What does your syllabus say about your blended/online course?

A learning-centered syllabus will:

- Define instructor’s role and responsibility to students;
- Provide a clear statement of intended course goals (learning outcomes);
- Establish standards and procedures for evaluation;
- Acquaint students with course logistics; and
- Establish a pattern of communication between instructor and students

Let’s check

**Defines responsibility to students**
- The positive, respectful, inviting tone is conveyed throughout the document.
- The learning objectives, assessments, activities, and grading scheme all indicate a high level of academic rigor (e.g. objectives that promote high-order thinking and skills development, challenging assignments, appropriate amounts of reading/writing).
- Personal pronouns (e.g., you, we, us) are used, rather than “the students,” “the course,” or “they.”
- The primary focus of the document is on learning and not on policies and punishment.
- The syllabus contains a “promise” that will be fulfilled through mutual effort by instructor and students to meet learning outcomes (i.e. language that emphasizes collaborative spirit; verbs that focus on what students and instructors do, not an abstract entity does; clear statement of connections between course content and answers to “big questions.”).

**Clearly states learning outcomes**
- Course-level learning outcomes are in a prominent and easily identifiable location (i.e., labeled section).
- Learning outcomes avoid non-quantifiable terms, such as “understand” and “know,”. And instead utilize strong action verbs (appreciate, critique, design, etc).
- Learning outcomes are expressed at the course level, and appropriate to class size, environments used (lab, online, field, etc) and location within the program (1st year versus 3rd year).

Clarifies standards and procedures for assessment

☐ Connections between the learning outcomes and major assessments are expressed (i.e., each major assessment activity maps to one or more learning outcomes).

☐ Course-level assessments are in a prominent and easily identifiable location (i.e. a labeled section).

☐ Regardless if grading percentages are included in assessment descriptions, there is a distinct section detailing grading.

☐ The instructor encourages students to “discover” value in the course by giving them choices along the way, such as choices in project topics, reading assignments, grading schemes.

☐ The student is in control of his/her learning. The course uses mastery-based grading (e.g., criterion-referenced, task-based, and absolute grading schemes) rather than performance ones (e.g., grading curves and other relative or group-referenced grading schemes).

Makes course structure (logic) transparent

☐ The schedule is not merely a list of content topics. It contains enough information (e.g., topics, context, questions, dates) to guide students through the course. It also clearly indicates when additional information will be provided at a later date.

☐ Various course components—description, objectives, schedule—frame the content through compelling questions or big ideas.

Creates an instructor / student communication process

☐ The document is readable, meaning the organization is clear, whether it contains major section headings or not, and ordered in a way that re-enforces the focus on learning.

☐ The syllabus communicates belief that each student can succeed by offering tips and strategies for how to meet and exceed expectations (builds in review sessions, expresses office hours, provides additional background material, etc.).

☐ The document clearly expresses a students need to interact with it frequently to get reading assignments and other information.

☐ The syllabus de-emphasizes course policies by positioning them late in the syllabus or in a separate document and connecting them to clear pedagogical purposes. The syllabus frames policies in positive ways, as opposed to lists of “do not’s.”