Suggestions, notes, explanations
for the syllabus template

Please note: You need not use the format of the template document (the table set-up) or the order; the key is to provide the information that students need to get. The template now contains indicators showing which items are required.

The basics
Instructor: Your name and title

Office location: CAMPUS-BUILDING-ROOM-PHONE NUMBER

Contact information: EMAIL ADDRESS: Use your RU email (if you are adjunct faculty and don’t have an RU email address, ask your department to have yours activated). Do not use an email address from another school where you work. Offer guidance on how quickly you usually respond (“within 24 hours,” “daily,” etc.).

Other contact information: Webpage? Cell phone (not suggesting this, but some instructors do provide it). Texts (one instructor lists a text-only number for his students)?

Course meetings: BUILDING & ROOM (if you know in advance), CAMPUS, DAY and TIME

Course dates: Start date/end date/final exam date. For important course dates, include a schedule at the end of the syllabus. For important term dates, including the withdrawal deadline, go to http://www.roosevelt.edu/Registrar/ImportantDates.aspx

Credit hours: You’ll see this on the online schedule. Most courses are three semester hours.

Office hours: List days/times. Are your hours walk-in? by appointment? Are you available after class or before class as well?

Teaching assistants, peer instructors, etc: List name and contact information.


Optional text: List that for students as well, and give them the details mentioned above.
Also required: If you require use of Blackboard for discussions or otherwise – or if you post readings on Blackboard, note that here. Explain (briefly) where to find Blackboard, how they get in (full instructions are listed at https://roosevelt.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id=_105_1 ) The class Blackboard site is at http://roosevelt.blackboard.com.

The course itself

Course prerequisites: Give enough info: English 102 with a grade of C+ or better, for example. Consult the catalog (the graduate and undergraduate catalogs are online at www.roosevelt.edu/catalog ) if you’re not certain.

Course overview: Many syllabi list the catalog description for the case, as is the case for Susanne McLaughlin’s syllabus for Linguistics for ESL Teachers, EDUC 358:

Catalog Description

Theory and research on learning English as a second language (ESL). Foundation for understanding linguistics and learning theory specific to ESL and bilingualism.

Other instructors describe their course, as Steve Meyers does for PSYC 103:

This course will provide you with an introduction to the field of psychology. As a survey course, it is designed to help you explore a bit of most everything psychology has to offer. We will examine how people “work” in detail ---- What do psychologists know about why people behave the way they do? How are personalities formed? What is “normal” and “abnormal” behavior? How do psychologists help people with psychological disorders? The class also addresses the research and experimental foundations of psychology: You will learn how psychologists ask and answer questions. We will use this lens to better understand topics such as how the brain influences our behavior, how our senses and minds perceive the world, and how we learn and remember.

RU’s learning goals: These must appear on your syllabus. The Higher Learning Commission expects to see the university-wide learning goals on our syllabi.

The university’s three overall learning goals for undergraduate students are:

Goal: Effective communication

Goal: Knowledge of disciplined-focused content

Goal: Awareness of social justice and engagement in civic life

Your own learning objectives for the class: Here is a sample from Steve Meyers’ PSYC 103 syllabus:
I have three main learning goals for you. At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Define key terms and concepts from different areas within psychology.
- Apply psychological concepts to understand how people function, both individually and interpersonally.
- Apply theoretical, research-based, and clinical findings to increase your understanding about yourself and improve your well-being.

This class also connects with the four overarching goals developed by Roosevelt University’s Department of Psychology for undergraduate students enrolled in our courses.

Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology. This course provides you with an introduction to many of these topics and is a key focus of PSYC 103.

Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology. Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation. This course will define these terms so that you can develop related skills in subsequent courses (especially statistics and research methods, for psychology majors).

Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology. Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes. We will analyze how psychologists examine arguments and evaluate claims.

Goal 4: Application of Psychology. Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues with concern for social justice. This is a main focus of PSYC 103. You will apply the ideas we discuss to yourself and others.

Methodology: What will you do in class? Do you primarily lecture? Do your students work in teams or pairs to reach solutions to problems? Is your focus on discussion? Give them an idea what to expect.

Here is a sample from Susanne McLaughlin’s EDUC 358 course in the College of Education:

This class will consist of lectures, class and small group discussions, and activities to work with linguistic data, which will be done individually or in small groups. We will often work collaboratively in this class to explore what we know about language as native speakers of a language and to explore how linguists study language. Since many of the terms used in the field of linguistics may be new to you, it recommended that you keep a terminology log.
of concepts, definitions, and examples given in class (notebooks will be provided).

Assignments and assessment
You’ve created assignments for the class, but consider having a written assignment sheet for any substantial assignment. That assures that students have a reference when their memories of your oral description of the assignment fade. Many faculty members also provide students, especially in undergraduate-level courses, with rubrics that provide a visual display of the requirements for an assignment. One source of sample rubrics is at http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/rubrics.cfm, but you can find a variety of sources online.

A word on assignments for freshmen: Some courses, especially those at the 100 level, are best structured with multiple assignments early in the term, to allow freshmen to get feedback early: If they’re having problems, they can get help (or the instructor can urge them to get help) before it’s too late to succeed in the class.

You also may encounter instances in which certain assignments are used by your program or department for “assessment” of student learning. In those cases, you’ll be told that these assignments will be collected for further review or otherwise reviewed by your program’s assessment team. Such assessments focus on student learning, not on instructor evaluation.

This, again, is from Susanne McLaughlin’s syllabus:

Assignments
Language Inquiry Projects/Papers: Students will write a 7-10 page final paper about a project in which they have gathered and analyzed linguistic data or a research paper on a topic covered in class. Guidelines will be provided.

Assignments: There will be a variety of assignments in this class, including short reports, short summaries of the readings, data gathering, etc.

Assessment
Assignments, quizzes and exams in this class will be designed to give you a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the basic concepts presented in class.

Grading
Give students enough detail – how you define work at various levels, how much assignments count toward the final grade and how grades are calculated – that they can figure out their grades anytime during the term. If they’re freshmen, show them how to figure out their grades.

Your own policies
Think about how your class operates and what you value. Consider including in your syllabus policies for:
Attendance: Do you take attendance? You need some method of attendance-taking, since you’re required to report attendance in each course you teach through RU Access; the registrar will notify faculty when attendance reports are available. Attendance reporting is required by federal regulations for financial aid.

Blackboard usage and expectations: Will you use Blackboard for discussions? Will you post all assignments there? Detail how you will use Blackboard and make certain students know where to get help if they have problems.

Civility: Elizabeth Meadows is succinct on this topic in her ACP 101 First-Year Seminar syllabus: This classroom will be a safe place for all participants. We will treat one another with respect.

Class participation: If you give a grade for participation, is it based on the quantity of responses? Or something else? If so, describe your method.

Electronic device use during class: Are laptops OK for note-taking but not OK for Facebook? Should all phones be set to silent/vibrate? Are all electronic devices prohibited? There’s no university-wide policy, but the issue(s) will come up in your classroom, so be prepared.

Extra credit: If extra credit is available, describe what can be done and how much extra credit counts. Extra credit should be available to all students and not only to individuals who encounter grade crises at a late date.

In-class behavior: Beyond “civility,” you may want to mention your preferences on tardiness, eating, sleeping, taking phone calls, texting, etc.

Incompletes: The university’s policy is that grades of incomplete are appropriate in instances in which the student has missed a small portion of the work for the course and has a non-academic reason for requesting it, such as health, natural disaster, death in the family, etc. Incompletes are not appropriate grades for students who have stopped attending class without explanation or have failed to complete a significant number of assignments.

Late assignments: You can always make exceptions for crises, but it’s best to have a general policy explaining whether you do – or don’t – accept late work.

Paper setup: If you have strict standards for how papers should be set up, this is the place to detail them. Typed-only, font size, spacing, margins – all of those can be established here.

Readings: Should readings be completed before class, for example? Are students asked to write out questions they have from the readings and submit them to the instructor?
Submitting assignments: Do you accept emailed assignments? Are all assignments submitted via Blackboard?

One final piece of advice: Go over your syllabus, especially with undergraduate students, on the first day of class. Explain why you do certain assignments ... note where students might go wrong on certain assignments. Assuming that they’re going to read it thoroughly and understand it is fraught with perils.

*Thanks to Steve Meyers, Susanne McLaughlin and Elizabeth Meadows for use of examples from their syllabi.*