

Anatomy of a Syllabus

Getting familiar with the expectations of your course

Division of Interdisciplinary Studies
at the Center for Worker Education



The City College
of New York

What is a syllabus?

- A **guide** to the academic content (topics) and skills you will be introduced to, and when you will have opportunities to practice them
- A **document** that states the academic and behavioral requirements and expectations of the course
- A **contract** between you and your professor

Advice from advisors

- Read your syllabus carefully, and more than once.
- Ask your professor questions about any part of the syllabus you don't understand.
- Transfer important dates and assignments from the syllabus to your planner.
- Learn to “work backwards”. If you have an assignment due on October 13, be realistic about when you will need to begin working on it to have a good outcome.
- Break your assignments into smaller chunks to make them manageable. Give yourself deadlines, and stick to them.
- Accept that coursework often takes longer than you expect it to. Build in extra time for assignments.

The parts of a syllabus

- Course number, section number, course title
- Semester
- Day and time of class meetings
- Class delivery method (in person; hybrid synchronous; hybrid asynchronous; fully asynchronous; online mixed)
- Name of professor/instructor
- Office hours
- Professor/instructor contact email
- Course description
- Learning outcomes (sometimes called *course objectives*)
- Required books and other texts
- Assessment and course requirements (how your professor will evaluate what you have learned in the course)
- Policies: attendance and lateness, academic integrity, services for students with disabilities, use of cell phones and other electronic devices, eating in class
- Class schedule

Course description

- **Provides an overview of what the course will explore and often identifies the academic discipline(s) it is situated within**

“This course will provide an overview of the field of developmental disabilities with a perspective that is interdisciplinary and practical.” (Introduction to Developmental Disabilities)

- **Identifies perspectives and theoretical approaches that will be used and emphasized**

“We will look at these contributions through the social and political context of American culture from the period of slavery to the present and through a lens of gender, race, class, and sexuality.” (African American Women’s History)

- **Identifies specific academic skills to be developed**

“The course emphasizes critical reading, thinking, and writing skills as well as various theoretical approaches to the composition of the academic essay.” (Core Humanities 1)

Learning outcomes

What will you be able to do by the end of the course?

Examples from 4 courses...

- *“Students will be able to read critically, with close attention to the language of the text.” (Core Humanities 1)*
- “Students will be able to isolate main ideas and theses, both explicit and implicit, recognize argumentation structures, and recognize and use effectively a number of common rhetorical devices.” **(Core Humanities 1)**
- *“Students will be able to describe the existing and evolving service systems in New York and the implications for families and planning for family members with disabilities.” (Introduction to Developmental Disabilities)*
- “Students will be able to periodize and contextualize some of the defining epochs and eras of the modern, western, intellectual and cultural tradition, from the early modern era to the Scientific Revolution, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, up to and including the Modern and Postmodern periods.” **(Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies)**

Practice the behaviors of an engaged learner

- ***Be active, not passive***
 - ***Be prepared***—doing assignments thoroughly and on time; coming to class with readings done; participating in discussions based on the readings
 - ***Become informed***—becoming knowledgeable about the vocabulary and terminology, facts, questions, debates of the subject matter; using tools such as dictionaries, glossaries, maps, etc.
 - ***Be critical***—learn to identify the author's argument, to ask questions of the texts, examine texts for evidence that supports the author's argument in order to evaluate the soundness of the argument
 - ***Be tolerant***—be patient with the process of learning; accept your mistakes and learn from them; accept that learning takes time

Required books and other texts

- The required books, articles, and other texts are your work **equipment...if you don't have your tools, you can't do the job!**
- What are your options in addition to purchasing the book?
 - CWE Library
 - Cohen Library on the main campus
 - Other CUNY libraries
 - Google Books
 - Former students

Assessment and course requirements

How will the professor evaluate what you have learned?

Examples from 3 courses...

“An introductory essay, plus five formal essays of at least 750 words, each revised once, are required. Essays will be graded only after revision. The averaged grades of these five essays will comprise two-thirds of your final grade. Attendance and participation account for on-third of your final grade.”

(Core Humanities 1)

“Quizzes: 40%. There will be 13 quizzes.

Presentation: 15%

Reaction paper to *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* 15%

Final paper: 30 %” **(Latin American and Caribbean Civilization)**

“Ethnographic Exercise: Gender Socialization (due Oct 16)

This 2-3 page-paper requires doing fieldwork in a toy store, play ground, or any setting in which you might observe adult-child interactions. Observe and analyze how gender norms, roles, and ideals are reflected and reproduced through toys, consumer goods, and socialization. How are gender roles communicated to children? What messages about race, class, and consumption are conveyed to children?” **(Cross-Cultural Perspectives)**

Grades

- Are what you EARN based on how well you fulfill the course requirements
- Are assigned to each student the discretion of each professor, who is considered the classroom expert in her or his field
- Your final grade gives you an overall impression of your progress in the course. But your grade may not allow you to identify the **specific** skills you still need to master.
- **The takeaway:** ALWAYS carefully read the professor's comments on any assignment. Ask for feedback. Meet with your professor during office hours to better understand your performance on an assignment. Then, IMPLEMENT your professor's suggestions.

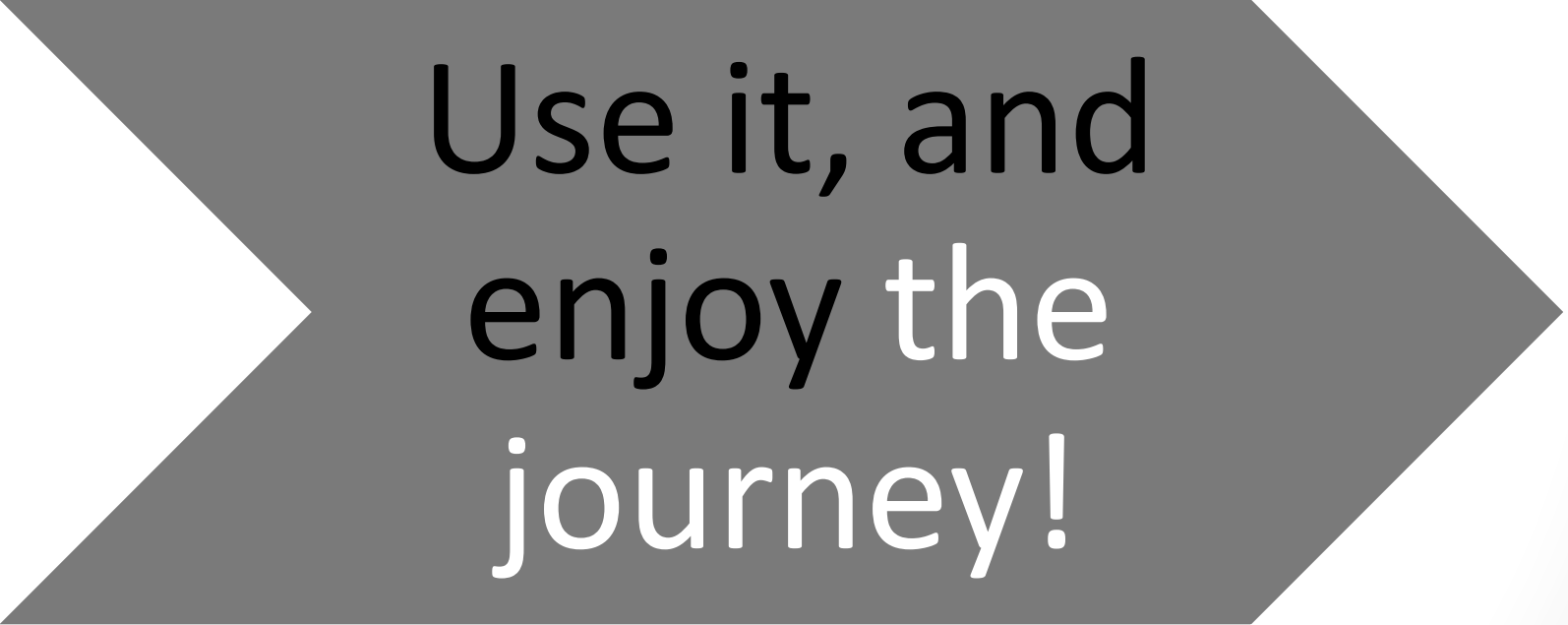
Policies

- Ensure a fair and orderly learning experience for all students
- Inform you of the academic rules and regulations of City College
- Promote intellectual integrity—it is unethical to steal the work of others
- Provide a level playing-field for students with disabilities (adherence to Federal and State law)
- Create a respectful, orderly, physically and emotionally safe environment that is conducive to the exchange of ideas and the development of students' abilities
- **Every syllabus includes general policies that apply to every course at CWE and the specific policies of that professor.**

Class Schedule

- Tells you the pace of the class
 - What will you explore?
 - What is the sequence of work?
 - When are assignments due?

Your syllabus is a road map



Use it, and
enjoy the
journey!