

DESIGNING THE SYLLABUS—TEMPLATE IDEAS

The information you communicate to your students on your course syllabus plays an important role in influencing the decisions students make regarding plagiarism and in affecting the outcome of the case should a student decide, as part of the University's due process guidelines, to appeal your sanction. Complete policies and procedures may be found in the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities (The Code) and Conduct Procedures for the Bloomington Campus* (hard copies can be obtained from the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs or on-line: <http://www.indiana.edu/~code/>). Faculty members have a fair amount of discretion in determining the academic sanctions they choose to impose in cases of plagiarism, but what remains paramount is the need to be clear in the language you use with your students. The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning's website, has a special section on Syllabus Design (reproduced below) that speaks to the key issues.

Syllabus Design

The best way to discourage plagiarism is to make clear to your students that academic integrity is important to you and will affect how you run your course.

Several steps that help:

1. Read thoroughly *The Code* (<http://www.indiana.edu/~code/>), which gives faculty clear guidelines about procedures to follow when it has been decided a student has committed an act of academic misconduct. Because *The Code* gives faculty quite a bit of latitude in imposing sanctions for academic misconduct, instructors should be familiar with all the options open to them.
2. Check with your department head or director of undergraduate studies for your department's policy, if it has been put in writing.
3. Consider the following questions in forming your policy about written work:
 - o have you distinguished for your students the difference between plagiarism and the misuse of sources?
 - o in instances of plagiarism or misuse of sources, do you hold first-year and upper-class students to different standards (to account for a "learning curve" on the part of novice researchers)?
 - o how will you distinguish between the misuse of sources and plagiarism in your grading?
 - o do you distinguish between penalties for misuse of sources/plagiarism on drafts v. final versions of papers?
 - o if after receiving an initial warning, a student again plagiarizes, what is your policy vis-à-vis such a repeat instance of misconduct?
 - o if you're using group or paired writing assignments, how will you allot responsibility and a grade to each group member, should one (or more) of the group plagiarize part of the paper?
4. Include a definition of plagiarism in your syllabus. Here is one sample you may use without citation:

Plagiarism constitutes using others' ideas, words or images without properly giving credit to those sources. If you turn in any work with your name affixed to it, I assume that work is your own and that all sources are indicated and documented in the text (with quotations and/or citations).
5. Include a statement of your policy about plagiarism. Here is a statement you may use without citation:

I will respond to acts of academic misconduct according to university policy concerning plagiarism; sanctions for plagiarism can include a grade of F for the assignment in question and/or for the course and must include a report to the Dean of Students Office.

6. Be aware of University policy concerning grades: For students found to have committed an act of misconduct and who receive an F in the course as a sanction, a grade of F will be entered for that student, even where an automatic W would otherwise be used. That is, after they have been found to have plagiarized and receive an F in the course as a sanction, students may not simply withdraw from a course and receive a W.

Additional considerations that may be helpful in designing the syllabus: Sometimes, faculty members make blanket statements (e.g., “Plagiarism will result in an F in the course”) that are intended to prevent plagiarism from ever taking place by telling students up front that all cases of plagiarism—and presumably, misuse of sources—will be sanctioned with a failing grade in the course. Such statements, while possible under the language of *The Code* and *Procedures for the Bloomington Campus*, may not be the best approach. Indeed, such language might create other philosophical or pragmatic dilemmas, since a zero-tolerance approach makes it difficult to be consistent and doesn’t allow for the consideration of mitigating circumstances using language such as this requires; every case must be treated in exactly the same way. Such language also may not take into consideration the points raised in #3 above. You may find it more useful to communicate your policies using language that keeps you from boxing yourself into a corner. Information in *Procedures for Bloomington Campus* (Effective 2009), [the section on Academic Misconduct, Step One: The Initial Finding of Misconduct, p. 16] (*Procedures for Bloomington campus* (IUB) [Effective 2009]), is illustrative:

If the faculty member concludes that misconduct occurred, s/he may impose an academic sanction for the course. Sanctions that may be imposed by the faculty member include but are not limited to one or more of the following:

- A lower or failing grade for any assignment(s) in which misconduct occurred
- A lower or failing grade for the course; the penalty for a serious act of academic misconduct ordinarily should involve the recording of a failing grade for the course
- Repeating the assignment(s) in which misconduct occurred
- Completing additional assignment(s)
- Required withdrawal from the course, with a grade of either F or W at the faculty member’s discretion, regardless of when during the semester the student withdraws from the course.

And, of course, it’s important to be accurate in what you **do** say on the syllabus. If you’re going to cite from or refer to the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*, please use the correct title. Moreover, when you state what will happen if academic misconduct occurs, don’t include things that cannot happen, such as telling students that you will formally recommend to the dean that the student be suspended from the university [this option is reserved for the Dean of Students after reviewing the student’s entire disciplinary history, as well as the report from you].

The words you use on your syllabus are powerful. Please take a few extra moments to make sure that the section on academic misconduct says what you mean and that it states this information clearly and accurately.