

Syllabus Clinic Checklists

Do I have everything I need in my syllabus?

That depends. If you have everything on the list below, then the answer is “probably”:

- Basic course information, including (as applicable):
 - Your name & contact information
 - Time & location of the class
 - Office hours (time(s) & location)
 - TA name(s) & contact information
 - Time & location of recitations/labs
 - Website
 - Course pre-/co-requisites
 - Course materials
- Course Description
- Learning Objectives
- Snapshot view of the grade breakdown
- Descriptions of graded components in the course
- Course Policies
- Class Schedule¹

What additional features are sometimes included in a syllabus?

- Grading rubrics
- Your expectations of your students
- Explanation of what your students can expect from you
- Advice to students about how to succeed in this course
- Advice to students about how to do task of type X well
- Extra information about labs/recitations/etc.
- Other campus resources (i.e. Office of Disability Services, Center for Academic Success, Office of Minority Education, etc.)

What requirements does Georgia Tech have about my syllabus?

- See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/6/>

¹Although the class schedule is typically treated as a document that is distinct from the syllabus itself, it is important to create an easy-to-read schedule to accompany your syllabus.

Do I have all the Course Policies I need?

There are **five types of course policies** that should be articulated in your syllabus (or carefully considered before choosing not to articulate them in your syllabus):

- Academic Integrity & Collaboration
- Accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- Attendance &/or Participation
- Extensions, Late Assignments & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams
- Student use of Mobile Devices in the classroom

In addition, there are a number of **other policies** that frequently show up in syllabi, depending on the nature of the course being taught, and the preferences of the individual instructor. For example:

- Guidelines for discussion/critique
- Re-grading and re-submission
- Food/drink in class
- Preparation for guest speakers
- Recording classroom activities
- Accommodations for religious observances

For each policy on your syllabus you should:

- aim to make **your expectations** clear;
- communicate **consequences** for policy-violating behavior;
- explain the **rationale** behind your policy;
- be clear about what a student needs to do if/when **extenuating circumstances** arise (and about what sorts of things count as extenuating circumstances);
- use **language** that emphasizes your **students' role** in the process;
- aim for a **tone** that communicates both **authority and approachability**;
- remember that policy choices tend to involve **tradeoffs** between equally desirable options; take time to consider what you're giving up and why.

Course Descriptions

Your course description should provide a brief introduction to the scope, purpose & relevance of the course. Note also that it is perfectly acceptable for the course description in your syllabus to go beyond the description in the course catalogue, provided it is consistent with that description.

Read your colleague's course description, make some notes, and give feedback based on the following criteria:

This Course Description...	not at all 1	2	3	4	very well 5	Notes for Discussion
...tells me what the course is about	<input type="checkbox"/>					
...gives me a sense of what is interesting/useful about this course	<input type="checkbox"/>					
...avoids the use of jargon, and terms students who haven't yet taken the course might not understand	<input type="checkbox"/>					
...will be useful to its various audiences	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Learning Objectives

Developing learning objectives is an important first step in course design, and they should be articulated on your syllabus. Your learning objectives are meant to identify your main goals for your students, in terms of the skills and knowledge they will develop in your class. They should be student-centered, action-oriented, and measurable, and should reflect a big-picture view of the purpose of the course.

Read your colleague's learning objectives, make some notes, and discuss your thoughts on the following questions:

	Yes	No	Notes for Discussion
Are the learning objectives student-centered, action-oriented, and measurable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there 3-8 learning objectives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there learning objectives that seem more like descriptions of assessments and/or classroom activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there vague/ambiguous phrases in use (like <i>understand</i> and <i>obtain a working knowledge of</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What is your sense of the scope of the course (e.g. topical breadth & depth, introductory vs. advanced, etc.), given the learning objectives provided?			

Graded Components

Your syllabus should include extra details and information for each component of your students' final grade. The idea here is to give your students a sense of what kind and quantity of work will be expected of them. Some things can be lumped together (e.g. midterms & final exams), but there should be a descriptive blurb associated with every component of your course that counts toward a student's final grade.

1. Take turns explaining your basic grade breakdown to your colleagues, and discuss together the ways in which you think each measures (or fails to measure) student achievement of the course's learning objectives.
2. Read and discuss your colleagues' descriptions of their graded components, with the following questions in mind:
 - If you were a student, what questions would you still have about the requirements, after reading the descriptions?
 - Is it clear from each description what kind and quantity of work will be expected of students?
 - Are there places where sentences like "More details about this assignment will be distributed in class" and/or "See our Canvas site for more information" would be helpful?

Course Policies

Course Policies are an important part of every syllabus, as they are an opportunity to make your expectations about your students' behaviour clear to them. As you write your course policies, use language that emphasizes your students' role in the process, and aim for a tone that communicates both authority and approachability.

Take turn reading each other's individual policies, and discuss the following questions:

- Is it sufficiently clear **what is and is not expected/permisible** in this class?
- Does the **rationale or motivation** behind the policy need to be made more explicit/clear?
- Is it clear **what students need to do** in extenuating circumstances, and what the **consequences** will be if they fail to live up to the expectations laid out in this policy?
- Does the **tone** of this policy seem **too harsh, too soft, or just right?**