

EFFECTIVE TEACHER SERIES
WORKSHOP
PREPARING A SYLLABUS

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October 20, 2004

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WHAT IS A SYLLABUS?

- A compilation of all information and lecture material related to a course or section of a course.
- A written guide for the lectures.
- A record and study tool for the student after the lectures.
- A reference for “after the course” (To prepare for the USMLE, or to check information later in time).

REMEMBER!

NO MATTER HOW BRILLIANT OR ENTERTAINING YOUR LECTURE IS, IF IT DOES NOT FOLLOW THE SYLLABUS, THEY WILL HATE IT!

WHAT IS NOT A SYLLABUS?

- A compiled hodge-podge of different lecture outlines with no “thread”, no directions regarding expectations, lack of a uniform format, etc.
- A textbook, *i.e.* a verbatim written version of your lecture.
- A short outline which lacks key information.
- **IF YOU ARE GOING TO DO THESE THINGS, ASSIGN A GOOD TEXTBOOK INSTEAD!**

THE HOLY GRAIL OF A SYLLABUS

1. THE LECTURE AND THE SYLLABUS SHOULD BE ALIGNED SO THAT STUDENTS CAN FOLLOW WITHOUT PAGE- FLIPPING!
2. THE SYLLABUS SHOULD INCLUDE ALL TABLES OR FIGURES SHOWN IN THE LECTURE. STUDY TABLES ARE ALSO USEFUL EVEN IF YOU DON'T COVER THEM IN CLASS. JUST TELL THEM.
3. THE SYLLABUS SHOULD INDICATE, WHENEVER POSSIBLE, WHETHER THE MATERIAL IS “ FYI” VS EXPECTED (WILL BE TESTED).

COMPONENTS OF A SYLLABUS

GENERAL

It is the job of the course director to weave the components together into a user-friendly document.

SPECIFIC

- 1. An overview of the course, the format, the exam, what is expected of the students, the lecturers and contact information.**
- 2. The Lecture Schedule and Table of Contents.**
- 3. The lecture outlines in the order given.**
- 4. Summary tables or overview tables compiled at the end of each lecture or at the end of the syllabus.**
- 5. Glossary of all specialized terms.**
- 6. Practice questions or an old exam or two.**
- 7. USMLE review**
- 8. Index**

COMPONENTS OF EACH LECTURE **WITHIN A SYLLABUS**

- **General**
 - a. This may vary depending upon the course.**
 - b. All the written material should be in the same format, even if given by different lecturers. The lectures should be in some logical order.**
 - c. The course director should make sure that the syllabus makes sense and is presented in a uniform format.**

Specific lecture outline contents:

- a. Name of lecture/date/lecturer/contact info., etc.
- b. Objectives (both narrow and broad)
- c. Lecture content in outline form with some description of each item.
- d. All Tables and Figures presented in the lecture with extensive legends so that they “stand alone” after the lecture.
- e. Summary/take home message.
- f. Questions or issues to think about. (optional)
- g. Articles, reprints, summary diagrams for studying. (optional)
- h. Practice questions (optional)

FIGURES AND TABLES

- Keep them as simple and “bottom line” as possible. Use the largest font possible. You should try to redo book diagrams to make them easier to understand and project in POWERPoint.
- Get copyright permission or revise/make your own version.
- If they are large/complex, use animated PowerPoint presentations to guide them through the components of the figure.
- Leave writing space under, above or on the side of the Fig/Table for them to take notes.
- When possible, tell them what you expect them to “hard wire” vs use for reference material only.

TEXT

- **This will vary from lecturer to lecturer and course to course.**
- **It is best to give them something which they can follow in class and yet refer to after the lecture. So, not too much chapter-like detail but not too brief. Seek guidance from your course director.**
- **The Figure and Table legends are a good place to put details to study after class. This will not detract from the flow of the lecture, and keep the length down.**
- **Clone something that works (don't reinvent the wheel).**

THE JOB OF THE COURSE DIRECTOR

- **Combine all the components of the course into a document that accurately depicts what the course will convey, including what they can expect from you and *vice versa*.**
- **Provide all lecturers with a lecture outline template . If they don't follow it, send it back to them.**
- **Do all editing, spellchecking, etc. to make it understandable, uniform, and accurate.**

- **Make sure the syllabus and lectures go hand in hand, that the terminology is covered, that there are no contradictions, and that the exams focus on the objectives and are covered in class.**
- **Deal with all “housekeeping items”.**
- **Make your expectations of the lecturers, small group leaders, students, etc. very clear.**
- **Provide feedback and suggestions after the course. Also, note what should be revised for next year.**

THE JOB OF THE LECTURER

- **Decide well in advance what you should cover. Consult others if you are new at this or are not sure.**
- **When possible, coordinate your material with what comes before and after you. Ask to see these outlines. Attend these lectures if possible.**
- **Think hard about your objectives and work through them with help, if necessary.**
- **Include all your graphics, legends, glossary material, exam questions, etc. as requested by the course director and provide them on time.**

- **Follow your syllabus even if you change your mind between handing it in and writing the lecture itself. Do NOT add material or change the order until next year.**
- **Practice if you are new at this.**
- **Seek feedback and take it seriously**
- **Confine your lecture to 50 min...no longer!!**

COMMON MISTAKES MADE BY THE COURSE DIRECTOR

- **Doing a cut and paste job rather than writing a uniform syllabus.**
- **Leaving out components/expectations.**
- **Not working closely with your lecturers and small group leaders to assure uniformity and clarity.**
- **Not proofing, reworking the exam questions, or compiling a good glossary.**
- **Starting too late so chaos ensues.**
- **NOT CARING!**

COMMON MISTAKES MADE BY THE LECTURERS

- **Just ... “GET IT OVER WITH”**
- **Not weeding material down to a reasonable amount. WE GIVE THEM TOO MUCH!! LESS IS MORE.**
- **Not aligning the syllabus and lecture material.**
- **Giving them Tables/Figures which are too complicated and/or not explained in the syllabus.**
- **Not proofing carefully or correcting errors in the syllabus and lecture in a timely fashion.**

- **Not putting your lecture in context.**
- **Not focusing on important points for exam questions. (Get your questions reviewed)**
- **Not providing sample questions.**
- **Being remote, combative, or confrontational.**
- **Not taking advice from the students and course director.**
- **Not noting changes for next year.**

GLOBAL ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT

- **More review lectures and Tables/Figures.**
- **More sample exam questions and exams.**
- **More entertainment and different ways to convey material (Blackboard vs PowerPoint). Variety is good.**
- **More interactions with the students in the form of Q and A sessions, exam discussion, content clarification, etc.**

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

- You will never get this exactly right. It is an evolving process. Learn from experience and take advice. Get better each year.
- Put energy into this but do not torture yourself if it is not perfect.
- Care, communicate and console.
- Course directors and lecturers should work together.
- Listen to your students! Their success is your success.