find they become distracting, I hold the right to disallow them in class. In this vein, I would strongly suggest you print out the PDF and online readings, and bring your books to class. I would also urge you to come to class with written notes on the readings or typed notes on your laptop or tablet. If printing is an issue, please talk to me!" ([Brown University course on "Racial and Ethnic Politics and Policy in America," taught by Yalidy Matos](#))
 - ***Use of devices prohibited:*** "A note on cell phones, texting, and checking one's email during class: Research has shown us that even having our cell phones on the table in front of us diminishes our ability to learn well; further, taking notes via computer diminishes one's ability to process information. Checking texts, emails, and messages is also unprofessional and disrespectful to our class community.

Please turn off your phone, email, and computer during class; I will do so as well. I appreciate your cooperation with this important aspect of creating a class of which we all want to be a part." ([Yale University](#))

AI Policy

- Policies for the use of Artificial Intelligence in classes are changing quickly. Make sure to address this in class, if it is something that pertains to your course.
- Consider the following questions in developing your policy statement.
 - If AI use is permitted, is it permitted on all assignments or only certain assignments?
 - If AI use is permitted, how should students cite their use of AI?
 - ChatGPT and other AI tools often generate factually inaccurate information. If AI use is permitted, what responsibility do students have for ensuring the accuracy of any information generated by AI?
 - What are the grading policies associated with the misuse or unauthorized use of AI (e.g., deductions, failing grade)?
- If you do not have a position on use of AI, be aware that Our [Honor Code Charter](#) currently considers unauthorized use of AI to be cheating:
 - *Utilizing artificial intelligence software or other related programs to create or assist with assignments on the behalf of a student unless otherwise specified by the faculty member and/or the Office of Disability & Access is considered a breach of the Honor Code.*
- The Gertrude B. Lemle Center assembled some resources for AI use during the Fall of 2023. See Resources on the website. A lot has changed since then, but it still has useful information.
- Education Developer Lance Eaton has assembled a crowd-sourced list of syllabi policies for AI Generative Tools. It has hundreds of models. You can find that [HERE](#). Or by Googling "Syllabi Policies for AI Generative Tools, Lance Eaton". Here you will find five examples, all shared under Creative Commons license:
 - ***Use of AI prohibited:*** "Some student work may be submitted to AI or plagiarism detection tools in order to ensure that student work product is human created. The submission of AI generated answers constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of [institution's] student code of conduct. Each assignment should include an academic integrity statement that reads, "Submitting AI generated text is not permitted". (Mary Reiter under Creative Commons 4.0)"

- **Use of AI prohibited:** Students are not allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) on assignments in this course. Each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools. (The Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning at the University of Delaware)
- **Use of AI prohibited:**"Using a product or technology (ChatGPT, Dall-E, etc.) in the course to create or aggregate synthetic content for the course such as any course writing, brainstorming, generating a draft, a works cited source bank, answering discussion groups, substitute or impersonate you in zoom, classroom, breakout rooms, collaboration, group work, or other attendance activities, is considered academic misconduct similar to plagiarism or violations of the honor code." (Miguel Fernández, Public Domain).
- **Use of AI allowed with prior permission:** "Students are allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) on assignments in this course if instructor permission is obtained in advance. Unless given explicit permission to use those tools, each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools. If permission is granted to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2), they must be properly documented and credited. Text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: "Chat-GPT-3. (YYYY, Month DD of query). "Text of your query." Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>" Material generated using other tools should follow a similar citation convention. (The Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning at the University of Delaware)
- **Use of AI allowed, with acknowledgement:** Students are allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) on assignments in this course if that use is properly documented and credited. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: "Chat-GPT-3. (YYYY, Month DD of query). "Text of your query." Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>" Material generated using other tools should follow a similar citation convention.(The Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning at the University of Delaware)
- **Use of AI allowed, with acknowledgement:** "Using a product or technology as identified above to help you edit your work (improve your quality as defined by course instruction, course definitions, standards & expectations, and rubrics) is not a violation of the honor code statement, as long as you cite the tool or identify it as a partner or augmentation in use for a course related activity before submitting your work.(Miguel Fernández, Public Domain).
- **No restrictions / use of AI encouraged:** "Within this class, you are welcome to use foundation models (ChatGPT, GPT, DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, GitHub Copilot, and anything after) in a totally unrestricted fashion, for any purpose, at no penalty. However, you should note that all large language models

still have a tendency to make up incorrect facts and fake citations, code generation models have a tendency to produce inaccurate outputs, and image generation models can occasionally come up with highly offensive products. You will be responsible for any inaccurate, biased, offensive, or otherwise unethical content you submit regardless of whether it originally comes from you or a foundation model. If you use a foundation model, its contribution must be acknowledged in the hand-in; you will be penalized for using a foundation model without acknowledgement. Having said all these disclaimers, the use of foundation models is encouraged, as it may make it possible for you to submit assignments with higher quality, in less time. The university's policy on plagiarism still applies to any uncited or improperly cited use of work by other human beings, or submission of work by other human beings as your own". (Policy by [Ryan S. Baker](#) under Creative Commons 4.0).

- ***No restrictions / use of AI encouraged:*** "As most of us have had a chance to explore new AI tools like ChatGPT, they can be an amazing assist much like a calculator is for math classes. The best way to use it for idea generation, synthesis, rephrasing, essentializing and gathering information about the typical understanding of a topic. However, it should be you that guides, verifies and crafts your ultimate answers, so please don't just cut and paste without understanding. Let's leverage the tools as an extension of ourselves with a base of knowledge to make them powerful." ([Thinker Metrics](#))

If you want to discuss your syllabi in detail, you are welcome to email your questions (or meet with) Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón, Director of the the Lemle Center, at sgutierr@oberlin.edu

The Gertrude B. Lemle Center for Teaching and Scholarship's LAST MINUTE SYLLABUS TOOLKIT was created in August, 2024. It was last updated on August 29th, 2024.