

Linguistics Tutorial Workshop

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Goal: To address overarching questions in course design, to translate them into a purposeful and thoughtful syllabus, and to understand the structure of a syllabus that successfully introduces the goals and plans for a tutorial in the linguistics department.

Overview:

1. Big questions to guide the design of your tutorial
 2. Learning outcomes
 3. More fine-grained questions concerning the structure of your course
 4. The structure of a syllabus
 5. Two examples of a tutorial syllabus
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BIG QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE DESIGN OF YOUR TUTORIAL

The following are overarching questions meant to make you think about the overall purpose of your course and how that relates to the students and their experiences in linguistics prior to your tutorial. (Material adapted from the Harvard Bok Center website.)

1. What is your purpose in this course?
 - a. In one sentence, what do you hope to teach the students?

 - b. If they had to come away from your course knowing just one thing, what would that be? (This is not about facts but about larger learning objectives.)

 - c. How does this tutorial fit into the linguistics concentration as a whole? How does it supplement what they learn in their core linguistics classes?

2. Who are your students?
 - a. Is this a sophomore or junior tutorial? What background in linguistics are your students likely to have? How will you determine what they know (demonstrative knowledge vs procedural knowledge)?

 - b. What other (non-linguistics) background might they have or need?

- c. What do they need to know for your tutorial? If they don't have this background, how will you support them?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

What are the intended **learning outcomes** of your tutorial? (Material adapted from the MIT Learning + Teaching Lab website.)

- This is not a list of topics to be covered (that's separate).
- Should be directly related to student performance – what students should know or be able to do after taking your tutorial.
- “Good intended learning outcomes shouldn't be too abstract (“the students will understand what good literature is”); too narrow (“the students will know what a ground is”); or be restricted to lower-level cognitive skills (“the students will be able to name the countries in Africa.”).”
- **You should be able to relate each learning outcome to the overall purpose of the course** (which we established above).

Frame:

*BY THE TIME THE STUDENTS FINISH THIS TUTORIAL,
THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO [INSERT STRONG ACTION VERB PHRASE HERE]...*
{explain, list, describe, demonstrate, calculate, report, compare, analyze, ... }

Let's write learning outcomes for your course, divided into three subgroups:

1. **Skills:** What students should be able to **do**:

2. **Knowledge:** What students should be able to **understand**:

3. **Attitudes:** What students' **opinions** regarding the subject matter should be:

MORE DETAILED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TUTORIAL

The following are questions that target more specific elements of your course and its structure. We have determined the purpose and the goals of the course, and now we will establish how we will achieve this. (Questions from the Bok Center website.)

1. What are the **six sessions** going to focus on? How are you going to tie the course together? What are the logical links between sessions?
2. How are you going to get to the broader, underlying **conceptual issues**, as opposed to simply covering the material? Given the underlying purpose or concept or level of the course, what material should be emphasized and what can be cut?
3. What **teaching methods** are you going to use - e.g., lectures, discussions, role plays, demonstrations - and in what proportions? What activities other than the readings and class discussions might be appropriate? Make sure each activity is clearly motivated!
4. **Homework**: How will you stimulate students to think about the material before class? How will you encourage/require students to prepare?
5. How will you get **feedback from** the students? How will you know if the course is working for them, what they are thinking?
6. How will you **evaluate** your students? How will you know what they do and do not understand? How will you know if they have learned anything, and if so, what they have learned? Will you have a final project, and if so, how will you ensure that the project is appropriate in topic and scope?

7. How will you get **feedback to** the students? How will you grade and comment on their written and oral work?

8. **Plan B:** How flexible are you going to be in meeting students' different backgrounds, interests and needs? Are you willing to change course in the middle of the semester if that seems appropriate? Are you willing to entertain different approaches to the material?

SYLLABUS STRUCTURE

Having decided all of the above, it's now time to write a syllabus in which all this information will be communicated to the students. (Material from the Bok Center website.)

In general, the syllabus is a **contract** between the instructor and the students. It is a clear description of what the TF and students will achieve together in the course, given that the instructor does what is outlined in the syllabus and that the students meet the expectations of the TF as detailed in the syllabus. Note that most of this should be relatively easy to provide given our planning above.

The following are typical parts of a syllabus:

1. **Learning Objectives:** What students will gain or take away from your course. Why these objectives are the most important skills/knowledge for the course (helpful if objectives are included for each topic/session).
2. **Goal/Rationale:** How the course relates to primary concepts and principles of the discipline (where it fits into the overall intellectual area). Type of knowledge and abilities that will be emphasized. How and why the course is organized in a particular sequence.
3. **Basic Information:** Course name and number, meeting time and place, instructor name, contact information, office hours, instructional support staff information.
4. **Course Content:** Schedule, outline, meeting dates and holidays, major topics and sub-topics preferably with rationale for inclusion.
5. **Student Responsibilities:** Particulars and rationale for homework, projects, quizzes, exams, reading requirements, participation, due dates, etc. Policies on lateness, missed work, extra credit, etc.
6. **Grading Method:** Clear, explicit statement of assessment process and measurements.
7. **Materials and Access:** Required texts and readings, course packs. How to get materials including relevant instructional technologies. Additional resources such as study groups, etc.
8. **(Teaching Philosophy:** Pedagogical approach including rationale for why students will benefit from it.)

You can find a syllabus template here: <https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/syllabus-design>

EVALUATING AN EXAMPLE SYLLABUS

Let's look at two examples of syllabi for tutorials in linguistics. For each, we should pose the following questions (from the Bok Center website):

1) Do the title and preamble clearly state what the course is about, orient and excite students?

- Does the preamble clearly identify the theme of the course, or pose questions that draw students in?
- Does it challenge or inspire your students? Is there a problem or puzzle to be solved?
- Does it introduce relevant vocabulary without being confusing?
- Does it require and mention prerequisites?
- Does the phrasing set a collaborative tone or sense of common purpose? *e.g.*, "We will explore..."
- Are learning objectives stated? *e.g.*, "You will be able to..." "Students will learn..."

2) Does your syllabus establish a clear *contract* between you and your students?

- Does it provide a means of contact (phone; email etc.)
- Does it make clear promises regarding due dates, readings, and office hours?
- Does it establish clear expectations for course blogs, chat rooms or the course website?
- Does it make grading policies explicit? *e.g.*, 20% for X; 40% for Y (or something else)
- Does your syllabus make provisions for writing and assignment preparation: pre-paper conferences, review sessions with you or TFs, etc?
- Are you prepared to eliminate material that cannot be covered (since adding is problematic)?

3) Is your syllabus *coherent*? —In the simplest sense a syllabus is a "calendar," but it should also have a logic, an order of argument or a story line.

- Is your tutorial divided into six manageable sessions?
- Does that order or logic follow from your preamble?
- Are the sections or elements *linked* to one another, or *steps* that follow one another logically?
- Can the elements be posed as *questions* that follow in a coherent sequence (at least for you)?
- Is the pacing reasonable? Can your students really read X pages a week (or less during exams)?
- Have you checked due dates against the university calendar: vacations/days of religious observance?

4) Does your syllabus *build* the appropriate skills or competencies? Does it clearly motivate stages of learning or have learning outcomes?

- Is the pitch and degree of difficulty right for the cohort (again, are prerequisites mentioned)?
- Is the sequencing of assignments laid out clearly with an eye to developing necessary skills?
- Do writing or other assignments coincide with the material they address?
- Do the assignments (reaction papers, exercises etc.) develop skills that build to a final, challenging written or other project or exam?