Syllabus Planning: 10 Questions
We thank Dr. Greg Reihman (Lehigh University) for allowing us to use this excellent resource. We have adapted it to reflect UC San Diego resources.

The following ten questions frame some of the main issues to consider when writing or revising a syllabus. What I present here is by no means meant to be exhaustive; rather, I offer some thoughts and suggestions that may help facilitate your own thinking or rethinking about how to design a course and write a syllabus. As ever, I am available to meet with anyone wishing to discuss these topics in greater detail.

You may also find this Syllabus Template to be a helpful.

1. What do you want your students to learn?

> Comment: We often prepare a syllabus by considering logistical questions from our own perspective rather than inquire into what we really want our students to be able to do as a result of having taken our course. Sometimes we build a whole course around readings, concepts, or canons, without much thought about the actual students who will be in the course. It is helpful to ask ourselves early (and often) what we expect our students to have gained when the semester is over. Complete this sentence: "I want my students to be able to _____." Whatever answer you give will shape the other choices you make for our courses

2. Do your course objectives capture your answer to Question #1?

> Comment: At the heart of a strong syllabus is a clear statement of what students will learn by taking the course. In writing our objectives, the best practice is to use student-centered language; to list only a small number of objectives (about 5); and to include skills or knowledge that you actually plan to teach and measure when designing assignments and assessments. It is good to use language such as "Upon completing this course students will be able to..." and then list your goals with strong, active verbs that capture the type of thinking you want students to do, e.g., analyze, design, evaluate, critique, justify, appraise, assess, interpret, compose.

3. Do your assignments and tests teach and measure the things that matter most to you?

> Comment: Distracted by secondary concerns or goals, we often end up asking students to do things that miss the main point of our classes or that fail to accurately represent the kind of thinking we most want them to gain. Having good objectives is insufficient if we do not design assignments that actually teach students how to meet the objectives. The result is that students' time may not be well spent when doing the assignments and our time may not be well spent when grading them. Even before choosing what content students will work with, it is good to have a firm idea of what sorts of things you will want students to do with the information they acquire.

4. How can you best use the class time you have?

Comment: Some faculty are improving their teaching by rethinking how they use class time. In some cases the scheduled 'lecture' hour may be better spent starting students on a project based on content that they were exposed to the night before (through a carefully structured reading assignment) and have already begun discussing (through an online discussion board). If you have such a design in mind, be sure to set up the syllabus so that students are adequately prepared for approaching your class in this way.

5. Have you established high expectations?

Comment: Students rise to the level we set for them. Setting high expectations doesn't mean assigning an unreasonable amount of work; rather, it means giving clear guidelines about the amount, nature, and quality of the work you will demand of your students. In communicating expectations, strive to inspire rather than command.

6. Have you used all the resources at your disposal?

Comment: Although it takes time to update a syllabus when a new text is used, it is crucial that we all stay current with what resources are available, rather than defaulting to what we're used to.
You may also want to consider incorporating web resources or directly linking to electronic versions of journal articles.
Consult with your librarian; find your librarian:
http://libraries.ucsd.edu/contacts/subject-specialists.html
Do you know about these resources: http://libraries.ucsd.edu/faculty/index.html
Did you know?: http://libraries.ucsd.edu/spaces/academic-staff-consults.html

There are many useful eLearning resources tucked away inside the TED site. The Discussion Forum can help students prepare for, or continue, in-class discussion. Course materials can be easily organized and quickly disseminated as Files or in Folders. The Assignments, Turnitin, and Blog tools can make it easier for you to collect and assess written work. Quizzes can simplify the collection and grading of tests. Feel free to consult your Instructional Technology Consultant for guidance.

7. Have you given students a road map for the course?

Comment: The 'Schedule' part of the syllabus should include all assignments, exams, and, ideally, some comment about what students should be prepared to do on each day of the course. It is also helpful to think of the schedule as giving students the long view of the course so that they know where they're headed and why. Finally, it's a good idea to build in some flexibility so that you can adapt to your students' needs, pace of learning, and areas of interest, once you have met them.

8. Is your syllabus well organized and readable?
Comment: Rarely will a student read a syllabus all at one sitting, so it is helpful to design it in a way that makes it easy to find crucial information. Be as brief and as clear as possible.

9. Have you built in ways of getting feedback from students on how the course is going?

Comment: It is a good idea to plan from the start how you will assess the course as a whole, both at the end and while in progress. Perhaps some particular types of assignments or assessments will help you gauge student learning at a crucial part of the course.
For example, you can improve a lecture or discussion if you ask students in advance to take a brief quiz or compose a paragraph (in class or online) so you know what material they're struggling with. Build these assignments into the syllabus to establish their importance.
TED has a "Feedback" feature that can simplify the process of collecting student views on how the course is going. Also, figure out what *you* want to learn as a result of teaching this class (about the subject or about your teaching) and build in appropriate assessment mechanisms that will allow you to do so.

10. Is your syllabus written in the tone you wish to convey?

Comment: Many of us, sometimes for good reason, are concerned about students who might try to game our course and so we write syllabi that read like legal documents with complex codes of rewards and punishments. It is reasonable to be on guard against such students and it is wise to incorporate policies that prevent students from sneaking through loopholes; however, your course will likely go better if you write more to inspire your ideal students rather than to tame the ones you fear. The best syllabi, like the best teachers, convey respect, trust, and enthusiasm.