

FIVE ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR SYLLABUS

Prompting your students to engage with your syllabus in a meaningful way helps them understand and retain the information in your syllabus better and can serve multiple purposes: It introduces students to the course, helps them get to know you and each other, 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 your syllabus independently and then write and/or discuss **how your 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 gives you a chance to discuss how you will help prepare them to succeed.
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 adjust 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 reinforces 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 that they can practice locating information in the syllabus. Incentivize participation with a low-stakes number of points. You can gamify this strategy by allowing students to work in teams, timing the activity, and giving the fastest team a prize or a point bonus. If you gamify, 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 each student to become an expert on one portion of the syllabus, then ask them all to move around the room, introducing themselves to one another and learning about the syllabus from their classmates. Afterward, give prizes to the students or teams who remember 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 later having prepared a well-reasoned argument to revise a portion of the syllabus. If you present them with an opportunity to negotiate the syllabus, you must be willing to make reasonable changes based on their proposals. This activity creates student buy-in.