



Ready Set Teach

Session 4.2
Syllabus Clinic: Designing for
Connection, Clarity and Change

Adriana Grimaldi (she/her), Senior Educational Developer
& Team Lead, RGASC



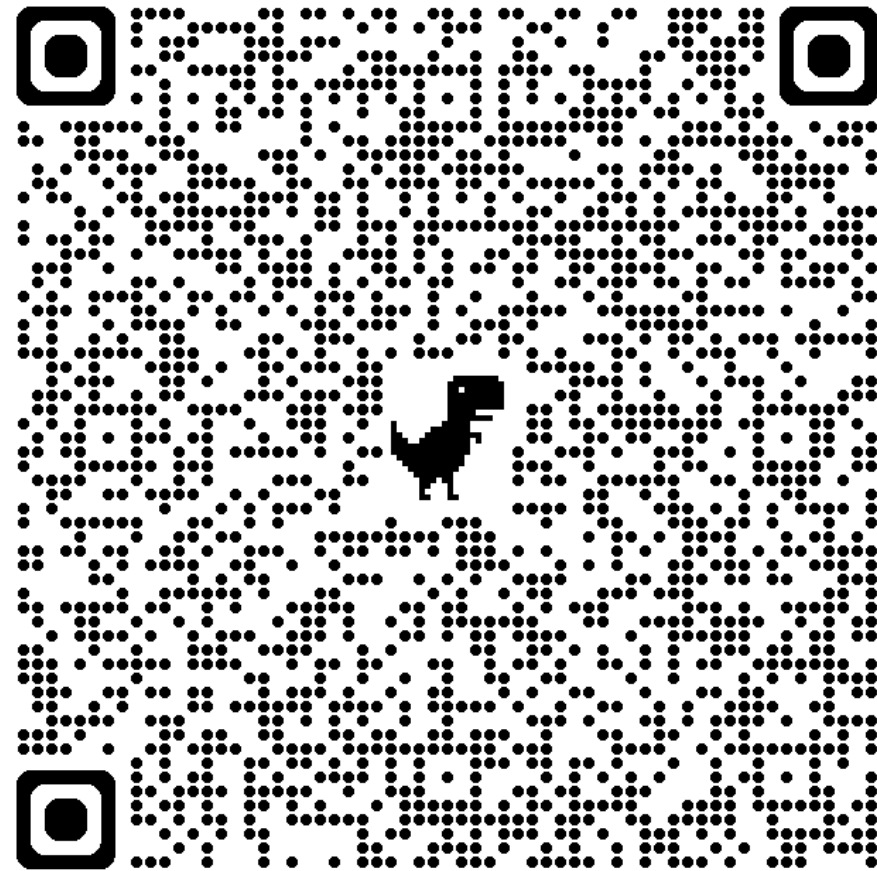
UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Robert Gillespie
Academic Skills Centre

Access Check

We encourage you to check, identify, and question your learning environment for any of the following and welcome comments if there are elements that we can support to reduce barriers.

- Technology
- Space
- Slide Deck for all Sessions + Resources via QR code
- Pace



SESSION OUTLINE 1

1. First Contact

- What students look for in a syllabus
- How syllabus design shapes course culture
- Moving beyond the "course contract"

2. Course design

- Teacher-centered vs student-centered course design
- Backward design as a planning framework and designing for alignment

3. Building an Engaging Syllabus

- Beyond the instructor biography
- Communicating purpose, expectations and belonging

4. Learning Outcomes as Foundation

- Developing and applying learning outcomes to guide course design and support your students' success



Latest version available online:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/dean/academic-planning-and-policy-utm>

Advice for Preparing Course Syllabi at UTM

Winter 2026

Office of the Vice-Principal Academic and Dean
Updated November 2025



First Point of Interaction: Setting the Tone for Your Course

What questions do students want the syllabus to answer?

- What topics will be covered?
- How will those topics be taught?
- How is performance assessed?

How do faculty use the syllabus?

- To plan for their course
- To establish expectations about how students will interact with course material

[Wagner et al., 2023.](#)



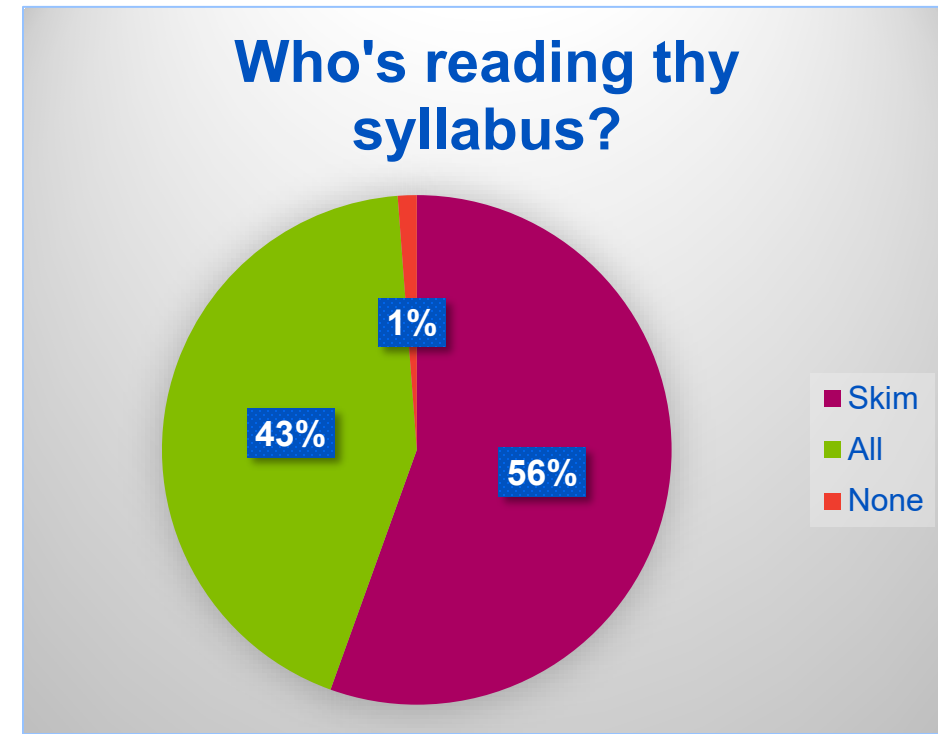
“Seem more appropriate for a courtroom than a classroom”

Most important information according to students:

- dates, deadlines and explanations of exams (Garavalia et. al. 1999)

Perrault 2026

- 51% indicated they trust the course syllabus over what is in the LMS
- $\frac{2}{3}$ of students said they learned something new after reading the syllabus
- 40% indicated they were too long



What are the benefits of an effective syllabus: Beyond the contract

Learning-centered documents (Fink 2013)

- clearer expectations

Tools for student success and retention (Bain 2004)

- greater student engagement

Instruments for inclusive teaching

- stronger feelings of belonging

Mechanisms for transparency and equity in assessment

- improved teaching effectiveness (Nilson, 2016)

Strategic communication tools that establish classroom culture early in the semester.



Teacher-Centered Course Design

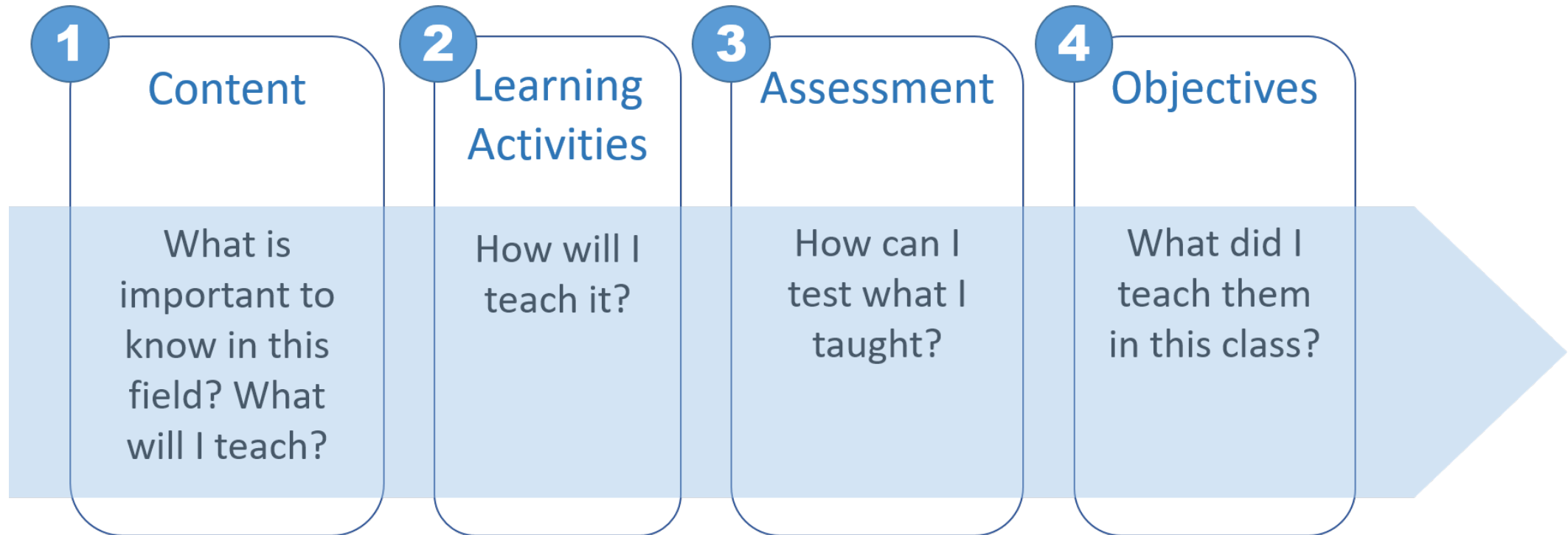
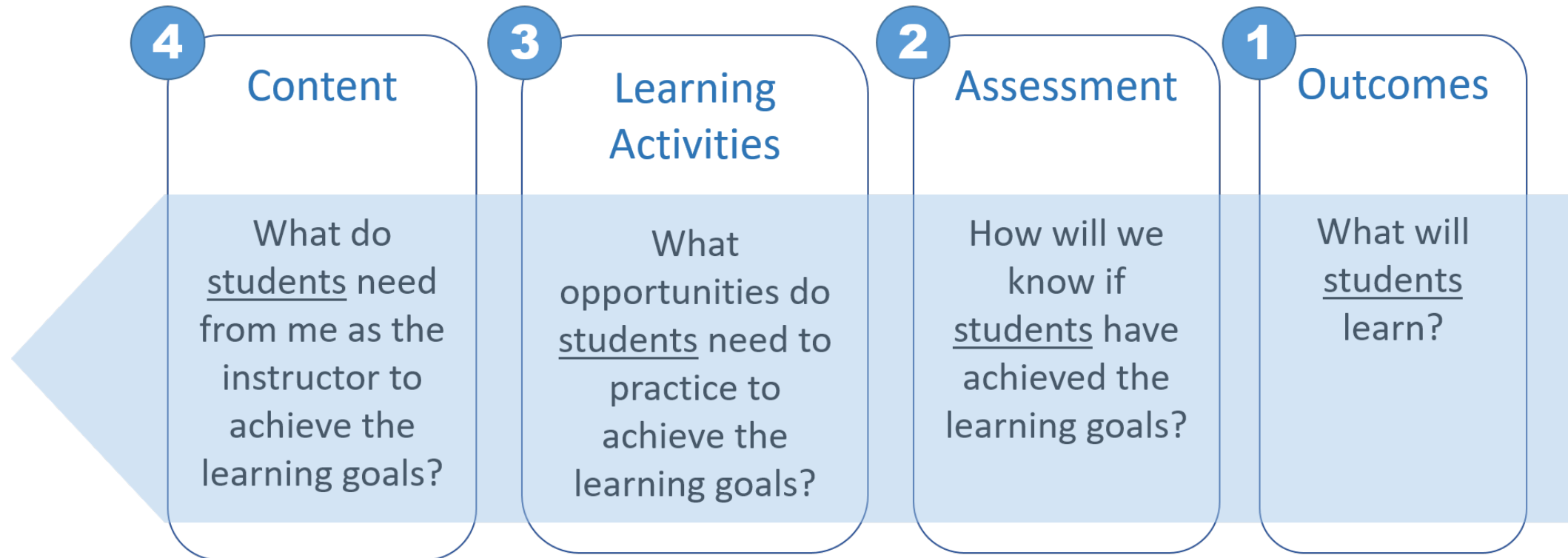


Figure adapted from [Stanford Teaching Commons](#)

Student-Centered Course Design

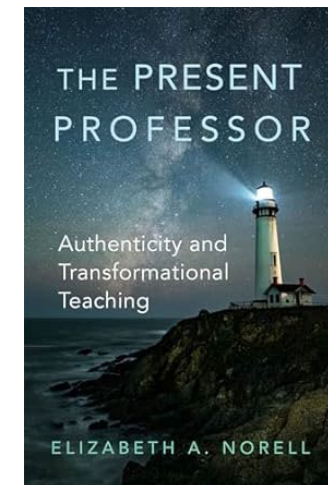


Beyond the Biography

Tell students about yourself and the pedagogical plan you have designed for them

Alongside the typical “biographical” data about yourself and your course, consider including elements that have been shown to create more meaningful learning experiences (Wagner, Smith, Johnson, Hilaire, & Medina, 2023).

- Providing rationale for assignments (e.g. connecting them with learning outcomes)
- Sharing your own connection to the material/discipline (e.g. sharing your origin story) [Harnish & Bridges, 2011](#)
- Share a provocation about your discipline:
 - What myth about my discipline makes me want to scream?
 - Why is this myth so charged for me?
 - What am I doing to dispel the myth? / What could I do?



Beyond the biography

Policy and Practice

Remember: Contact hours must match the Academic Calendar and Timetable Builder



Course Information System

Step 1: Administrative Details

* Indicates a required field

Step 6: Course Schedule & Outline

Rich Text Area

* Indicates a required field

Please use the area below to enter your course schedule information. You can choose to use the table formatting provided by the Syllabus Builder or format your own course schedule. If you have a course schedule made in an external tool such as Word or Excel, you can copy and paste that content into the field.

Do you want to include a week-by-week outline? *

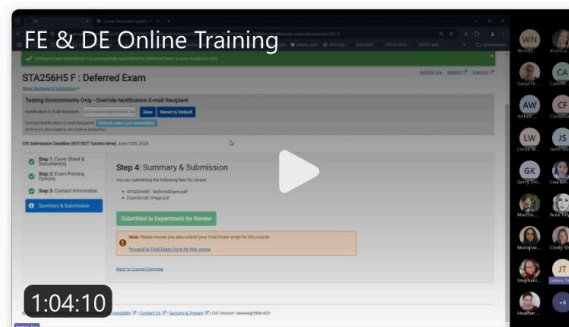
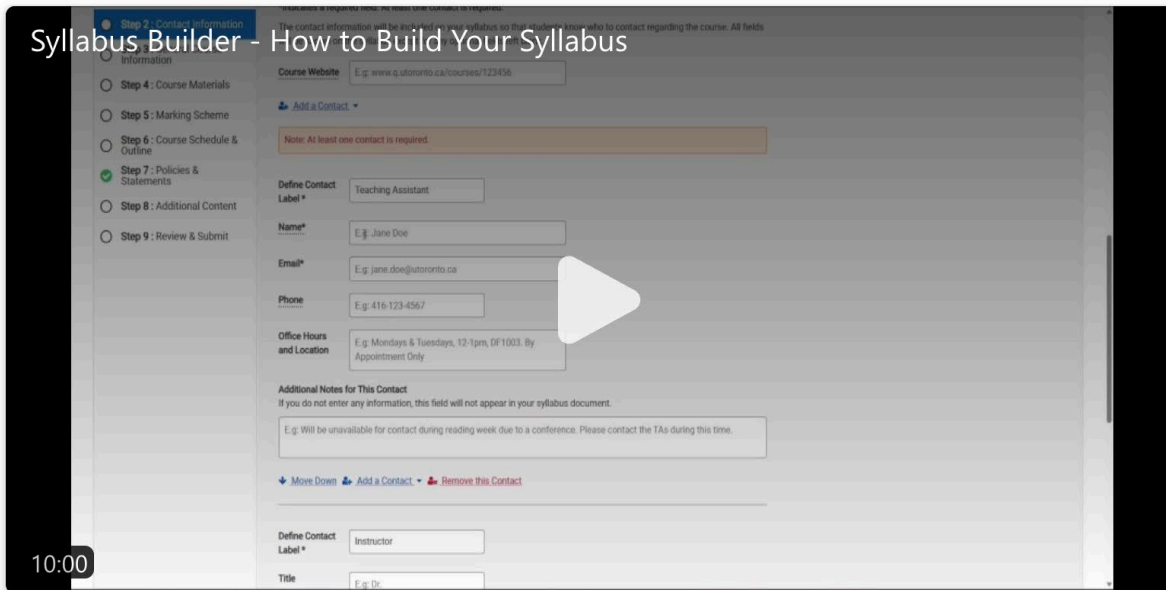
☒ Yes

☐ No

Week	Description
Week 1 Date	In this field, we recommend providing any details about the topic for the lecture, tutorials, and any required or recommended readings. This field can also be used to provide due dates for assessments.
Week 2 Date	

Course Information System (CIS) Onboarding

Policy and Practice



Onboarding Resources

 CIS Help Documents and How-To's (U of T)

 Fall 2025 CIS Tip Sheet (OVPAD)

 CIS Email Notifications Summary

 Still need help? Send a ticket to EASI

 SessionalDates2025_2026

 Faculty & Staff Apps

[Visit: Course Information System \(CIS\) Onboarding](#)

Contact Information Policy

Quick tip regarding emails:

@utoronto.ca email for instructors.

@mail.utoronto.ca for students (and some instructors).



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Course Information System

Step 2: Contact Information

* Indicates a required field

At least one contact is required if you are using the syllabus built in the Course Information System.

The contact information will be included on your syllabus so that students know who to contact regarding the course. All fields will be shown on the syllabus except for any optional fields left blank.

Course Website

E.g: www.q.utoronto.ca/courses/123456

 [Add a Contact](#) ▼

Define Contact
Label *

Instructor

Title

E.g: Dr.

Name *

Paul Smith

Email *

paul.smith @utoronto.ca

Important Dates

Policy

Check for conflicts with: Religious dates, vacation periods & University closed dates

Office of the Registrar

Equity, Diversity &
Inclusion Office (EDIO)



Learning Outcomes: The Building Blocks of our Pedagogical Practice

A statement that describes the knowledge or skills that instructors expect students to learn, develop, or achieve proficiency by the end of their learning experience (Suskie, 2009).

- written from the student's perspective
- describe what they will be able to know, do or value after successfully completing their learning experience

Keep coming back to the Learning Outcomes throughout the course, and attach them to learning activities.



Learning Outcomes: The Building Blocks of our Pedagogical Practice

For students:

- provide clarity around the instructor's expectations &
- how they will demonstrate their learning

For instructors:

- help point to appropriate methods of assessment
- prompt consideration of how success in a course will be evaluated



Sample Course-Level Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the major factors that influenced the development of the Canadian political system.
- Analyze the diverse ways in which visual evidence can be interpreted, including consideration of the possibilities and limitations of the major methods of the discipline.
- Create examples and counterexamples to illustrate novel definitions and concepts about sets and functions of real numbers.



**What should
students be able
to do or
accomplish by the
end of your
course?**

Step 3: General Course Information	
* Indicates a required field	
Rich Text Area Information in this step is used to make students aware of the expectations for the course and any requirements that must be met to participate in the course. All fields will be shown on the syllabus except those marked as "Hidden from Syllabus" and optional fields left blank. All pre-populated information in this section has been drawn from your divisional calendar and approved through the divisional curriculum governance process. To request the modification of this information, please contact your academic unit.	
Course Description	Ecology, evolution, form, function, diversity, and conservation of birds. Practical sessions focus on observation and assessment of local avian populations using field ornithology techniques and approaches.
Additional Notes	B I U Paragraph [dropdown] [bulleted list icon] [numbered list icon] [link icon] [unlink icon] [indent icon] [outdent icon] [undo icon] [redo icon] I_x <> E.g: As part of the course, students will build on their knowledge from the previous course and learn to apply the techniques within the context of a cumulative capstone project. This course involves meetings with clients, taking part in regular stand-ups and project management techniques. P 0 WORDS POWERED BY TINY
Course Learning Outcomes *	B I U Paragraph [dropdown] [bulleted list icon] [numbered list icon] [link icon] [unlink icon] [indent icon] [outdent icon] [undo icon] [redo icon] I_x <> E.g: By the end of the course, students will be able to produce professional quality writing and effectively communicate the results of their research findings and analyses to fellow classmates in an oral presentation.

SESSION OUTLINE 2

5. Assessment Design and Alignment

- Linking assessments to learning outcomes
- Using outcomes to guide course design

6. Accessibility, Inclusion, and Academic Integrity

- Building learning communities through accessible learning environments
- Supporting academic integrity through course design
- Considerations for generative AI in courses

7. From Design to Implementation

- Using the Course Information System (CIS)
- Syllabus requirements and policy supports
- Resources and next steps

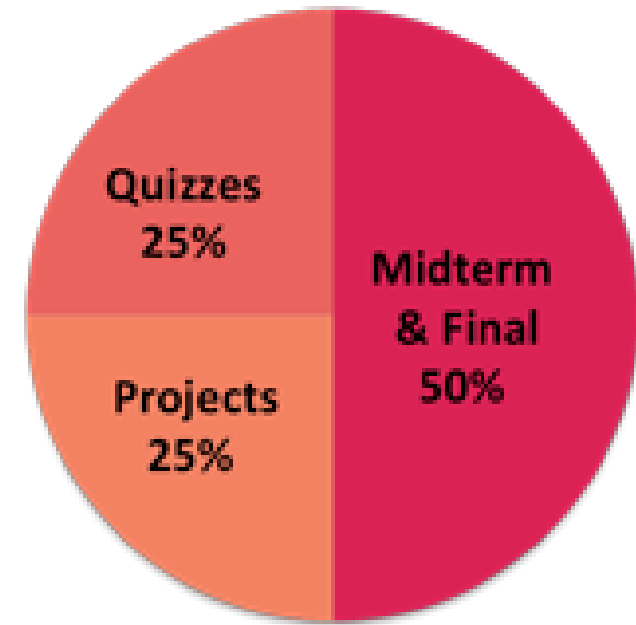


Assessment: “Testing” our Learning Outcomes

Some key pedagogical considerations in assessment design for your courses.

- Multiple Methods of assessment (quantity)
 - formative and summative (quality)
- Scaffolded assessments
- Collaborative/Group work

Grade Distribution



Source: CAST. (n.d.). *UDL Syllabus*. UDL On Campus.
https://udloncampus.cast.org/page/planning_syllabus

[Connect Course Learning Outcomes to Assignments and Exams](#)

Assessment: Policy and Practice

- 15% for H courses, 25% for Y courses, returned by last class before the drop deadline
- No tests, or recent assignments, more than 25% in last 2 weeks
- Discuss with your chair if the “at least 33%” exam policy for first-year classes should be followed
- Must include how tests will be made up and how students notify instructor of missed test
- Must include assignment deadlines, how to submit if late, and late penalty and missed assessment policies
- Registrar's policy on missed exams on syllabus



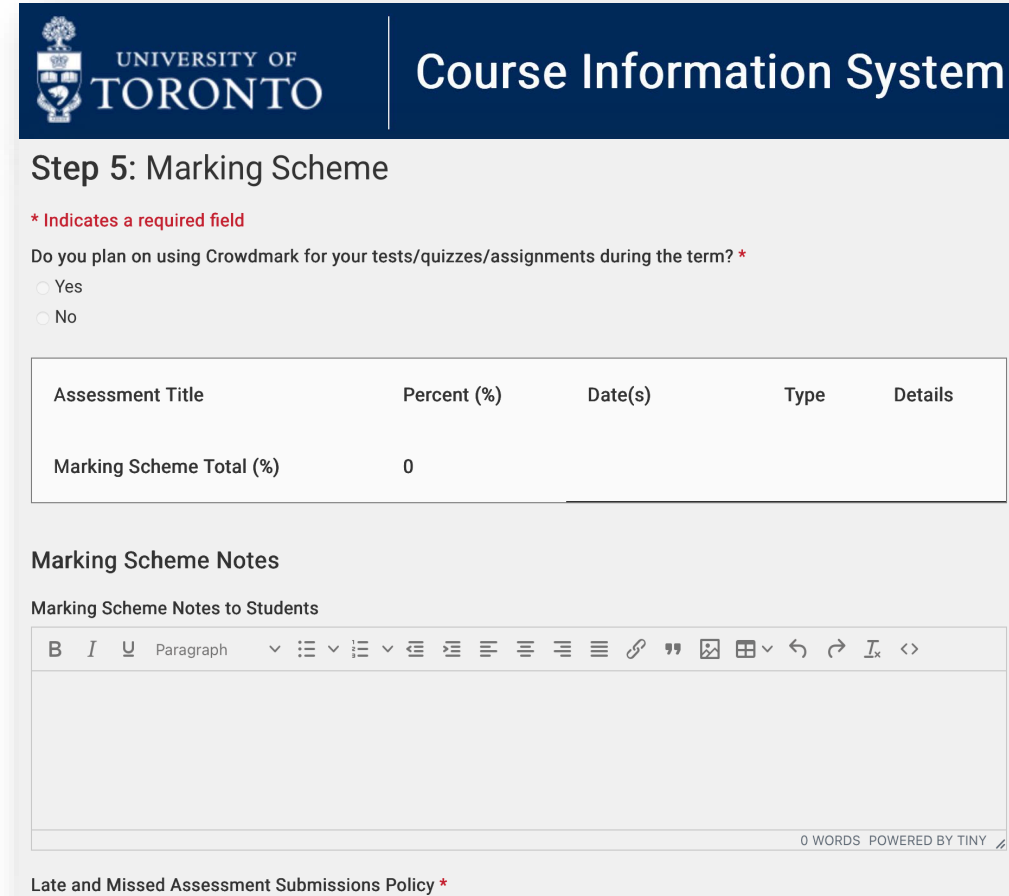
Assessment Policy

● Step 5: Marking Scheme

Please adhere to the following

- ❗ Total must add up to 100%
- ✔ No term test or combination of term tests worth more than 25% can be due in the last 2 weeks of class
- ✔ No one assessment (e.g. test/assignment/exam) should have a value of more than 80% of the overall total course mark
- ✔ Combination of class participation should never exceed 20% of the total course mark and should involve participation rather than mere attendance
- ✔ The final exam should count between one-third and two-thirds of the final mark. In any course where there is a final examination, the Chair/Director may allow a reduction in the value of the examination from one-third of the final mark to no less than one-quarter of the final mark

If your plans are not aligned with some of the policies, you will see an orange exclamation mark.



Accessibility and Inclusion: Building Learning Communities

Tips for Creating a Welcome Video

- 3-5 minutes
- Use a program (Zoom, Snagit) that incorporates captions
- Highlight one (1) academic policy that is particularly important for your course
- Explain what a week in your course will typically look like for your students
- Leave the "mistakes" in



Accessibility Policy

Remember: you must add the proper accommodations on your syllabus.

Examples:

- Religious accommodations;
- Equity & human rights;
- Student rights statements

 UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Course Information System

Step 7: Policies & Statements

* Indicates a required field

The policies and statements available in this section are provided as a convenience to you when creating your syllabus. These can be personalized and saved to suit the context of your course. CIS stores the most up-to-date versions of all policies and statements

Recommended Policies & Statements		Collapse
☒ Academic Integrity	Required	View
☒ Religious Accommodations	Required	View
☒ Declaration of Temporary Absence	Required	View
☒ Re-grading Term Work	Required	View
☐ Plagiarism Detection Tool	Required If Using	View
☐ Missed Final Examinations	Required If Using	View
☐ Accommodations for Students with Disabilities		View
☐ Code of Student Conduct		Personalize View
☐ Equity and Academic Rights		View
☐ Academic Rights		View & Edit Delete

Academic Integrity: How do we ensure students are learning?

Be clear with your students about how you expect them to enact the values of academic integrity in your class (Eaton, 2021)

- Scaffold scholarly practice
- Set clear assignment expectations
- Create meaningful learning communities



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA



Academic Integrity Policy

Required:

The Academic Integrity statement is included in the syllabus

 UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Course Information System

Step 7: Policies & Statements

* Indicates a required field

The policies and statements available in this section are provided as a convenience to you when creating your syllabus. These can be personalized and saved to suit the context of your course. CIS stores the most up-to-date versions of all policies and statements

Recommended Policies & Statements [Collapse](#)

☒ Academic Integrity Required	View
☒ Religious Accommodations Required	View
☒ Declaration of Temporary Absence Required	View
☒ Re-grading Term Work Required	View
☐ Plagiarism Detection Tool Required If Using	View
☐ Missed Final Examinations Required If Using	View
☐ Accommodations for Students with Disabilities	View
☐ Code of Student Conduct	Personalize View

Generative AI Policy



Can use Generative AI tools



Can use Generative AI in certain instances or specific ways



Cannot use Generative AI

[Visit: Embed options
for syllabi statement](#)

Whatever you decide to do as an instructor, we encourage you to **evaluate what AI use means** relative to ethics and environment and utilize resources on AI literacy for you, your students and your TAs as much as possible



Connect with an [Educational Developer](#) to help you decide which level of AI integration (or not) is best for your course(s).

STUDENTS	FACULTY	RESEARCH	TOOLS & TRAINING	GUIDELINES	AI TASK FORCE
----------	---------	----------	------------------	------------	---------------

Toward an AI-ready university

The University of Toronto is an institution dedicated to the development of human potential. We recognize AI's transformative capabilities and associated risks for our institution and society which compels a thoughtful approach to this class of technologies.

In Spring 2024, U of T established an AI Task Force to develop a comprehensive vision and strategy for responding to the emergence of generative artificial intelligence.

Discover U of T's human-centred approach to AI adoption

[Toward an AI-ready University](#)





The Educational Development Team



Amanda Brijmohan

Educational Developer, Assessment and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Email: amanda.brijmohan@utoronto.ca



Rob Huang

Educational Developer, Instructional Practices and Student Engagement

Email: rob.huang@utoronto.ca



Laura McKinley

Educational Developer, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Accessible Pedagogies

Email: laura.mckinley@utoronto.ca



References

Eaton, S. E. (2021). *Plagiarism in higher education: Tackling tough topics in academic integrity*. Libraries Unlimited.

Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences : an integrated approach to designing college courses* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Harnish, R. J., & Bridges, K. R. (2011). Effect of syllabus tone: Students' perceptions of instructor and course. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal*, 14(3), 319–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-011-9152-4>

Office of the Vice-Principal Academic and Dean. (2026) "Academic Planning and Policy at UTM." University of Toronto Mississauga. [Academic Planning and Policy at UTM | Office of the Vice-Principal Academic and Dean](#)

Perrault, E. K. (2026). Syllabus Information and the Relative Importance of Content They Can Contain. *College Teaching*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2026.2612968>

Stanford Teaching Commons. (n.d.). *Teacher-centered vs. Student-centered course design*. Stanford University. [Teacher-centered vs. Student-centered course design | Teaching Commons](#)

UTM Teaching and Learning Resource Hub (n.d.) Video Course Tour. University of Toronto Mississauga. [Video Course Tour: Teaching and Learning Resource Hub](#)

Wagner, J. L., Smith, K. J., Johnson, C., Hilaire, M. L., & Medina, M. S. (2023). Best Practices in Syllabus Design. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 87(3), ajpe8995. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8995>.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (Expanded 2nd ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.





UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

**Robert Gillespie
Academic
Skills Centre**

Feedback Form Ready, Set...Teach!

2026



Robert Gillespie
Academic Skills Centre

Thank You!

Faculty & Instructors | Robert
Gillespie Academic Skills
Centre

UTM Course Information
(CIS) Onboarding