

READ THE FINE PRINT

A 10-MINUTE SYLLABUS REALITY CHECK

Don't just hunt due dates. Figure out the rules before the rules get used on your grade.



You don't have to argue with the syllabus. Just read it like a contract.

COURSE

PROFESSOR

TERM

CREDITS

OFFICE HOURS

BEST WAY TO CONTACT

1

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Write what the syllabus actually says, not what you hope it means.

☐ ATTENDANCE

What happens when you miss? How many absences hurt your grade? Excused vs. unexcused? What proof do they want?

☐ LATE WORK

Exact penalty: per hour, day, or assignment? Grace period? How do you ask for an extension?

☐ PARTICIPATION

What counts: showing up, talking, posts, group work? How are the points actually measured?

☐ GRADE APPEALS

If a grade looks wrong, what's the process, and who do you contact first?

CIRCLE THE FOG WORDS →

may

usually

discretion

appropriate

professionalism

engagement

Other vague wording I found:

Fog words aren't automatically bad. They just mean someone gets to decide later, so ask now.

2

WHERE YOUR GRADE ACTUALLY COMES FROM

Percentages are cute until one category beats the hell out of your final grade.

CATEGORY	WEIGHT	MY TARGET	WEIGHTED POINTS
ESTIMATED FINAL GRADE			

QUICK MATH target × weight = weighted points. Add them up for your estimate. Example: 80% exam average × 30% exam weight = 24 points.

3

FIND THE RULES HIDING UNDER THE PERCENTAGES

The grading chart is the front door. Check what's behind it.

- ☐ Does the lowest quiz, assignment, or discussion score get dropped?
 ☐ Are grades rounded? If yes, how?
- ☐ Is there a curve?
 ☐ Extra credit: total points, or one category?
- ☐ Can the final replace a lower exam score?
 ☐ What's allowed: collaboration, tutoring, calculators, outside sources, AI tools?

4

TURN THE SYLLABUS INTO QUESTIONS

Ask early, calmly, and specifically. Make it easy to answer.

Attendance / absence question I still need answered:

Late-work / make-up question I still need answered:

Grading / participation / policy question I still need answered:

BORING + SPECIFIC WINS

"I want to make sure I understand the late-work policy. If an assignment is one day late, is the deduction ten percent of the assignment grade or ten percentage points?"

5 • OFFICE HOURS BEFORE URGENT CARE

You don't need to be failing to go.

- ☐ Ask what a strong assignment looks like.
 ☐ Ask what mistakes students usually make.
 ☐ Ask how papers are actually evaluated.
 ☐ Ask how to prepare for the exam.

6 • SAVE THE ANSWER

Your stressed-out memory is not a records system.

- ☐ Email saved / starred
 ☐ Announcement screenshotted
 ☐ Office-hours notes + date

WHERE I SAVED IT

7

PUT IT ON THE CALENDAR

If the syllabus gave you a date, deadline, or trigger, get it out of the PDF and into your life.

WHAT	WHEN	REMINDER / ACTION



THIS WAS THE 10-MINUTE VERSION.

The **Syllabus Audit Starter Kit** goes all the way in: six audit categories (grading, participation, access, readings, tech/AI, policies and power), Clear / Vague / Missing scoring, and a next-move plan. 12 printable + fillable pages.

GET THE FULL KIT • \$7 →

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