

5 Activities to Encourage Students to Engage with the Syllabus

Prompting your students to engage with your syllabus in a meaningful way helps them understand and retain the information from your syllabus better and can serve multiple purposes: it introduces the students to the course, helps them get to know you and one another better, and gives them the opportunity to practice locating and interpreting information on the syllabus. Here are a few activities to get students actively engaged in reading your syllabus:

1. Ask students to read the syllabus independently, then write and/or discuss **how this course compares to others they have taken in the discipline and what they think their anticipated strengths and challenges might be in the course.** This activity works particularly well in courses that students are nervous about because it gives them a chance to voice their fears and it gives you a chance to discuss the how you will help prepare them to succeed in the course.
2. Assign the **syllabus as pre-reading** and on the first day of class, ask the students to compose **short and long-term academic goals.** Periodically throughout the semester, ask students to compare their progress against their goals and make adjustments as necessary. At the end of the semester, use the plans to show students how far they have come. This activity helps build accountability and reinforce the purpose of the course.
3. **Syllabus quiz or “scavenger hunt”:** Give students a short quiz on the important content in the syllabus. Make it “open book” so they can practice locating information on the syllabus. Incentivize participation with a low quantity of points. You can gamify this strategy by allowing them to work in teams, timing it, and giving the winning team a prize. If you gamify, you can call it a scavenger hunt instead of a quiz.
4. **Syllabus icebreaker:** You can roll exploring the syllabus into an icebreaker activity. For example, you can assign students to become an expert at one portion of the syllabus, then ask them to move through the room, introducing themselves to one another and learning about the syllabus from their classmates. Afterwards, give prizes to whoever remembers the most about the syllabus and the most names of classmates.
5. **Get your students involved in creating parts of your syllabus.** You can allocate certain sections (like rules of conduct) to co-create together on the first day of class or you can distribute the syllabus and ask students to come to class in a week or two having prepared a well-reasoned argument to revise sections of the syllabus. If you present them with the opportunity to negotiate the syllabus, you must be willing to make reasonable changes based on their proposals. This activity creates student buy-in.