



CREATING AN ASSET-BASED SYLLABUS

Francesca López, PhD

Elements of a Syllabus



Essential
Elements
(University
Policy)



Learning
Outcomes



Classroom
Context &
Language



Attendance



Curriculum



Late/Missed
Work



Accessibility



Elements of a Syllabus

Reflect: what is the *point* to a syllabus?

Elements of a Syllabus

- Our *contract* with students
 - What we are expected to provide, and what they are expected to perform
- A roadmap to be successful in the course
 - ...and if we do not assume students know how to navigate our institutions, a roadmap for resources available at the university

There are essential components to a syllabus...

- **University-directed policies:**
- **Basic course information.** What course is this? When and where does it meet? How many credit hours does it offer? Is the course face-to-face, online-only, or blended? Are there prerequisites?
- **Instructor information.** Who are you? What's your departmental affiliation? Where is your office (if you have one)? When and where can students meet with you? How can students communicate with you via phone or email, and do you have a preference?
- **Course goals.** What will your students be able to do as a result of this course that they could not do, or do as well, before? What purpose does this course and its material serve? Are there discipline-specific objectives, larger metacognitive goals, or both?
- **Course materials and requirements.** What books, readings, and other course materials will be needed, and where can students acquire them? Are there other skills that students will need to be successful? Will the course involve site visits or fieldwork outside of regular meeting times?

There are essential components to a syllabus...

- **University-directed policies:**
- **Course policies.** Do you have policies regarding attendance or missed work? Are there particular classroom expectations that students need to be aware of? What about technology use?
- **Grading and assessment.** What will students be asked to do? How is the course grade determined, and what is the grading scale? Do you offer extra credit?
- **Course schedule/calendar.** What will students be asked to do for particular class sessions? When will quizzes and/or examinations be given? What are the due dates for the papers, projects, or other assessments? Is there a final exam, and if so, when?

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

Asset-based pedagogy, at its core, reflects a *humanizing* pedagogy.

Link to document for work on syllabus

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1abeowsP67yDS_gH8unN1hMv-_ZvyS8N26Vlop6qhQl4/edit?usp=sharing



Learning
outcomes

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **Course Learning Outcomes**

- should be clear, measurable, use verbs (e.g., identify, recall)
- Example:
- Successful completion of course activities will reflect students' proficiency in demonstrating their ability to:
 - **differentiate** among the various sociopolitical forces that shaped early and contemporary education goals and outcomes
 - **identify** the explicit and implicit goals of education, both past and present (including nomenclature, theories of justification, and teacher/leader roles in sustaining goals)
 - **evaluate** the ways various forms of asset-based pedagogies meet the needs of historically marginalized students

Below are terms (verbs) that can be used when creating student learning outcomes for a course or degree program.

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
Count	Associate	Add	Analyze	Categorize	Appraise
Define	Compute	Apply	Arrange	Combine	Assess
Describe	Convert	Calculate	Breakdown	Compile	Compare
Draw	Defend	Change	Combine	Compose	Conclude
Identify	Discuss	Classify	Design	Create	Contrast
Labels	Distinguish	Complete	Detect	Drive	Criticize
List	Estimate	Compute	Develop	Design	Critique
Match	Explain	Demonstrate	Diagram	Devise	Determine
Name	Extend	Discover	Differentiate	Explain	Grade
Outlines	Extrapolate	Divide	Discriminate	Generate	Interpret
Point	Generalize	Examine	Illustrate	Group	Judge
Quote	Give examples	Graph	Infer	Integrate	Justify
Read	Infer	Interpolate	Outline	Modify	Measure
Recall	Paraphrase	Manipulate	Point out	Order	Rank
Recite	Predict	Modify	Relate	Organize	Rate
Recognize	Rewrite	Operate	Select	Plan	Support
Record	Summarize	Prepare	Separate	Prescribe	Test
Repeat		Produce	Subdivide	Propose	
Reproduces		Show	Utilize	Rearrange	
Selects		Solve		Reconstruct	
State		Subtract		Related	
Write		Translate		Reorganize	
		Use		Revise	
				Rewrite	
				Summarize	
				Transform	
				Specify	

Source/Reference: These steps were derived from information collected at various conferences by Dr. Cia Verschelden, the original source is unknown. See <http://www.k-state.edu/assessment/slo/action.htm> for more information.



LEARNING OUTCOMES



Attendance Policy

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices **and promote student belonging**

- **Absence and class participation policies:**
 - **Strict attendance policies don't ensure attentive students.**
 - **A flexible policy reduces stress and makes life easier for you as well.**
- The foundational question of an attendance policy is, *Why is it essential for students to be in class?* (I'm defining "in class" broadly, so as to cover online courses as well.) The answer ought to be how you introduce your attendance policy on the syllabus. For example: "***Because class discussion is at the heart of this course, you are required to be in class, and what we do in the course of our class meetings will determine a large portion of your grade.***" Note, I've underscored that attendance is important, and I've tied its importance to the very way the course will be conducted. Policy derives from philosophy, which helps make clear to students the legitimate pedagogical reasons behind these expectations.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-create-a-syllabus>

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **But perfect attendance almost never occurs. What then?**
- Some universities do not distinguish excused from unexcused absences.
- A more flexible approach is recommended—it recognizes that life happens. Worry about academic penalties shouldn't be added to an already stressful situation like a family emergency or illness.
- *Because class discussion is at the heart of this course, you are required to be in class, and what we do in the course of our class meetings will determine a large portion of your grade. Of course, I understand that sometimes emergencies or other unexpected circumstances arise that make attendance that day impossible. If this is the case, please talk with me as soon as possible so we can make arrangements to get you caught up (this provision will not apply to nonemergencies like oversleeping). If you will be absent from a class for a university-sponsored activity, please make arrangements with me — beforehand — regarding any work you might miss.*

Guiding questions to explore:

- How do you feel about the language you used to describe your attendance policy? Does it consider students' lives, from varying backgrounds?
- Does your policy reflect your interest in students' learning?



ATTENDANCE POLICY



Late or Missed
Work

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **Late or Missed Work**

- Will you accept late work? If so, how late? What, if any, adjustments will you make to the assignment's grade if a student submits it past deadline? Perhaps you are less deadline-focused and have a rolling submission policy. Some instructors set assignment deadlines in collaboration with their students.
- "It's time we give our students the same respect and flexibility that we demand in our own careers" and not make *a priori* assumptions that late work stems from some academic or character deficit instead of real-life circumstances. *Ellen Boucher*

Guiding questions to explore:

- Do you offer opportunities for retaking missed or late work? What opportunities do students have to catch up if they are behind due to technological barriers or other personal deterrents?
- How do you feel about the language you used to describe your late assignment policy? Does it consider students' lives, from varying backgrounds?
- Does your policy reflect your interest in students' learning?



LATE OR MISSED WORK



Course requirements and grading

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **Examine your assignment design and class requirements for student-centered learning**
- As James M. Lang argues in *Cheating Lessons: Learning From Academic Dishonesty*, one of the best ways to combat cheating is to [change the environment](#) in which it usually occurs.
- Plagiarism is typically a “product of procrastination followed by panic the night before an assignment is due and by poor decision-making skills that make copy-and-pasting from the internet seem like a viable solution.”
- Creating assignments that are due throughout the semester with formative feedback can address issues of plagiarism almost completely.

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **Examine your assignment design and class requirements for student-centered learning**
- Provide student choice as often as possible
 - Choice in topic for written assignments
 - Choice in reading materials
 - Opportunity to bring in perspectives whenever possible

Inclusion and Equity

Clemson doctoral student produces rap album for dissertation, it goes viral

Share: [f](#) [t](#) [l](#)

February 10, 2017

Clemson University doctoral student A.D. Carson is many things – poet, activist, and rap artist to name a few -- but “typical Ph.D. candidate” is not one of them. So, when it came to writing a dissertation, he couldn’t simply write a traditional one. Instead, he produced a 34-song rap album that already



Guiding questions to explore:

- **Beyond ensuring that graded assignments are all reflective of learning outcomes**, how do you feel about the language you used to describe your course requirements and grading policy? Do they consider students' lives, from varying backgrounds? Do they demystify the grading criteria?
- Are mistakes expected, respected, and used to elevate students' understanding of the subject? Does your policy reflect your interest in students' learning?
- Is it high stakes, with ample opportunities for plagiarism, cheating, or cramming? Or formative, customized, with student choice and long-term learning opportunities?
- Is there student choice?



COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING



Accessibility

...and elements, that although not necessarily required, reflect best practices

- **Accessibility**

- Considering issues of access can be greatly improved by considering [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL).

- Identifying and removing barriers to access can reduce or eliminate the need for individual accommodations and increase inclusiveness

Guiding questions to explore:

- Consider your course requirements and students with diverse characteristics with respect to gender; age; size; ethnicity and race; native language; and abilities to see, hear, manipulate objects, read, and communicate.
- What kinds of accommodations have you had to make in the past? (E.g., extended time, alternative assessments).
- What changes could you make to your requirements that remove obstacles such that the accommodations are no longer necessary?



ACCESSIBILITY



Classroom Climate and Language



ACPA20

NASHVILLE

2-5 MARCH 2020

REGISTRATION ▾

EDUCATION ▾

NEXTGEN ▾

CAREER DEVELOPMENT ▾

INCLUSION ▾

LOCATION ▾

EXHIBITORS

FAQ ▾

Inclusive Language

As a welcoming and inclusive organization we ask that you consider using **equitable and inclusive practices in language and practice** at Convention and in preparation for program sessions (and hopefully in your everyday lives). It is especially significant to consider inclusive practices when creating a program session. As members of society, we have been surrounded by problematic language and practice throughout our lifetime. These continual problematic messages become part of our everyday interactions, and we begin to miss the boundaries of inclusive and exclusive practices. Fostering inclusive practices requires a willingness for growth and acceptance of failure. As educators, we do not expect perfection and hope that this opens the door for continued conversations on how to provide space for everyone in our environments.

ACPA

- **Ableism:** language that refers to able-bodied actions or using language that uses a disability as a descriptor.
- **Racism:** language or curricular materials that discriminates based on race or ethnicity or promotes one race as superior to others.
- **Gendering & Sexism:** language that uses gender terminology in reference to people, uses gendered terms, focuses on a gender binary, or uses societal standards of gender.
- **Religious Implications:** language that is not mindful of various religious & non-religious identities or religious practices.
- **Stereotypes:** language that reinforces stereotypes about various individuals and is not based on fact.

ACPA

- **Economic Assumptions:** practices that refer to monetary requirements or reference makes assumptions regarding economic accessibility.
- **Ageism:** language that reinforces age disparity.
- **Hierarchical Barriers:** be conscious of language that reinforces often inequitable hierarchical systems in which we often operate, and thus create and foster barriers.
- **Accessibility:** use language that is accessible to anyone and is not specific to any educational level, background, identity, or exclusive entities.
- **Derogatory Expression:** language that is used in a negative way, especially that which focuses negativity towards another.

ACPA

- **Historical Context:** reflect on the historical context of the word choice and themes in your course materials.
- **Cultural Significance:** language that is significant to a culture that is not your own or using culturally significant language in a way that is exclusive of others.
- **Specificity:** use language that is specific and clear to allow for transparency, understanding, and accuracy.
- **Various Populations & Backgrounds:** people come into these spaces from a variety of experiences and an array of identities so it is important to be mindful of triggering language.

APA: Bias free language

- Guideline 1: Describe at the appropriate level of specificity
 - Acknowledge relevant differences that do exist
 - When writing about [gender identity](#), descriptors with modifiers (e.g., cisgender women, transgender women) are more specific than descriptors without modifiers (e.g., women) or general nongendered terms (e.g., people, individuals)
 - Guideline 2: Be sensitive to labels
 - Acknowledge people's humanity
 - Choose labels with sensitivity, ensuring that the individuality and humanity of people are respected. When [writing about disability](#), person-first language (e.g., “a person with paraplegia” rather than “a paraplegic”), identity-first language (e.g., “an autistic person” rather than “a person with autism”), or both may be acceptable depending on the group you are writing about.

See <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/general-principles>

Guiding questions

- Does the syllabus include explicit language about fostering inclusiveness?
 - Language use in class and writing
 - Pronouns
- Do students have input in co-creating community rules outlined in the course syllabus?
- How do you convey intolerance of microaggressions and racist remarks, action, and behavior in the course?



CLASSROOM CLIMATE & LANGUAGE



Curriculum

Our choices to be
inclusive: The Syllabus

Guiding questions

- What books, articles, and readings have been selected in your course? Are your course resources inclusive to race, socio-economic standing, gender, sexuality, disability, immigration status, English language learner, and first-generation students?
 - Are authors you have included from various backgrounds, with an intentional attempt at including authors from students' own backgrounds?
- Do students have input in shaping content?
- Do the images and videos in the course showcase diversity and representation of the students?



QUESTIONS?

falopez@psu.edu