Chapter Zero:
What Students REALLY Need on Day One

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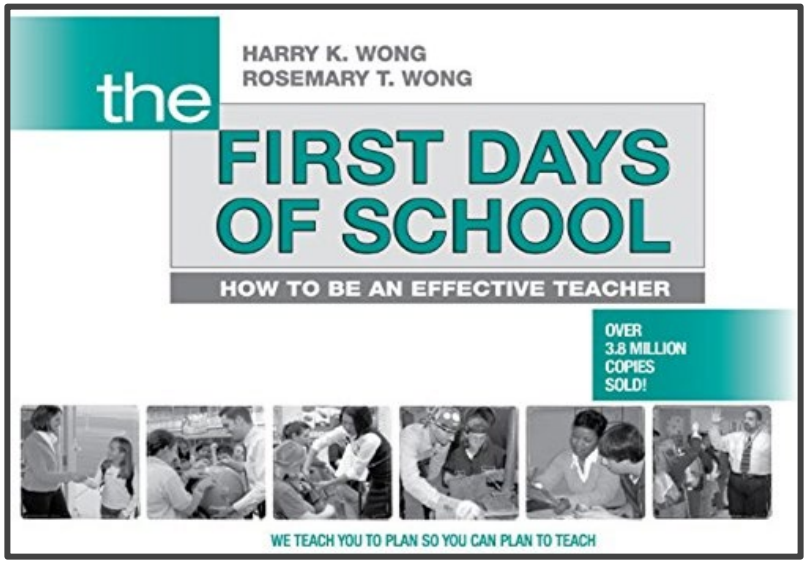
“The First Days of School”

- At the elementary and secondary levels, management is key; at the post-secondary level, management is a lesser “concern”
- Both environments require clear expectations
- One major difference: students in college have freedom of choice and autonomy

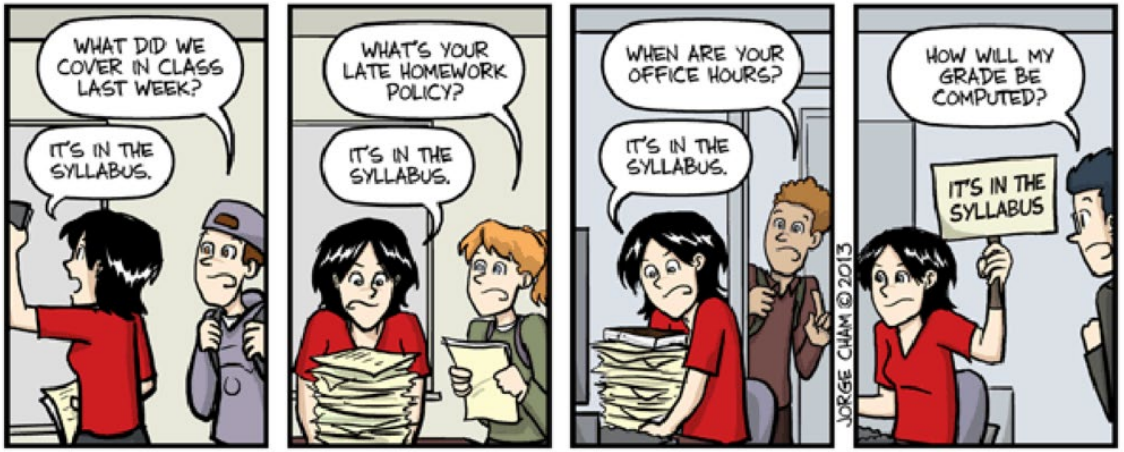


The Syllabus

- Write down the following on a piece of paper, notebook, or on your device:
  - **How many pages is your syllabus?**
  - **In your opinion, what do you believe are the *three* most important parts of the syllabus?**
  - **How do you share your syllabus with students?**

The Syllabus

What's a Syllabus? - YouTube



ChatGPT's Reason for a Syllabus

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What is the purpose of a syllabus

A syllabus is a document that outlines the content, goals, and expectations of a course. Its purpose is to provide students with a clear understanding of what will be covered in the course, the course requirements, grading policies, and the instructor's expectations. It serves as a roadmap for the course and helps students to stay on track and focused throughout the semester. The syllabus also provides important information about the instructor, including office hours, contact information, and any specific policies or procedures that students should be aware of. Additionally, the syllabus may include information about the course schedule, including important dates and deadlines, as well as any required readings or assignments. Overall, the purpose of a syllabus is to provide students with a comprehensive overview of the course and to help them succeed academically.

Include the Following When Writing a Syllabus:

- “Universal syllabus” (institutionally mandated)
- Basic information (course title, meeting times, etc)
- Instructor’s contact information and office hour availability
- Materials (textbook, laptop, calculator, etc)
- Breakdown of how assignments are weighted and scored

Include the Following When Writing a Syllabus:

- Grading policies
- Attendance policies
- Course outline (by topic)
- Course objectives
- Course schedule (daily or weekly)
- “Amendment clause”

Food for Thought About The Syllabus

- Should I read/thoroughly review the syllabus to the class on the first day **OR** should I give the students a "syllabus quiz" to make sure they read it on their own time?
- Should I explain in detail my policies and procedures **OR** give brief explanations and "get to the point"?
- Should I plan out a full sequence of lessons so students know exactly what is going to be learned each day **OR** provide dates the units cover and the date of the anticipated end-of-unit assessment?

Food for Thought About The Syllabus

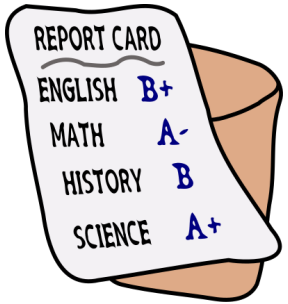
- Should I include information regarding extra credit **OR** decide on this as the semester progresses?
- Should my policy for makeup work and extensions be flexible on a case-by-case basis **OR** firm?
- Should I grade attendance/apply a rule that students must show up, **OR** provide flexibility so students may make their own decisions with whatever natural consequences follow?

Food for Thought About The Syllabus

- Should I have set office hours or make them “by appointment”?
- Should I encourage students to access tutoring or campus resources first before seeking out my help as an instructor?
- Should I use a point system or a percentage system for grading?
- *Other ideas welcome (share at the end!)*

“Will I Pass This Class?”

- Share the add/drop/withdraw deadlines with students
- Explain–and re-explain–the grading policies
- Show how weighted grades work with an example
- Use a spreadsheet to let students play the “what if game”
- Have an assessment (any size) before the drop deadline so students can know what to expect
- Give a pre-assessment if your class requires prerequisite knowledge



Do All Students Really Know…?

- How to take effective notes
- How to read a textbook “properly”
- How to research a topic for a semester project
- How to paraphrase, not plagiarize
- How to show sufficient work
- How to neatly write out a solution

Do All Students Really Know…?

- How to annotate
- How to ask for help/advocate for themselves
- How to manage their time
- How to study efficiently
- How to bounce back after a setback (low grade, etc)
- How to balance commitments with their mental health and well -being

“It Takes a Village”

- Share with students your office hour availability
- Provide options for appointments (in -person, Zoom, etc)
- Give tutoring center information (if applicable to your campus)

- Encourage students to study with one another or with friends, family, etc
- Invite students to reach out with questions via email or to ask about concepts in class
- Offer trusted websites or media that could assist in learning

What I Have Done…and Learned

- My syllabus is approximately 11 pages

- I do not have a syllabus quiz nor do I read it in its entirety
- I post my syllabus, but tell students announcements will be provided if changes are made

- I create a course outline with “buffer periods” and “work time” to account for potential reteaching, sick days, catch-up days, etc

What I Have Done…and Learned

- I save a “template” with highlighted sections that may change each semester (course number, meeting times, etc)
- I share “words of wisdom” which are strategies I feel might help a student be successful in the course
- I have flexible deadlines but let students know that trying to work on past material while learning new material can be challenging (they usually figure this out themselves!)
- I use a diagnostic assessment to get a baseline for their math ability level, then explain their score in a personal email and offer any assistance I can provide

Co-requisite Models for Math Courses

- Day 1 (Start of week 1):

  Me:

  "This is the material you will review to get ready for College Algebra."

  Students:

  "Hmm. I don't remember a lot of this."

  "It has been 10 years since I have taken a math class."

Co-requisite Models for Math Courses

- Day 12 (End of week 3):

  Me:

  "Now you ought to be ready for College Algebra."

  Students:

  "Alright, I think I can do this!"

  "This has been somewhat challenging. I w
  if I should stay in this class…"

Co-requisite Models for Math Courses

- Day 13 (Start of week 4):

Me:

"Here we are in College Algebra."

Students:

"Let's do this!"

"Sorry, professor. I have to withdraw from your class."

"I need to drop back down into pre-algebra, but I hope to see you again next semester!"

An Intriguing Idea…

What if students in your class co -created the course syllabus?

What Works for You?

Please share some ideas about what your first day looks like and what you feel is best to provide students so they are most successful!

I will gladly give my feedback!

Q & A!

*If you would like to connect further, please reach out via email:

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“When Will I Ever Use This?!?!”