

Using Your Course Syllabus Strategically

Most professors will take you through your course syllabus on the first day of class, and they will encourage you to review it yourself for important information about the course. But the course syllabus can also be used as a tool to create your plan for the class and can help with studying for the exams in the class. We urge students to think of the course outline as:

- **A Time Management Tool** – plot out all assignments, exams and due dates in your personal calendar and set up reminders (so you never miss a deadline)
- **A Study Guide** – use the learning outcomes as practice questions, see the distribution of topics (the more weeks you spend on a topic, the more test questions you'll see)
- **A Guide for your Time and Effort** – use it as tool to help you prioritize (if an assignment is only worth 5%, it shouldn't be taking up 50% of your time or stress)
- **Strategize When to Get Help** – put professor/TA office hours right into your calendar each week (you can plan to have questions ready, or check your understanding ahead of the help each week)

Course Syllabus Scavenger Hunt Activity

Using your own course syllabus for one of your courses, consider the main elements and reflect on how you could use the information strategically

<i>Syllabus Element</i>	Question to ask yourself
<i>Assignment Deadlines</i>	How will knowing these help you plan your time?
<i>Late Work Policy</i>	Can I set a goal that will help me meet the deadlines?
<i>Office Hours/Course Help</i>	How can I use this support to study better?
<i>Major Assessments</i>	How can you prepare ahead of time?
<i>Grading Breakdown</i>	What should I focus on to maximize my grade?
<i>Participation Policy</i>	What habits should I build to earn full credit for participation?
<i>Learning Outcomes</i>	How can I make these into practice questions so I can assess my understanding?
<i>Course Schedule</i>	How do I build a routine into my week that has me prepared for the lectures/labs?

Our Tips for Using the Course Syllabus as a Tool for Studying

- Learning Outcomes are what the professor says you'll know at the end of the class. How will they know if you learned it? They'll put questions about it on the test.
- Put Assignment Deadlines in your personal calendar a day before the due date listed on the syllabus. Most professors will gratefully accept quality work early.
- Identify Patterns in the class. If a discussion post is due every Sunday, set aside some time on Friday to get started on it.
- Spot the "crunch weeks". Are there weeks where there is more reading, or where you'll be covering multiple topics? Plan ahead and pace yourself.
- Use Office Hours as an accountability tool. To speak to a professor or TA about the course material, you need to first review the material and come up with good questions to ask. Figuring out what you don't know is the first step to great studying.