

## Pointers for Preparing Exemplary Syllabi

As seen in the syllabi on this site, exemplary syllabi take many forms. However, the following pointers provide some ideas about things that we value. Exemplary syllabi:

- Provide a clear map of the course. Students (and faculty) reading these syllabi should be able to see what they need to do over the semester, when they will do this and how they can hope to be different at semester's end. This includes describing the course, communicating course goals, providing topic descriptors within the schedule of events, and identifying required readings and when they will be covered.
- Give clear and complete information. Answer students' basic questions about the course in a clear manner. Headers are often judiciously used to make this information quickly accessible.
- Communicate clear goals for the course and ways to meet these. Exemplary teaching does more than present content, but also helps students meet process goals (e.g., build writing or oral communication skills, think critically, apply psychological principles to their lives). Exemplary syllabi set process goals, communicate these goals, and explicitly help students meet these.
- Relate assignments to course goals. Assignments are not superfluous, but are an integral part of the course and an attempt to meet course goals. How they meet course goals is often communicated explicitly.
- Are interesting and creative. Although exemplary teaching and syllabi may rely on multiple choice exams, there is often clear evidence that the professor is

innovative in meeting course goals and concerned about how to best help students meet their goals.

- Err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion. Syllabi that help students navigate the course (and university) are accessible to all students. This point is especially important when considering students who may not recognize or understand the implicit rules of higher education, especially those students who have historically have been underrepresented in higher education.
- Communicate departmental, institutional, or legal regulations pertaining to the course. Some universities or states mandate that syllabi contain specific information on university or course policies, especially information on attendance, plagiarism or research participation.
- Communicate positive expectations. Setting ambitious, attainable goals is important. It is equally important to communicate that you believe they will reach these goals. Warm syllabi also have the benefit of being remembered better than cooler syllabi.
- Model desired behaviors. The syllabus should also be consistent with and model course goals. For example, when students are required to use APA style, citations in the syllabus should be presented in APA style. Similarly, if one advocates person first language, one should refer to “persons with schizophrenia” in the syllabus, rather than “schizophrenics.”
- Maximize the use of action verbs. Passive verbs suggest that teaching is done to students; action verbs suggest that students are active participants in the learning process and that they will behave differently as a result of the course. Under

Goals and Objectives, for example, use action verbs (e.g., analyze, create, synthesize, demonstrate) whenever appropriate.

- Capitalize on word processing features. Exemplary syllabi are attractive and make judicious use of various fonts, bold faced or italic print, bullets, shading and borders. These features can make a syllabus easier to navigate. Selective use of headers, graphics, and layout strategies can make syllabi more attractive and user-friendly.

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