

# Writing course-specific policies

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A description of the process for writing or revising course-specific policies, and examples of communication, technology, and in-class work policies.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Work through the stepwise process for writing or revising course-specific policies in order to create policies using the lenses of specificity, consequence, and inclusivity. Consult sample policies for reference. For assistance, please contact [CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

Course-specific policies differ from university-wide and departmental policies in that instructors have authority to create them and no two instructors’ policies will be exactly the same. Wording for university policies and student support services are already found on the last page of the Curriculum Office’s Syllabus Template. Some of the most common course-specific policies that instructors will need to create and include in course syllabi are a communication policy, in-class work policy (attendance and participation), and technology policy.

### Process for writing/revising course specific policies

1. Before creating any course policy, check with your department or school on existing mandatory policies that may take precedence.
2. Consult the sample policies below for wording you may wish to incorporate into your own course-specific policy.
3. After drafting your policy, analyze it through the lenses of specificity, consequence, and inclusivity.
   1. Is the policy as specific as it can be?
   2. Is the consequence for not following the policy clearly stated?
   3. Does the policy unfairly burden or otherwise impact certain student populations more than others?
4. Ask a colleague to review your policy and incorporate relevant feedback into the final draft.
5. Before the course is taught again (not in the middle of a course), edit the course syllabus to reflect the new/revised policy.
6. Review the course-specific policies with students on the first day of class.

### Example before/after policy

Table Example before/after policy

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Existing Late Work Policy** | **Revised Late Work Policy**  **(with some improvements to specificity, consequence, and inclusivity)** |
| All work must be completed by the indicated deadlines. | Late work will be penalized by a 10% deduction in the assignment grade every 24 hours late unless due to an emergency situation excused by the instructor. Email the instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternate arrangements due to an emergency. |

### Sample policies

The following are samples of instructor-created, course-specific policies. They are certainly not perfect, and not all of them will work for you, your course, and your students. You may choose to use similar wording, or edit their wording, for your own course-specific policies.

### Communication policies

Communication policies are perhaps the most personal of all policies because instructors’ schedules affect their contact preferences.

* Students are encouraged to contact the instructor by USC email and during office hours. The instructor will reply to emails within 48 hours, 72 hours over a weekend, and the work day following a holiday. The instructor does not respond to questions during the 24 hours before an exam or assignment is due and may not respond to emails sent from non-USC accounts.
* To communicate with the instructor outside of class or office hours, email the instructor from your USC email account. In the subject line, indicate the course number and your full name. Simple questions will be answered by email, but for more complex discussions students may be instructed to visit office hours. Email will be answered within 24 hours.
* To promote independence and critical thinking, students are encouraged to work through the following process for obtaining answers to course-related questions before contacting the instructor. First, consult the course syllabus. If you do not find the answer you need, next consult a classmate. If you are still not satisfied with the answer, email your section TA. Finally, after you have exhausted these methods, email the instructor. In your email, please indicate the steps you have gone through to seek the answer. Your question will be answered within 24 hours between 9am-5pm, but response may be delayed on the weekend or holidays. Please use USC email for all correspondence with the section TA and instructor.

### In-class work policies

In-class work policies may be the most surprising as they replace participation and attendance altogether. In-class work is a record of both participation and attendance because it requires students to produce a small deliverable, or product, of their learning. Changing the participation policy to an in-class work policy has the added benefits of providing the instructor with formative feedback on a student’s progress and a tangible product on which to base an in-class work grade.

* Students will complete work assigned during class time, such as small group assignments, open-notes quizzes, and polls that count towards their in-class work grade. Credit will be given for thoughtful completion. The lowest two scores on in-class work will be dropped.
* As a record of active participation and attendance, the instructor may require the completion of small, in-class work products individually or in teams. For teamwork, all members will receive the same grade for the work product. The lowest four scores on in-class work will be dropped. In-class work may be assigned at any point during the class; students who miss the assignment due to arriving late or leaving early will not have an opportunity to make up the work.

### Technology policies

Technology policies, which specify when and how personal electronic devices may be used during class, are arguably the most varied from one instructor to the next. However, one item all technology policies should include is a Digital Equity statement explaining how students can acquire the hardware and software needed for the class if they do not have it. This might be as simple as referencing the procedure for how to check-out a loaner laptop from the library. Consider that your technology policy should not inadvertently identify students with a confidential accommodation from Disability Services and Programs, who are allowed to use devices in class even if others are not allowed to do so. When safety is a concern, such as in a laboratory, the use of personal devices may be prohibited.

* Students will be asked to leverage their devices for academic purposes only when indicated by the instructor. The instructor will provide at least 24 hours’ notice to students if they will need to bring devices to class for in-class work. Students who require devices when not indicated by the instructor should let the instructor know of their need privately. Students who require a laptop to complete in-class work can check one out through the Laptop Loaner Program. Students who use their devices at times not indicated by the instructor will be asked to put them away and receive a zero for their in-class work grade for the day.
* Students are required to bring an internet-enabled device with browser capabilities, such as a cell phone or a laptop to class. During class time, it is expected that students will use their devices only to participate in activities guided by the instructor. Use of devices for other purposes is not permitted during class time. If you require an internet-enabled device, the USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program - USC Information Technology Services provides loaner laptops at the general-use computing centers in King Hall, Ahmanson Information Commons at Leavey Library, and Waite Phillips Hall.
* This service is only available to currently enrolled USC students with a valid USCard. To check out a laptop, go to the service desk at an USC computing center and log into the laptop checkout webpage.
* Students are encouraged to use their personal devices for academic purposes during class. Academic purposes include looking up terms, doing research, and completing in-class work for this class. Please make sure devices are silenced so as not to disturb classmates. Students whose devices make noise during class, or are used for purposes others than those stated, will be asked to put them away and receive a zero for the in-class work grade for the day. Students who require a device to use for academic purposes should contact the program’s IT department at XXXX for a loaner device.
* Students are required to have the latest version of Excel installed on their laptops and bring laptops to every class session. Students who require a laptop to complete in-class work can check one out through the Laptop Loaner Program. Students who need assistance installing the latest version of Excel on their laptops should contact the program’s IT department at XXXX.
* Students may use their personal electronic devices during class sessions. Devices are permitted to the extent that they do not distract your attention, or the attention of your peers, from the lecture. It is up to the instructor’s judgement whether a device is distracting. If it is deemed distracting, you will be asked to put away your device for the remainder of the class session