Tips for Remote and Hybrid Course Syllabi

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Syllabi for remote and hybrid courses are especially important because they partly take the place of first-day speeches about policies and course goals. In your remote or hybrid course syllabus, you still must include the same information that you would in a syllabus for a face-to-face course: basic course information, your contact information, objectives, policies, grading information, information about academic integrity, and resources for accessibility. To make the syllabus work specifically for your remote and/or hybrid courses, however, you'll need to make a few changes, as outlined by these tips.

For both remote and hybrid course syllabi:

- Make it accessible! Our colleague Laura Hall has created a guide with everything you need to know about accessibility (including why it's necessary, how to think about it, and how to do it.)
- Provide links to resources for managing technical challenges, including Canvas Student Resources and the Central IT Support Help Desk, also available at 970-491-7276 or help@colostate.edu.
- Don't be afraid to be redundant, e.g., include instructions in your syllabus that you also post elsewhere on the course site. Make sure that if the same information appears in multiple places, it's consistent.
- Include images, an engaging layout, and/or a concise, engaging introduction. Demonstrate your excitement for the course.
- Try to avoid what Professor Kevin Gannon calls a tone of "jaded cynicism." Even as you're clear about policies, don't overemphasize punitive measures. Gannon's article goes over ways to maintain a constructive tone, especially regarding academic integrity.
- State how much time students should expect to spend working on the course.
- If your course includes a participation grade, clearly define what "participation" will look like and how it will be graded.
- Explain how you intend to engage with discussions and small assignments. Will you reply to every student's post in the discussion forum? Respond to the whole class? Etc.
- In addition to required textbooks, specify technological requirements such as MS Office 365, Zoom, Discord, Google Docs, etc.
- Explain when you will be available and through what media (Zoom, phone, email, etc.), as well as how long it will take you to respond to email.
- Explain the layout of the Canvas course. If, for example, students access all readings and assignments from "Modules," must go to the "Quizzes" tab to take quizzes, or need to go to the "e-Reserves" page to access the readings, explain. (This information can go on the course homepage rather than in the syllabus.)
- Outline expectations regarding courtesy and "netiquette."
- Provide a full schedule with due dates and times. (This can be a separate document.)

For fully remote courses:

- Specify time zones for deadlines.
- Be clear about whether students can work ahead and whether work must be completed in sequence.
- Recommend effective remote learning strategies for students such as keeping a consistent work schedule, a dedicated workspace, and a planner.

For hybrid courses:

- Specify which kinds of activities students can expect to do in the classroom and which kinds of activities will be completed online.
- Specify whether assignments should be turned in electronically or on paper.

To encourage your students to read the syllabus, you can assign a syllabus quiz. Beyond simple comprehension questions, Professor James M. Lang suggests that you can also include critical engagement questions like, "Which of the learning objectives for this course are most important to you personally, and why?" or "Of the four papers assigned, which are you least (or most) looking forward to writing, and why?" Professor Lang also recommends asking students to return to the syllabus throughout the semester to look at past assignments and course objectives, as doing so can help students understand how different assignments and units fit together.

Sample online and hybrid course syllabi:

Caplan, Debra. "Syllabus: Introduction to Theater Arts." Baruch College Center for Teaching and Learning. 16 June 2014. https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/ctl/files/2015/02/Caplan-Theatre-1041-Syllabus.pdf.

Eatough, Erin M. "Syllabus: Introduction to Psychology." Baruch College Center for Teaching and Learning. 16 June 2014. https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/ctl/files/2015/02/Syllabus_Introduction-to-Psychology_Eatough.pdf.

Geary, Danielle. "Course Guidelines and Syllabus." Faculty Focus, 4 June 2018, https://s31450.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Course-Guidlines-Syllabus-Geary.docx.

Other articles and resources for further reading:

Cunliff, Ed. "Tonic for the Boring Syllabus." Faculty Focus, 28 Aug. 2018, https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/tonic-for-the-boring-syllabus/.

Gannon, Kevin. "How to Create a Syllabus: Advice Guide." The Chronicle of Higher Education, https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus. Accessed 1 July 2020.

Geary, Danielle. "Ideas for Creating an Effective Syllabus for Online Learning." Faculty Focus, 4 June 2018, https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/ideas-for-creating-an-effective-syllabus-for-online-learning/.

Ko, Susan and Steve Rossen. "Chapter 5: Creating an Effective Online Syllabus." Teaching Online: A Practical Guide, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Lang, James M. "The 3 Essential Functions of your Syllabus, Part 2." The Chronicle of Higher Education, 23 Feb. 2015. https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-3-Essential-Functions-of/190243/.

Lang, James M. "The 3 Essential Functions of your Syllabus, Part 2." The Chronicle of Higher Education, 30 March 2015. https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-3-Essential-Functions-of/228909.