

Study EACH Syllabus

A syllabus is essentially a contract for learning between a professor and a student. Included in your syllabus, you will find:

- **Contact information for your instructors** – when and where you can find them (office hours), as well as email or phone contact information;
- **Course objectives** – pay attention to this listing of what you should have learned by the end of the semester;
- **Policies & expectations** – these are the ‘rules’ around attendance, late or missing assignments, make-up work, etc.;
- **Grading** – what are the criteria by which you will be graded? *Most syllabi will give you the break-down of tests, papers, assignments, and other factors that go into your grade, with a clear percentage or point system to help you understand where you should devote the most energy. If it’s not there, ask your instructor about it!*
- **Required reading** – what text(s) will you need, and what additional readings might be assigned (through reserve readings, Moodle sites, etc.)? *In many classes, you will not be given explicit reading assignments at each class meeting – you will need to glean this information from your syllabus, and keep up with what’s expected of you.*
- **Assignments & deadlines** – what, specifically, do you need to hand in, by what time, and (sometimes) in what format (e.g. online, in class, etc.). *NOTE: This level of detail around expectations may not be spelled out anywhere else.*

At the beginning of each semester, gather all of your syllabi and look carefully at what will be expected of you.

- 1) **What is required in this course?** Notice types of requirements such as: attendance, participation, readings, exams, out-of-class activities, written assignments, tests (what format?), class events, individual meetings, etc. If you are planning to drop one course during Add/Drop, details on a syllabus could help you make a good decision about whether/what to drop. Talk to your advisor about it!
- 2) **How will my final grade be calculated?** Notice the percentage or points awarded for each requirement (4 exams @ 20% each & 1 paper @ 20% = 100% final grade), and enter the information into your **Grade Tracker**, so you can follow your progress and always know where you stand in a course. Remember the small percentage points (i.e.: 15% participation and 5% extra credit) add up; it’s an easy way to boost your grade! Understanding percentages can help you make tough decisions when you are pressed for time: *do you spend more time studying for a History exam (20% of your final grade) or an Economics exam (50% of your final grade) that are both on the same day?*
- 3) **Plot your semester in your Student Planner / calendar.** For each course, enter EVERY major assignment or exam and due dates (for the ENTIRE semester) in a datebook or calendar. Try using a different color for each course. Get a visual sense of the flow of your semester, and note the pressure points.
- 4) **Make a plan to be successful.** Now that you have more information, evaluate your course selection and your obligations. If you are concerned about any of your courses or what is required of you, talk to an advisor about possibly switching to a new course (this is best done during the first week of classes). Also plan to go to faculty or TA Office Hours with any questions or concerns.