

Communicating with Students / Best Practice: Customize the Online Syllabus

Students in online courses often feel disoriented without the familiar face-to-face introductory explanations during the first day of class. Besides including the basics in your syllabus about grading criteria, course objectives, and department policies, consider adding procedures distinctive to the online environment. For example, include sections for the schedule, an online map, and a participation contract.

The Schedule

- List start and end times for units and provide a weekly overview.
- Specify due dates; consider repeating important due dates on the Calendar, in Announcements, or by making the Notification Modules available on the Home Page.
- Provide students with your real-time office hours in Chat.
- Make expectations clear about how often students are to attend class.

The Map

- Help students use the syllabus as a map or guide to the course. Provide a description of the course layout and where to find each area of the course.
- List special online course procedures, such as where to access lesson material and how to label and submit assignments.
- List where tests are located, and offer practice tests to familiarize students with the interface.

The Contract

Make participation expectations clear:

- Set a minimum number of postings in the Discussion Board or Chat.
- Let students know you intend to grade on quality, as well as quantity.

Let students know what they can expect from you:

- List your schedule for returning graded work and providing feedback for questions, emails, and discussion posts.
- Let students know how you handle technical difficulties.