

How to Use Your Course Syllabi

During the first week of each semester, your professors will present you with a syllabus or course outline. Don't stuff that syllabus in a folder and forget about it! It contains valuable information that will help you plan your study time for that course, including class policies, test types and final grade calculation. The syllabus is a plan to follow, or a road map of a professor's expectations, so file each one in a safe place for frequent future reference. You can predict much about a course from the syllabus, and it can help you to design your academic activities for the course.

Long-range planning needs to begin on the first day of class. Planning out your semester will help you reduce confusion and anxiety by exactly defining the demands you will face in each course. By anticipating and planning your approach to each course, you can plan your coping strategies.

Steps for Creating a Semester Schedule

1. Collect all of your course syllabi.
2. Get your planner, Outlook calendar or iCalendar, or print out a **monthly calendar** (You'll need four copies of the calendar -- one for each month of the semester.).
3. Using your course syllabi, fill in each month with all of your exams, papers, short essays, presentations, quizzes and due dates for other important projects.
4. Using the calendar, you can see which weeks of the semester will be the busiest, and plan your time accordingly. If you have several tests and papers due during one week, you may want to start studying several weeks in advance to avoid cramming! Many people find it helpful to set their own deadlines for their work. For example, if you have a paper due on May 1, set a deadline of April 24 for completing the rough draft. Write in these deadlines on your calendar to help yourself stick to them!

Steps for Planning for Your Courses

1. Collect all of your course syllabi.
2. Print out a **course chart**.
3. Under **Course**, list each course title with your most difficult course at the top, to indicate its high priority, and your easiest course at the bottom. Under each course title, set a goal by adding the final grade you want to earn in that course.
4. Under **Professor**, record their name, office location and office hours. You may want to visit each professor's office hours during the first two weeks of classes to introduce yourself and to ask any questions you may have. Get acquainted with each professor early, especially in your most difficult courses, and you'll be more likely to seek help regularly before problems with grades can arise. Seeing this entry on your chart will remind you to take this step.
5. Under **Exams**, briefly list the dates and types of each exam, and how much it counts toward your final grade (e.g., midterm on 10/2, three essays, 40 percent). Do the same under **Projects & Papers** and again for **Other**, for courses in which homework, quiz grades or critiques contribute to your final grade. Leave blanks for

any courses in which these don't apply. These three spaces show you, at a glance, exactly what you have to do -- and when -- to earn the final grade you want.

6. Under **Attendance Policy** and **Late & Makeup Assignment Policy**, note any special requirements of individual professors. There will be wide variations on these; you'll need to know that four absences in one course will cause the professor to fail you, while in another case you have more leeway. Some professors dramatically lower grades for late work, while others are less strict. Your chart will make it easy to meet individual requirement that can affect your grades.
7. Post your completed chart prominently, where you'll see it every day- this may be on your wall, in a notebook, on your desk, etc. Seeing all of your course demands condensed onto one sheet of paper, rather than spread out over four or five multi-page syllabi, is the first step in organizing and balancing your approach to the semester.
8. Be sure that all of the important dates you've listed (e.g., tests, papers, projects, etc.) are listed on your semester schedule!

After completing this long-range plan, create a **weekly time management schedule** to help manage your study time on a weekly basis!

Adapted from the Academic Resource Center at Sweet Briar College, 2010.