

# CET Synchronous online course design syllabus review checklist

## Introduction

The CET Synchronous Online Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist provides standards for course design through syllabus review, reflecting a progression of recommended teaching practices.

* Tier 1: Performing at Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard.
* Tier 2: Performing at Proficient Level of Teaching Standard at USC.
* Tier 3: Performing at Excellence Level of Teaching Standard at USC.

The checklist can be used as a developmental tool to provide faculty formative feedback to enhance their teaching, showing progression over multiple observations. It can also be used as an evaluative tool to document evidence of teaching performance for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment.

This checklist was developed to include recommended course design practices relevant to most teaching environments at USC; it is editable so that schools may add or delete items to customize it to their needs.

Schools could determine how many criteria in each tier should be met in order to qualify for the various levels of advancement in the school.

## Not included in the Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist

* Evaluation of course teaching practice, which is addressed in a separate Synchronous Online Teaching Observation Checklist.
* Best practices that are specific to certain fields, class types (e.g., labs, studios, clinics), or instructional methods.

## Recommended observer characteristics

* Is an expert in the field, but not necessarily in the sub-field/specialty.
* Would ideally be the same person who observed the class and completed the Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist.
* Has been trained by CET or by a CET Faculty Fellow to use the checklist.

## Instructions for Use

Check off all items observed in the course syllabus and/or other course documents. The first- and second-tier evaluations can be accomplished with a review of the syllabus. The third-tier evaluation requires a review of the syllabus, assignment descriptions, grading rubrics, and other course and program materials.

Each dimension in the checklist measures one or more criteria in USC’s Definition of Excellence in Teaching. USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching criteria measured by each dimension are noted by the index of the criteria in the definition; for example, 5a.

### Syllabus format

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 1c, 1d, 2g, 3e, 5d.

* Syllabus is available on the LMS as a downloadable document (Tier 1).
* Syllabus contains the Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems provided in the Curriculum Coordination Office syllabus template (Tier 1).
* Syllabus contains all components of the Curriculum Coordination Office template (Tier 2).
* Course description section includes aspirational goals that frame why the skills in the learning objective section are important (Tier 3).
* Syllabus mirrors that of other sections of the same course (same prefix and course number) taught onground, online, or off-campus (if applicable) (Tier 3).

Note: LMS = Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Canvas.

Observer comments:

### Communication

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 1d, 5b, 6e.

* Syllabus provides contact information for instructor, as well as preferred method of contact (Tier 1).
* Syllabus indicates how long students should wait for a response from instructor (Tier 2).
* Syllabus encourages students to contact instructor outside of class (Tier 3).
* Syllabus encourages students to provide feedback to the instructor (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Learning objectives

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 2a, 3e, 5b, 6a, 6c.

* Learning objectives are listed in the syllabus and identify specific, measurable skills (Tier 1).
* Every learning objective is measured by at least one graded assignment (Tier 1).
* The learning objective being measured is noted in the assignment description (Tier 2).
* Learning objectives are explicitly cited in the syllabus as related to standards/goals set by program, university, profession, and/or accrediting body (Tier 3).
* Learning objectives include development of skills relevant to living and working in a diverse world (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Grading

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1d, 4e, 5b 5d, 6a, 6d, 6e.

* A grading scale includes points or percentages, and the corresponding letter grade (Tier 1).
* The syllabus displays the weight of each assignment/assessment toward the overall course grade (Tier 1).
* Information is provided for when graded assignments/assessments will be returned (Tier1).
* If credit is awarded for participation, it is no more than 15% of the grade, and the method for grading participation is specified (Tier 1).
* Student grades are based on their performance against clear grading criteria aligned with course learning objectives (Tier 2).
* Group work has a method of measuring individual student's contribution to the project (Tier 2).
* Extra credit is not offered (Tier 2).
* Grades are maintained on a secure online system for students to access, such as a LMS (Tier 3).
* Participation credit is awarded for in-class work during synchronous sessions (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Assignments and Assessments

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1d, 2a, 2b, 2d, 3c, 3d, 3e, 5b, 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, 6e.

* The method of grading/scoring for each assignment or assessment is specified in the syllabus (Tier 1).
* Due dates for all assignments are specified (Tier 1).
* Assessment is done using a variety of methods (e.g., exams, projects, presentations, etc.) (Tier 2).
* Each assessment or assignment has its own specific description (Tier 2).
* Course includes multiple low-stakes assignments distributed across the course to prepare for larger assignments (Tier 3).
* Grading rubrics are provided for all major assignments along with the assignment description (Tier 3).
* Grading rubric requirements align to the assignment description (Tier 3).
* Assignments include examination of underrepresented perspectives or populations (Tier 3).
* Course includes at least one community-based assignment or an assignment that requires examination of a challenge from the perspective of multiple disciplines (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Course materials

Course materials can include readings, videos, audio recordings, etc.

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1d, 3c, 3e, 4a, 5d.

* Required and optional (if any) course materials are specified separately in the syllabus (Tier 1).
* Syllabus specifies which resources must be purchased and where/how other resources are available (Tier 1).
* Course materials or topics include diverse perspectives, authors, or applications (Tier 2).
* Course materials include materials related to current local, national, and/or global events, when pertinent to course learning objectives (Tier 2).
* Instructor-created materials demonstrate fair attention to topics and issues regardless of personal beliefs and without revealing one’s bias or appearing to push a personal agenda (Tier 2).
* Course readings include influential and current peer-reviewed journal articles (or discipline equivalent) when pertinent to course learning objectives (Tier 3).
* Course content is presented in multiple formats (e.g., video, text) (Tier 3).
* Content follows recommended best practices for accessibility (Tier 3).

Note: Accessibility practices include: images are described, videos are captioned and transcripts provided, documents are .pdf or .doc, documents use headings rather than manually-styled text, etc.

Observer comments:

### Course outline

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 3d 4b, 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a.

* A plan for the semester is provided and includes session topics, readings, and assignment due dates (Tier 1).
* The plan for the semester includes description of session work and active learning (Tier 2).
* Assignment due dates have not been scheduled on religious days of obligation (Tier 2).
* The plan for the semester includes specific instructional plans for each session with a lesson objective tied to the course learning objectives (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Student participation and engagement in course

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2g, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e, 4f, 5b, 5c, 6e.

* Syllabus establishes expectations that students’ communication, behavior, and participation are respectful, professional, and appropriate (Tier 1).
* Syllabus outlines expectation for inclusive behavior in the course (Tier 2).
* Syllabus provides course behavioral norms relevant to course learning objectives or indicates that the class will work together to compose course norms (Tier 2).
* Syllabus establishes expectations that students assume responsibility for their learning through active learning or experiential learning (Tier 2).
* Syllabus indicates students’ statements of fact should be based on facts from course materials or other credible sources, and appropriately cited during course discussions (Tier 3).
* Syllabus outlines opportunities for students to take leadership roles in the course or profession (Tier 3).
* Syllabus includes opportunities for students to add unique, discipline-based content to the course (Tier 3).
* Syllabus incorporates professional codes of ethics, USC student code of conduct ([SCampus Part B](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/)), and/or [USC code of ethics](http://policy.usc.edu/ethics/) (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Other course policies

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 1c, 1d, 2g, 3e, 4d, 4e, 6e.

* Syllabus specifies consequences for late assignment submission and missed classes (Tier 1).
* Syllabus includes a policy on use of electronic devices during class (Tier 1).
* Pre-requisite technical skills expected of the learner are clearly stated (Tier 1).
* Suitable technology requirements are clearly stated, and instructions provided (Tier 2).
* Technology requirements are clearly stated, and instructions provided (Tier 2).
* Required technology is attainable by students (Tier 2).
* Minimum technical skills required are clearly stated (Tier 2).
* Syllabus specifies consequences for academic integrity violations (Tier 3).

Note: Examples of prerequisite technology skills a student might need for a synchronous course are software, hardware, learning management systems, and web literacies.

Observer comments:

### Course and Instructor Evaluation

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1a, 1d, 2b, 2c, 2e, 3a, 3b, 5b, 7a, 7c.

* Syllabus explains end-of-semester university student course evaluation process (Tier 1).
* Syllabus explains end-of-semester university student course evaluation purpose and the importance of student engagement with the process (Tier 2).
* Student self- and/or peer-evaluation is planned (Tier 2).
* A mid-semester course evaluation is planned (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Context

Record pertinent characteristics of the course, student population, and physical environment. Examples: enrollment, student demographics, course LMS, class meeting time, and general-education status.