



Reflection Worksheet:

What does your syllabus say about your course?

This worksheet uses learner-centred and inclusive teaching principles to help you assess how well your syllabus communicates your intentions for the course to your students. For each element, read the paragraph and then self-assess your own syllabus. How well does your syllabus communicate that particular element to your students? Reflect first, then jot down some notes for yourself: what is already working well on your syllabus, and what aspects could you improve on? The worksheet will grow as you add your own comments.

Bring this worksheet to the workshop. You won't need to show the worksheet to anyone, but it will help to remind you of areas you intend to work on.

Introduction to the Course and the Instructor

An inclusive syllabus aims to connect students to the people in the course, and get them excited about the course itself. Some of the ways this is done is by introducing yourself to your students and why this course excites you. This could include a brief biographical statement and/or by describing your foundational beliefs and values which drive your approach to teaching, and your approach to the course. This might include sharing a rationale for how you've designed the course and the teaching methods you use to help students engage and learn. Other members of the teaching team (if there are others, such as TAs, etc.) may also be introduced. Finally, it will include an introduction to the course in a way that inspires your learners and builds excitement for the course.

How well does your syllabus introduce the course and you (the instructor)?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Stated Commitments to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Stating your commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion is a key aspect of an inclusive syllabus. These kinds of acknowledgements support student's sense of belonging in a course. This can include specific statements that acknowledge the diversity of who will be in the course (students and instructor's identities), and the different perspectives, accessibility needs, and lived experiences that these bring. The statements may also describe your own approach to equity, diversity and inclusion. Meaningfully acknowledging the Indigenous lands on which the course takes place (whether in person or online) is usually included.

How well does your syllabus state commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Course Modality

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to more clearly communicate to your learners why a course is running in a particular modality. Learners should be given enough information to understand how they are expected to engage and participate in this particular modality. The rationale for why the course is running in a particular modality can be tied to the goals of the course, and how the course modality influences the course activities (e.g. labs vs lecture), including the structure and flow of the course.

How well does your syllabus explain the rationale for the course modality?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Course Communication & Office Hours

Your syllabus should clearly articulate how students can contact you and others on the teaching team, and for what purposes. Is it clear on your syllabus how students should contact you, and how to contact other members of the teaching team? Does it specify what students can expect for a turnaround time? Are there any ways that learners can reach out to each other? For office hours, some students do not understand what office hours are for and how attending will benefit their learning. Does your syllabus explain the purpose of office hours, your expectations for learners in office hours, and what learners can expect from you? And finally, does your syllabus communicate a welcoming tone and encourage learners to drop by office hours?

How well does your syllabus describe how to connect with you and others on the teaching team?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Course Materials

It's important to include some rationale for the materials included in class. Instead of simply listing the course materials, does the syllabus describe why the textbook and other course readings have been selected for the course and how they help support student learning? Does it specify the different options for learners to access the course materials, and are there any alternatives for students who are unable to purchase materials or tools needed for your class? It's also important to consider accessibility of materials used, and important to point out to students that you follow accessibility guidelines for materials that you create. If you teach a lecture section, have you explained why you are or are not recording your lectures?

How well does your syllabus explain the rationale for the course materials and how they are being used?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Course Schedule

Creating an organized schedule for the course and its activities supports students' success in the course. It's important that the course schedule includes more than a mere list of content topics and readings. It should contain enough information to guide students throughout the course including dates, topics, readings, learning activities, and due dates for assignments. This information should be neatly formatted and organized, and readily accessible for students.

How well does your syllabus communicate the course schedule to students?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Course Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes guide the learning in the course. Articulating why the course is useful with general overall course goals, how it may function within the overall curriculum and what learners will be able to accomplish at the end of the course with specific measurable learning outcomes helps orient learners to the course and supports them in managing and monitoring their own learning and progress. It is helpful to include not only a general description of the course goals, but also how the knowledge and skills learners gain might be useful to them for other courses, their careers, or everyday life. This is an opportunity not only to describe what the course is about but also to help learners better understand the value of the course to them, and thus further support their motivation to learn in the course. An inclusive course will have learning goals and outcomes that take into account the diversity of student experiences and motivations.

What are the general overall course goals and specific measurable learning outcomes and are they clearly stated? How well does the syllabus communicate the relevance of the learning goals to the students' lives and does it incorporate any diversity-related outcomes?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Assessments

Providing a clear outline of assessments and grading will help learners prepare and plan for their course work and responsibilities ahead. From a learner's standpoint, meaningful assessment and grading descriptions can inform learners how to scaffold and manage their learning and what they can expect in terms of formative and summative assessment and feedback. Each assessment should be described clearly and meaningfully, including an explanation of how they will help learners attain course outcomes, and what feedback strategies will be used to guide and inform learners along the way. An inclusive course will provide learners with options in completing assessments where this is feasible and fits with the learning outcomes of the course.

Does the syllabus communicate to students how assessments align with the learning outcomes and design of the course? Does the syllabus communicate whether the course has a variety of ways for learners to show what they learn, whether there is a variety of formative assessments (assignments) that provide them with immediate feedback and opportunities to improve, and whether divergent, creative thinking is rewarded?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

Policies, Resources and Expectations

It has always been important to include a section with some of the university policies. Rather than simply stating the university policy on plagiarism, it is important that students understand why academic integrity matters, and how values of integrity are reflected in your course and in your discipline. Students should also know where to find the regulations around academic integrity and the procedures related to academic misconduct.

It has become increasingly common to acknowledge the importance of taking care of one's physical health, mental health, and wellness, and to include particular campus resources and campus units that can support students in their success (such as Counseling Services, the Writing Centre, the Centre for Accessibility). Does your syllabus describe additional resources and campus support units that are available to help your learners be successful in your course?

Finally, it is important that you specify expectations for engaging in the course. Do you discuss or collaborate with learners in setting these course expectations? Do learners know what is expected of them both inside and outside of the class?

How well does your syllabus explain how course expectations and/or university policies and resources support student learning?

Reflect on this element of your syllabus and take notes for yourself. For example, what is already working well? What improvements could you make?

For the final step, review your responses to this worksheet. What areas of your syllabus do you feel are working well? What areas do you think need some attention?

Consider your time during the 2-hour workshop. Choose one or two areas to focus your energies on during the workshop. Bring this worksheet to the workshop, along with your syllabus, on whichever device you will use to make revisions.