

Inclusive Syllabus: What is it?

An inclusive syllabus emphasizes the importance of engaging with and valuing difference, and incorporates equity and inclusion into key course information, such as course policies, readings, assignments and resources.

Introduction

Your syllabus can play an important role in shifting the tone of the course and demonstrating your commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion to students.

An inclusive syllabus usually takes a [learner-centered approach](#), which focuses on the needs of students by acknowledging their various learning preferences, accessibility needs, perspectives and lived experiences. This approach also communicates to students that they are active contributors to the learning process, not passive recipients of knowledge.

Finally, an inclusive syllabus may contain an inclusion statement that emphasizes your commitment to inclusive teaching (<https://inclusiveteaching.ctlt.ubc.ca>).

Why is it important?

An inclusive syllabus alone will not create an inclusive learning environment, but it lays the foundation for inclusive teaching practices.

Creates an inclusive environment

Having an inclusive syllabus helps create an inclusive learning environment where all students are supported to succeed, especially students from groups who have been historically, persistently or systemically marginalized in higher education.

Communicates commitment

By making the syllabus inclusive, you are reflecting your thoughtful course design and communicating your commitment to equity and inclusion as an instructor. It shows that you are making an effort to take into account the well-being of students and the diversity of their needs and lived experiences.

Helps engage diverse students

Students – especially students from groups who have been historically, persistently or systemically marginalized – look for cues in the syllabus for what a course will be like. An inclusive syllabus signals opportunities for more diverse students to engage in class, which may provide you with new insights on your course.

FOR EXAMPLE:

[Acknowledging the land that the university sits on](#) and revisiting this reality throughout the course may shift the context of your class in subtle ways.



How do I write an inclusive syllabus?

There is no one way to write an inclusive syllabus, but it usually starts with [inclusive course design](#). Answering the questions below may help you reflect and help guide your process as you (re)design your syllabus.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What assumptions does my syllabus make about learners?
- How do the selected examples and readings represent a diversity of experiences?
- Does my syllabus recognize the contributions of people who have been historically less visible in my field/discipline?
- How is my syllabus inviting students to provide feedback on the course and the learning environment?
- Am I utilizing the best teaching and assessment strategies for this course and a diverse student population?
- How is my course's approach to inclusion, disability, or the Indigenous land that the university sits on reflected in my syllabus?
- How does my syllabus signal to students that
 - Diverse perspectives are welcomed;
 - Accommodations can be made; and
 - Acts of intolerance and disrespect will not be permitted.

Adapted from: <https://sites.tufts.edu/inclusiveteaching/the-syllabus-as-a-tool-for-setting-a-climate/>

What can an inclusive syllabus look like?

An inclusive syllabus can:

Support student success and well-being by clarifying what support is available from the instructor and on campus.

Model respectful behaviour by setting some guidelines for class discussion or sharing your own pronouns.

Apply a learner-centered lens by ensuring that course content and learning activities can be aligned with students' current interests and/or diverse future aspirations.

What it might look like:

Listing office hours:

- "I encourage you to make use of my office hours to chat about anything that is related to the course or to discuss how I could better support your learning. You can drop by or call during the hours. If office hours do not work with your schedule, please let me know and I will try to work out a time to meet you. If you prefer emails, I aim to respond within 48 hours."

Discussing class participation:

- "This class involves small and large group discussions. Try to avoid making assumptions about other people's background or identities. For example, try to avoid gendered language unless you know how the person identifies (e.g., "I agree with what was just said" instead of "I agree with her")."

Discussing the goals of the course:

- "The examples discussed in the course aim to make your learning experience more relevant and applicable to different contexts, such as other courses, your everyday life, or your professional career."



More resources

General resources

- [Inclusive Syllabus Language](#) (University of Michigan)
- [Inclusion By Design: Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design - A Worksheet](#) (James Madison University)
- [Diversity and Inclusiveness Syllabus Collection](#) (American Philosophical Association)
- [Developing a learner-centered syllabus](#) (UBC)
- General resources on [syllabus development](#)

Reflections and examples from professors

- [Include readings by, about, and for women](#) (Dr. Eric Anthony Grollman)
- [Steps Toward a Big Idea Syllabus](#) (Michael Wesch)
- [Hacking, Remixing Design](#) (Mark Sample at Davidson College)

