



Syllabus Tone, Language, and Accessibility

Research suggests that the tone of the syllabus communicates an instructor's teaching philosophy and how the instructor communicates with students ([Boysen et al, 2015](#)). Additionally, the tone of the syllabus evokes perceptions of the instructor being warm, approachable, and motivating for learners ([Harnish & Bridges, 2011](#); [Wheeler, 2019](#)).

Accessible Format

To create a learner-centered syllabus accessible to students with diverse needs and accommodations, instructors must attend to the syllabus formatting.

1. Consider the needs of students who have visual disabilities.
 - a. Avoid relying on colors as the only marker of important information
 - b. Use formatting/headings for people using screen readers
 - c. Use alt-text for images
2. Use resources for accessible syllabi.
 - a. Download the [accessible syllabus template](#) and adjust it for your course
 - b. Use [accessibility checker](#) tool in Microsoft Office products and [Anthology Ally](#) in Canvas courses.

Tone and Language

Using a warm tone and language in syllabi positively impacts students' perception of the course and the instructor ([Denton & Veloso, 2018](#); [Gurung & Galardi, 2022](#)). Below are suggestions and examples of using a warm tone and language in syllabi (Adapted from [Chandar et al., 2023](#); [Denton & Veloso, 2018](#)).

1. Invite students to contact you and provide multiple ways to communicate.
 - a. "I welcome you to contact me outside of class and student hours. You may email me and call my office to schedule an appointment."
2. Use welcoming statements of self- and community care
 - a. "We all feel stressed sometimes. Even though it's normal, it can be really tough and too much stress or anxiety can get in the way of your learning. Please reach out to campus resources if you are struggling and in need of help."
3. Use 1st person language to personalize/share information about self
 - a. Provide your pronouns and invite students to share theirs
 - b. "My goal is to connect with each of you so that we can work together to help you accomplish your learning goals."
4. Use growth-mindset language
 - a. "By the end of this course, I am both confident and hopeful that you will be able to:..."
5. Use bold, underlines, CAPS to emphasize positive statements
 - a. "Your ability to learn and maintain your mental health are THE MOST IMPORTANT things"



- b. Avoid making the course policies all caps: “NO WAIVERS WILL BE GRANTED,” instead, you can state: “Since no waivers will be granted, I ask you to make sure that you have completed all the prerequisites for the course.”
6. Indicate flexibility where possible
- a. “We all need some flexibility because we all learn differently, and we all have lives outside of the classroom. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning, please let me know as soon as possible. Together, we can do our best to find strategies to meet your needs and the requirements of the course.”

Inclusion of Statements

The University Faculty Senate [Syllabus Policy 43-00](#) requires including statements about academic integrity, student disability, educational equity/report bias, and counseling and psychological services in every syllabus. In addition, you can review the [syllabus checklist](#) for required and recommended items.

Adding a diversity and inclusion statement can signal to learners that instructors are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. For more examples, please see the links below.

[Diversity & Inclusion Syllabus Statements](#), Brown Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning
[Diversity Statement on a Syllabus](#), Eberly Center Carnegie Mellon University

References

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