

Preparing a Syllabus

On the Cutting Edge: Preparing for an Academic Career in the Geosciences June 2011

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GOALS for a Syllabus

WHY PUT ENERGY INTO OUR SYLLABUS?

- We can eliminate stress for ourselves and our students by clearly detailing our expectations and course logistics in a syllabus on the first day of class.
- We can design a class and grading system that allows students to take control of their own class performance and feel happier and more engaged in the course.
- We can anticipate possible pitfalls in student-teacher and student-student interactions and plan ahead. This save us all time and sweat.

GETTING STARTED ADVICE

It reduces student anxiety when they have control over their performance

- Set clear expectations
- Make rules/policies only if you plan to enforce them
- Make rules/policies that allow you to be fair and consistent, but also give students a chance when emergencies arise.
- Be sure you can practice what you preach (turning around grades quickly – following your own syllabus – learning student names, etc.
- Ensure there are consequences and rewards for specific behaviors (if they do the reading, they do well on tests; if they cheat on a test, you give them a O.)
- REVIEW different syllabi from the instructors within your department/school to help anticipate potential issues.
- DON'T feel that you have to include everything. Cover your biggest areas of concern. Your syllabus will evolve over time.

GREAT RESOURCES available at SERC website:

<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/syllabus.html>

SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT WANT TO INCLUDE

(Modified from 2009 Workshop)

Logistics

- Name, Course Title, Room, Meeting time
- How best to contact you
- Course prerequisites or advisories
- Required field trips or outside meetings
- Amount of time required for the class
- Add/drop deadlines and exam times
- Testing accommodations
- Topics to be covered, sequence, etc. (including homework deadlines)

Policies

- Grading
- Attendance
- Making up exams and quizzes
- Late homework
- Academic honesty
- Classroom etiquette (during lectures and during exams)
- Participation
- Incompletes
- What expectations students are allowed to have of you (turnaround time, etc.)
- Student responsibility

Resources

- Textbooks (and possible alternatives if cost is an issue)
- Materials on reserve at library
- Website – what’s available and how to access it
- In-class technology (where to buy and expectations of use – such as clickers)
- Campus support centers (like writing labs, math labs, etc.)
- Office hours and study halls
- Library info
- Study and success hints
- Space for names/e-mail address of 2-3 classmates for peer support

SYLLABUS TONE

(Modified from 2009 Workshop)

The MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

You decide what message you want to send:

- Firm
- Approachable
- Caring/understanding of real life balance
- Humorous
- No nonsense
- Disciplined
- Realistic
- Responsible

Add images or cartoons to document to demonstrate above?

MORE ADVICE

(Modified from 2009 Workshop)

- Review carefully with entire class (but be aware that folks who are not there won’t read it, and folks who are there won’t remember)
- Make it clear that you can change the syllabus at any time (but be careful, because this will cause anxiety amongst your students – so make sure the benefit outweighs the cost and then advertise it highly)
- Possibly include syllabus-related questions on the exam
- Be as specific as possible
- Possibly include Course Goals, 3-5 learning objectives, relevance and importance of material

What follows are examples from my courses, which we’ll use as samples for discussion during the presentation.

GEOL 10: Introduction to Geology – FALL 2011

Location: Science 45 **Credits:** 3

Text: *Geology*, 2007, 4th Edition (3rd edition also OKAY) (*Chernicoff, Whitney*)

NOTE: To achieve a passing grade in this class, it is expected that the average student will have to spend 6 hours per week on homework. Be sure you have that amount of time in your schedule. We recommend you devote 2 hours, 3 days a week, to reading and reviewing and practicing the material from this class!

Wed 6:30-9:30 pm	Topics to cover this week
Aug. 17	Introduction to class Overview of Earth History and Plate Tectonics
Aug. 24	QUIZ: Chapter 1 Vocabulary Chapter 1: A First Look at Planet Earth – Origins, Systems, and Plate Tectonics
Aug. 31	QUIZ: Chapter 1 Review – Chapters 12/13 Vocabulary Chapter 12: Plate Tectonics and the Formation of Earth's Oceans Chapter 13: Plate Tectonics and the Formation of Earth's Continents
Sept. 2 LAST DAY TO ADD	
Sept. 7	QUIZ: Chapters 12/13 Review – Chapter 9 Vocabulary Chapter 9: Earth Structures – Folds, Faults, Fabrics
Sept. 8 LAST DAY TO DROP	
Sept. 14	QUIZ: Chapter 9 Review – Chapter 10 Vocabulary Chapter 10: Earthquakes
Sept. 21	QUIZ: Chapters 10 Review – Chapter 11 Vocabulary Chapter 11: Earth's Interior and Chapter 12: Plate Tectonics and the Formation of Earth's Oceans – <i>Magnetism</i> (p. 404-5) + Exam Review/Catch up
Sept. 28	Exam I (Covers chapters 1, 9-13) Chapter 2: Minerals (Preview)
Oct. 5	QUIZ: Chapter 2: Vocabulary Chapter 2: Minerals
Oct. 12	QUIZ: Chapter 2 Review – Chapter 3 Vocabulary Chapter 3: Igneous Rocks and Processes
Oct. 19	QUIZ: Chapter 3 Review – Chapters 5/6 Vocabulary Chapter 5 Weathering: Breakdown of Rocks (<i>up to Soils/ Formation</i>) Chapter 6: Sedimentary Processes, Environments, and rocks
Oct. 26	QUIZ: Chapters 5/6 Review – Chapter 7 Vocabulary Chapter 7: Metamorphic Rocks (Preview)
Nov. 2	QUIZ: Chapter 7 Review – Chapter 4 Vocabulary Chapter 4: Volcanoes and Volcanism
Nov. 9	Exam II (Covers chapters 2-7) Chapter 8: Telling Time Geologically (Preview)
Nov. 16	QUIZ: Chapter 8 Vocabulary Chapter 8: Telling Time Geologically
Nov. 17 LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW	
Nov. 23	QUIZ: Chapter 8 Review – Chapter 19 Vocabulary Chapter 19: Shores and Coastal Processes
Nov. 23 (evening classes only), 24, 25 HOLIDAY	
Nov. 30	QUIZ: Chapter 19 Review – Chapters 17, 14 Vocabulary Chapter 17: Glaciers and Ice Ages Chapter 14: Mass Movement
Dec. 7	QUIZ: Chapters 17/14 Review – Chapter 15 Vocabulary Chapter 15: Streams and Flood and EXAM Review/Catch up
Dec. 14	Exam III

LECTURE CLASSES

Instructor: Katelyn Wiese, katelyn.wiese@mail.ccsf.edu, <http://fog.ccsf.edu/kwiese>
Office hours: See board/website for office hours. <http://www.ccsf.edu/Earth>
Grading scale: A=90-100%; B=80-89%; C=70-79%; D=60-69%; F=<60%.
Grading: Your grade is equally divided between each exam and the total for all your weekly quizzes. For example, if there are 3 exams in the class, each is worth 25%, with the remaining 25% coming from your quizzes. If there are 4 exams, each is worth 20%.

Time required (units) – For each lecture unit, expect to put in 1 hour in lecture and 2 hours in homework for an average grade of a C. For example, a 3-unit lecture class requires 3 hours in class and 6 hours homework weekly for a C average. Each student will need to put in more or less time, depending on his or her background and study techniques. Study session schedule at <http://www.ccsf.edu/Earth>

Class prerequisites – There are no official prerequisites. However, without the following basic skills, you will need extra help and time in this class: comprehensive reading, writing, algebra, basic geometry, and basic chemistry. If you are weak in these areas or have any questions at any time, come to office hours, see the tutor, attend study sessions, make an appointment, or e-mail me. We're here to help!

Weekly HW – #1: Review previous week's chapter questions (you will be quizzed). Ensure expertise by writing out the answers in your own words. Seek help from me or tutors (or attend a study session) for material that still hasn't clicked or just to help review. #2: Read assigned new chapters. Learn vocabulary words (you will be quizzed). Review new chapter questions and start writing out answers to as many as you can before class, so that you can get the most out of the classroom discussion. #3: Two optional, creative projects. (See additional handout for more information).

Homework is checked through weekly quizzes.

Attendance – Your grade does NOT include attendance. I don't take typical attendance. However, your grade WILL drop with each class you miss, simply due to your missing important information. If you are absent for more than three classes (determined by quiz scores) or miss an exam (without immediately making contact to discuss your options), you WILL be dropped. I will not keep students enrolled just for financial aid or student visa status – if you want to stay enrolled, keep attending and contributing. **You must take exams and quizzes on scheduled days.** Exceptions are made only for extenuating circumstances and only when alternate arrangements have been made prior to the exam/quiz or as soon as possible after.

Cheating – The highest level of integrity is required for all quizzes and exams. Anyone found cheating will receive a zero on the exam or quiz and face disciplinary action at the college.

Handouts – All class handouts are available through the bookstore or online at: <http://fog.ccsf.edu/kwiese> ... click on Class Handouts & Websites). Please be considerate to those students who have not missed class by not using class time to get caught up. Catch up quickly on your own and/or with tutors (attend study sessions) or you will fall even further behind. I HIGHLY recommend that you **keep all materials in one notebook for easy reference.**

Loaner books – See me if, at any time, you need a temporary loaner book (NOT class text, but similar).

Seeking Help – If you have questions, come to office hours, see the tutor, attend study sessions, make an appointment, or e-mail me. It's your responsibility to seek needed help. We're here if you're ready!

Cancelled classes – If class is cancelled, for any reason, keep up with homework assigned on syllabus.

Cell phones/pagers – Please turn all electronic devices off before coming to class.

Sleeping in class – I assume your bed is more comfortable than the classroom. Please stay at home if you're too tired to stay awake in class; otherwise you drain my energy, and your fellow students suffer.

Leaving class – When arriving late to class or leaving class while it is in session, please be as nondisruptive as possible. There is no need to ask permission or give excuses. You're all adults, so I assume you're making the best choices for yourself. **In S-45, please use the back door only!**

Eating and drinking – **No gum chewing in the room at all.** No food or spillable drink containers on the tables or desks during class. Note: Especially in late-night classes and labs, you will get hungry. Feel free to bring food, but eat it only outside the classroom or by the display cases.

Getting the best grade – Follow this plan to get the highest grade possible:

1. Teach yourself BEFORE we go over the material in class. Read each chapter thoroughly. Learn the key words and compose and write answers to as many of the questions on the chapter handout as you can on your own. (Leave space next to each question, so you can take notes on it during class.)
2. Use class to deepen your understanding. Ask questions, take notes on the correct answers to the questions, and participate in in-class discussions and activities. Note: You will not have time during class to write verbatim what you hear in lecture. If you need such detail, bring a tape recorder.
3. Review material after class. Review and study question handout (and correct answers) at the end of each week. If you are missing any answers or don't feel confident about some of your answers, compare with other students in the class and/or check the answers with me or the tutors.

I HIGHLY recommend that you keep all class materials in one notebook for easy reference.

Chapter Questions Handout – For each chapter, one week before we cover the material in class, you will receive a list of questions, from which all future exam questions on that chapter will come. BEFORE attending class each week, carefully and thoroughly read the assigned chapters and review the chapter questions. The more you read and study the material before class, the more you will get out of class, and the better you will do on exams. All classroom activities assume that you have taught yourself all you can on your own first and that you have a basic understanding of the material. If you do not prepare well enough, you may have difficulty following and participating in classroom discussion. If at the end of the week you still have questions or doubts on any of the topics, seek help ASAP. You will be quizzed on these questions in the weekly quizzes (see below for more information).

Quizzes – At the start of the semester, you get a list of vocabulary words for each chapter that we cover. Prior to each week's class, as you read the new chapter, learn the vocabulary and review the questions we will be covering – try to learn as much as you can on your own. Also every week, review the material we covered the week before (answers to the previous week's chapter question sheet). The first class period each week begins with a preview and review quiz that takes the first 10 minutes of class. **NOTE: If you show up late, no guarantees you can still take the quiz!** $\frac{1}{2}$ of the quiz content covers vocabulary for new material (matching); the other $\frac{1}{2}$ covers chapter questions from the previous week (old material, short-answer). (Note: there will be a few extra-credit questions on the quiz from the new chapter – any starred question from the chapter question sheet – asked in short answer format.) You may start quizzes up to 10 minutes early; you cannot continue quizzes after the allotted time. If you cannot attend class for legitimate reasons, you may make up the quiz ahead of time. (You cannot take quizzes after the fact, only on time or before!). If you are late to class, you miss the quiz. To accommodate emergencies, I drop your two lowest quiz grades. If you have difficulties making quizzes or are not doing well on quizzes, please see me ASAP to discuss.

Quizzes occur weekly on the first day the class meets.

Pass Sheets and Exams – Prior to each exam, you will receive a Pass Sheet – with ~70% of the questions that will be on the exam. As long as you can answer these questions correctly on the exam, you will get the lowest C. All additional exam questions that you answer correctly will help you to raise your grade from a C to a B (80-89) or A (90+). **YOU MUST BRING THIS COMPLETED SHEET WITH YOU TO TAKE THE EXAM – NO SHEET – NO EXAM.** If the sheet is missing any answers – any blanks – you will not be able to take the exam. (The pass sheet is your ticket, but you cannot use it ON the exam.)

Exams are closed notes, closed book. Each exam takes between 45 to 90 minutes to complete and consists of multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay questions that cover topics that have appeared on chapter question handouts. **NO DICTIONARIES OR ELECTRONIC DEVICES ALLOWED DURING EXAMS OR QUIZZES (CALCULATORS OK IF NECESSARY, BUT UNPROGRAMMABLE ONES ONLY).** Please ask me during the exam if you don't understand a question. You will need to bring your own pencil and eraser. Regular exams are NOT comprehensive; however, keep past pass sheets because those questions will appear again on an optional comprehensive final that you can choose to take at the end of the semester (in addition to the normal exam). **Final note: we do NOT go over pass sheets in class – these are for you to complete on your own, with other students, with tutors, or in study sessions.**

Optional Comprehensive Exam – This exam option is available only to those who had one poor or missed exam that would make them fail the class. You may take an optional comprehensive exam during finals week (in addition to the regular exam) to replace the lowest of your exam scores (not including normal final) or your combined quiz scores. All scores count. So don't take it unless you are prepared. To take this exam, you must have first met with the instructor, received permission, and scheduled exam.