



## Westmont College Guidelines for Course Syllabi

**Every course needs a syllabus.** The college grants you considerable freedom to construct syllabi that reflect your own goals, pedagogies, and vision for your courses. There are, however, several requirements that must be included in all syllabi. The following guidelines define those requirements and offer some recommendations about how you might construct the syllabi for your courses.

### Purpose and Philosophy of the Syllabus

While the syllabus exists primarily for your students, it is helpful to remember that it also serves other purposes and is viewed by multiple audiences. Your syllabus should tell prospective and current students what the course is about, what they can expect to learn, and how they can complete it successfully. Your syllabus also provides your department and the college with easily accessible information such as course objectives and outcomes that serve both assessment and planning.

~~In recent years the syllabus has been at the center of some weighty debates. Some faculty view it as a legal document that spells out obligations of all parties. Others look to the syllabus as a place to articulate their aspirations for the course, and use it to inspire enthusiasm in their students. Still others treat it simply as a record of course requirements and schedules. Whether you think of the syllabus as a contract or more as a roadmap, know that~~ **T**he goal of **these** guidelines is to help faculty envision what a “thorough” syllabus looks like. A thorough syllabus is one that

- Creates some structure for students and the course, but allows for flexibility over the course of a semester;
- Outlines official rules of conduct, but resists overly prescriptive policies and punitive measures; and
- Provides a rationale for the course, the texts, and the topics, without teaching the entire class in the pages of the syllabus!

~~Another debate in the syllabus discussion has focused on questions about goals, aspirations, and outcomes.~~ Just as a syllabus cannot capture all that you want students to know about your course, lists of outcomes and descriptions of your hopes for the students in your course will be limited in their ability to convey the full range of your aspirations for the impact of your course on your students. Still, such lists and descriptions have a place in every syllabus. More suggestions about that element of the syllabus will come in the section on Further Guidance, below.

**Required Elements of Your Syllabus** As an instructor, you will bring your own style and the expectations of your particular discipline to the format and content of your syllabus. But every syllabus must answer some particular questions for your students. Those questions appear below. In the case of a few of them, noted with an asterisk, further guidance and recommendations follow.

- ◆ What is the course title, number, section, term, and year?
- ◆ Where and when does the class meet?
- ◆ Who is teaching the course, where is your office, how can you be contacted, and when are your office hours?
- ◆ What books, materials, and other resources are required for this course?
- ◆ What is this course about? What will I learn? What are your aspirations for me in this course?\*
- ◆ What are the specific learning outcomes of the course and how are they connected to the department's Program Learning Outcomes, and the Institutional Learning Outcomes? \*
- ◆ What GE requirements does this course meet and why? (if applicable)
- ◆ What are the main assignments and exams, and when are they due?
- ◆ What are your policies about attendance, participation, make-up work, and due dates?
- ◆ I have been diagnosed with a disability. What should I do?\*
- ◆ What are your expectations regarding academic integrity?\*
- ◆ What is the proposed course schedule of topics?\*

You may choose to answer additional questions in your syllabus. Here are few to consider:

- ◆ How should I study for this class?
- ◆ What is the homework like?
- ◆ What are the exams like?
- ◆ What additional resources might help me succeed in this course?
- ◆ Are there library resources for this course?\*
- ◆ What are Westmont's emergency procedures?\*

### **Further Guidance**

#### **What is this course about? What will I learn? What are your aspirations for me in this course?**

Some professors provide a short narrative in their syllabus (1-2 paragraphs) about the content and direction of the course. It might include the college catalogue description, but often goes beyond the terse language of the catalogue. This narrative can define the purpose of the course, might set the topic of the course in the context of particular goals and trends of your discipline, and can help students perceive why this topic is intriguing, relevant and worthy of their exploration.

This section could also convey your aspirations for students in the course. Students will, of course, be evaluated on their performance on certain assignments and measured against certain "learning outcomes" (more on outcomes below). But you have many other aspirations about the hopes, abilities, curiosity, affections, and virtues that will be enriched by the course. You may want to convey something about the experience that you hope students will have working and learning together. At its best, a syllabus can reinforce the values of pursuing the topic in the context of a liberal arts community of learners, so you may want to make connections between your goals and aspirations and students' broader education, helping them see how your course connects to the planks of Westmont's mission.

Other colleges may look at this part of your syllabus to determine whether a student's credits for the course will transfer to another institution, so some specifics about the topics covered can be helpful.

### **What are the specific learning outcomes of the course and how are they connected to the department's Program Learning Outcomes and the college's Institutional Learning Outcomes?**

As part of an ongoing effort to assess how well our students are learning and how we might make adjustments in our courses and programs, every syllabus should identify some specific **course learning outcomes** (CLOs). The outcomes identify some of the specific knowledge, skills, or abilities students should be able to demonstrate following the successful completion of the course. You can consider attitudinal outcomes, such as civic engagement, diversity, professionalism, and respect for civility in interpersonal relations.

The number and kinds of outcomes per course will vary. Some experts recommend as few as three, and some as many as ten. It is important that you keep the number of learning outcomes manageable for you. ***Since these are the outcomes that you will actually assess with specific tests, assignments, or other forms of evaluation, you should keep the number limited. Remember that outcomes need not capture all your goals and aspirations for your students. You can include broader, less measurable objectives when you answer the question above about aspirations.***

To help students see how your course fits into the mission of your department and the college, include information in this section about the links between your course learning outcomes, the **Program Learning Outcomes** (PLOs) for your department/program, and the **Institutional Learning Outcomes**.

Also indicate what activities in the course will enable you to determine whether students have achieved the course learning outcomes.

Below is brief checklist to guide your development of this section of the syllabus.

- The syllabus has a section titled "Course Learning Outcomes" (for the sake of consistency and clarity, it is important to use the word **outcome** here, rather than such words as *goals* or *objectives* or *standards*.);
- All the outcomes use active verbs to state what students can demonstrate, represent, produce or do (words such as *improve*, *understand*, *know*, *appreciate*, or *learn* belong in the section on goals and aspirations, but **not** here);
- When appropriate, at least some of the outcomes connect with your department's Program Learning Outcomes and the college's Institutional Learning Outcomes;
- The syllabus tells the reader how you will determine whether students are able to do what you want them to do by the end of the course (in other words, how the outcomes will be assessed);

You can find your department's **program learning outcomes** on your department's web page at [http://www.westmont.edu/\\_academics/departments/\[your discipline\]/program-review.html](http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/departments/[your discipline]/program-review.html)

For example:

[http://www.westmont.edu/\\_academics/departments/chemistry/program-review.html](http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/departments/chemistry/program-review.html)

A link to a document with the Institutional Learning Outcomes can be found here:

<https://www.westmont.edu/office-provost/educational-effectiveness/documents>

~~Note: some years ago, Westmont had a document called the Institutional Learning Standards. We have replaced these with the Institutional Learning Outcomes.~~

At the end of this guide are a few sample syllabus excerpts for this section.

### **I have been diagnosed with a disability. What should I do?**

Students who have been diagnosed with a condition that meets the criteria of a disability are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by ODS. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your full participation and the successful completion of this course.

Please email [ods@westmont.edu](mailto:ods@westmont.edu) and see the website for more information  
<http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability/>

### **What are your expectations regarding academic integrity?**

Remind students of the college's policy on academic integrity and plagiarism, and spell out your own policy. You may also want to list resources that would help students avoid plagiarism. At a minimum, include a statement such as the following:

Dishonesty of any kind may result in loss of credit for the work involved and the filing of a report with the Provost's Office. Major or repeated infractions may result in dismissal from the course with a grade of F. Be familiar with the College's academic integrity policy, found at: <https://www.westmont.edu/office-provost/academic-program/academic-integrity-policy>

### **What is the proposed course schedule of topics?**

- Include important and required dates (exams, major assignment due dates, and required attendance for visiting speakers, performances, etc.).
- If appropriate for your course, provide a daily or weekly schedule of topics and associated readings, activities, and assignments.
- Identify what may change as the semester progresses.

### **Are there library resources for this course?**

Voskyl Library has provided this language you may choose to include in your syllabus:

Westmont librarians are available to advise and consult with you on your research assignments. You can drop by the Research Help Desk or schedule an appointment with a librarian assigned to your course. To identify a specific librarian and find subject-specific resources, consult Voskyl Library's [Research Guides](#) or email [askalibrarian@westmont.edu](mailto:askalibrarian@westmont.edu).

### **What are Westmont's emergency procedures?**

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If an emergency occurs during instruction, it is important for you and your students to be familiar with recommended practices. Please review the following webpage

(<https://www.westmont.edu/emergency>), include its link in your syllabi, and take a few minutes at the beginning of each semester to consider together how you could respond within each of your classrooms. Direct any questions or concerns to the Office of Institutional Resilience.

### What are Westmont's expectation regarding honor and respect in the classroom?

You may consider adding this paragraph to your syllabus:

Westmont's Community Life Statement calls us to treat each other according to two commands from Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Further, our Diversity Matters document indicates that as we abide by these commandments, we learn to honor and respect one another. In this class, we will embody these commitments as we interact with one another and with the class material. If you experience or witness something that does not honor these commitments, please talk with the instructor as soon as possible. You may also find it helpful to access the College's policy on [Bias, Harassment, and Discrimination](#).

**Final Thought: Consider the Tone You've Set in Your Syllabus.** Once you have a draft of your syllabus, think about the tone you will set when your new students read your syllabus. Is the syllabus more punitive, or more inspiring? Have you set the tone for obedience or intellectual excitement? Are your expectations clear without being pedantic? Think about whether you prefer the first person plural (inclusive "we" language) or second person singular (familiar "you"). Consider your audience and how your syllabus will be read by prospective students, parents, colleagues, and accrediting agencies.

*These guidelines were compiled from previous Westmont documents, AAC&U guidelines, and policies of other colleges, including University of Utah, Baruch College, LeMoyne College, Cornell Center for Teaching Excellence, and Oberlin College.*

### Sample Syllabus Excerpts: Course Learning Outcomes Sections

From: Communication Studies COM-098: Introduction to Communication Research

COM Program Outcomes →	Disciplinary Knowledge	Biblical & Ethical Principles*	Oral Communication Skills*	Written Communication Skills*
<b>Course Outcomes</b>				
<b>Understand/evaluate 4 research methods</b>	Lecture & readings	Readings & lectures	Class discussions	Exams & article notes
<b>Faith/personal application</b>	Readings & lecture	Readings & lecture	Class discussions	
<b>Conduct original research</b>	Research projects	Implementation of projects		Research write up
<b>Communicate findings well</b>	Lit Review	Presentations/Reports	Poster presentation	Lit Review, flyers,

\* Department PLO and College ILO overlap

From Chemistry CHM-006: General Chemistry II

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

<b>Student Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Instructional Activity</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<i>Apply</i> relevant scientific and mathematical methods to analyze and solve problems effectively	Lecture Laboratory Experiments	Exams Quizzes Problem Sets In-class work Laboratory Assignments
<i>Identify</i> ways in which the scientific approach to knowledge can be used to investigate the physical and living world	Lecture Laboratory Experiments	Problem Sets Exams Laboratory Assignments
<i>Survey</i> the relationships between scientific knowledge and the Christian faith	Lecture Discussion	Reflection Questions Exams

These outcomes are related to the study of General Chemistry, which is a required part of the chemistry major. Your success in this class will contribute to you reaching the outcomes of the program as a whole, which are shown below.