

HOW TO DECODE A CLASS SYLLABUS

At the beginning of every term, the class syllabus makes its appearance. Each syllabus outlines the need-to-know information about the class as deemed by the instructor. But do you know how to decode it? Below are some tips to help you navigate your class syllabus and get the most information out of it.

CLASS TOPIC

You know the class title, but do you know the topics that will be covered? Scan the syllabus for a section that addresses the key topics. If not, look at the course calendar to discover the reading assignments. This will tell you what you can expect to learn in the class. If this class is not required for your major, consider if these topics will help you meet your career goals or if you might benefit from transferring into a different class for the term.

CLASS EXPECTATIONS & WORKLOAD

Each professor has different expectations about your preparation for classes and the amount of time spent on class assignments. You can use the syllabus to determine if you have the time to commit to doing well in the class. Do you need to read before each class? How often are assignments due? How much time will you need to dedicate to this class each week?

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS & DEADLINES

At the core of the syllabus is the grade breakdown. This will show you the graded assignments and how much each will count towards your final grade. Review to make sure you understand how you will be graded and if you feel comfortable with your ability to successfully complete the course. It is also helpful to look at the deadlines for each of the major graded assignments to ensure that none of them sneak up on you later in the term.

PROFESSOR AVAILABILITY

An important part of the syllabus that students often miss is the professor's availability. Professors often have office hours regularly to allow students to drop by with questions. Also, they will list the best way to get in contact with them and may include special instructions, such as a special email subject line to ensure your email gets noticed. Look for this section in the syllabus and take note now so that when you have a question, you already know how to best contact the professor.