

Communicating with Students about SAIL

Here are some notes I put in most of my current syllabi. (All SAIL.)

“Important: This is a Structured Active In-Class Learning (SAIL) course.

There is A GROUP ASSIGNMENT due at the end of each class, and you will have multiple videos and online exercises to complete every week before class that will help you to prepare for the class activities.”

For my larger intro-SAIL class, I include the following:

Modules and Module Exercises: There are 8 modules (~1/2weeks) which you will go through on your own, 1-3 exercises each week. The exercises have due dates and times. These will involve exercises, videos and other supporting information. The answers are shown for these exercises once the module assignment is closed. All aspects of this course are important for each student to complete. The videos are as important as attending an in-class lecture in a traditional class, but they don't stand in for coming to class, reading, thoughtfully going through all of your exercises, assignments, and discussions.”

I also send them the following letter and my first online module is explicitly and inclusively on how this class will be run and why.

Dear Students,

Welcome. I'm excited for our upcoming semester and hope that you are as well.

As soon as possible, please make sure to go through our Canvas site thoroughly. You will find very useful information in the Syllabus, Calendar (side panel of Canvas), and the Home Page.

Note that all materials in the Modules are designed to be done in sequence. Please do Module 0 as soon as possible.

A few important things to note: I have taught this course elsewhere since 2000 and at Penn off& on since 2006, and I absolutely love teaching this class. I now teach this course as a “Structured Active In-class Learning” (SAIL) class, meaning (for this course) that there are modules on Canvas to help you individually get the basics of the material at home before "class" (the building blocks of the Knowledge and Comprehension in the Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning [Links to an external site.](#)), and then we do group activities to get at higher order learning objectives together in class (continuing the Comprehension, but also moving on to Application, Analysis, Evaluation and Synthesis).

The idea is that you can get the basics on your own from reading the book, watching the module videos and reading the websites posted in the Modules, but it is much more useful and fun to tackle the higher order learning objectives together with the instructor and your peers in class.

I have had great success with this design for many years and so have the students (my assessments show students learn much more and find the class more enjoyable with this design) so I am thrilled to be able to offer this class for you.

This class is going to be awesome. Yes, you read that right—awesome! But if you're not up for an active learning experience, I encourage you to find another course. You will be expected to come to every class, take your exams at the scheduled times, and do online assignments weekly.

Please note all dates and times on the calendar and adjust your schedule accordingly.

QUESTIONS? Please ask in class or post all (non-personal) questions to the logistics discussion board, where I can answer the question just once, but all students can benefit from the answer. If you have a question, someone else probably does too. And feel free to help others by respectfully answering their questions on the boards. We're all here to learn together.

I will see you in class!

Cheers to a great semester. I am looking forward to it!

Jane Dmochowski, Ph.D. (she/her)

Additionally:

I list (some variation of) the following (in addition to course-specific content and skills) in my **Course Learning Objectives** in my classes (varies by course), and I periodically ask them at the end of assignments to list the Course Learning Objectives addressed in that assignment.

“Ability to work effectively with others.”

“Ability to clearly and concisely communicate the course material.”

“Ability to give constructive feedback to improve oral and written communication.”

“Develop active listening skills in order to provide thoughtful questions and answers.”