

# Higher-Ed Voice | Teacher's Road Map for Class

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## Why you need a syllabus and how to make one

By Jeanne Fornarola

Colleges across the country have distributed course syllabuses to their students at the beginning of each semester probably since Harvard opened its doors in 1636. A syllabus, whether on paper or online, serves as a road map for students, a blueprint for faculty members, and a guide for individual teachers to achieve the common goal of understanding and learning.

With the aid of a course syllabus, students will clearly understand the goals, expectations of the teacher, and most important, how both parties will achieve the desired outcome. A syllabus enables all members of the faculty team to understand the curriculum design of each class and define what needs to be taught at each level of learning in order to maintain a cohesive program. Finally, as a guide for the individual teacher, it serves several functions: It promotes pre-planning and the identification of benchmarks in a logical order that produce results.

Though commonplace in colleges and universities, a syllabus is used less frequently in the private dance studio setting. But an argument can be made that the reasons for using one are equally valid in a community school as on a college campus. Here's why.

By definition a syllabus is simply an outline of a course of study. That means that the distribution of a course outline can establish the first connecting point between parents and the dance classroom. In addition, it provides another learning tool for older students. Just as a newsletter communicates important times, dates, and studio information, a syllabus can inform students and parents of your goals, expectations, and procedures inside the dance studio.

By defining a few key words of "syllabus jargon," we can begin to develop a suitable document for use in the dance studio.

**Learning outcomes or achievement targets** describe what you want the students to be able to know and do after the instruction that they couldn't do before. Learning outcomes define content, procedure, and evaluation. They target exactly what is to be accomplished. They are the broadest goals.

**Objectives** are smaller in scale and focus on a particular skill. There might be more than one objective, but all of them must relate to the learning outcomes, which are the long-term goals. These objectives help guide the development of the content materials and the teaching methods

used. You can use objectives to make sure you reach your goals and insure that students understand what is expected of them in the studio classroom.

**Assessment** is the process of documenting progress, knowledge, and skills, often in measurable terms. In designing methods of assessment the teacher should keep in mind the desired learning outcomes of the individual and the student group.

**Course information** can include the days and times of classes and any specific directions such as sign-in or warm-up information. It should include any specific procedures that the students should be aware of.

The **course description** summarizes the content that will be taught at this level.

**Instructor information** gives details on how to get in touch with you. This can include instructions to call the studio and leave a message, how to contact you via email, or your available office times.

**Requirements** may include attendance policies and should be in conjunction with studio policy. Your dress code should be included, listing any specific requirements such as the types of tap or pointe shoes you want students at various levels to wear, as well as guidelines for which dancewear, jewelry, and hairstyles the studio permits.

The **course calendar** outlines the planned content. If you are ambitious, you can outline the general course flow week by week, including pertinent information such as music used or class time focus, to prepare both students and parents for a successful learning experience in your class.

The following is a sample studio syllabus for an intermediate ballet class.

Course title: Intermediate Ballet

Course description: A continuation of ballet technique and theory as taught in the Vaganova system. Class time focus is on the barre and center floor.

Instructor: Jeanne Fornarola

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Day: M/W: 6–7:30 p.m.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Through the course of the year, students will gain knowledge in ballet technique as performed at the intermediate student level. Students should be able to correctly execute exercises at the barre and center floor and be able to know and perform the eight body positions as taught in the Vaganova system of ballet. Additional class time emphasis will promote an awareness of ballet history, musicality, and artistry.

**Objective #1**

Class time emphasis will focus on the concepts of adagio and petit allegro. In adagio the concepts of line, core strength, and port de bras will be addressed in each class. Petit allegro will introduce beats focusing on height, stretched feet in the air, and articulate footwork.

**Objective #2**

A ballet dance will be choreographed utilizing all of the concepts identified above. This dance will be performed in the annual spring recital. Preparation and choreography will begin after the winter break.

**Requirements:**

Attendance policy: Students are expected to attend all classes. In the event that you are unable to attend a class, please call the studio office. The dress code for Intermediate Ballet for girls is pink tights, a black leotard, pink ballet slippers, and hair worn securely away from the face in a bun. Demi skirts may be worn. Boys must wear black tights, a white T-shirt, black ballet shoes, and a dance belt.

**Assessment**

A written evaluation of student progress will be distributed in December.

Parents may view class during observation week [give dates].

The final performance will assess the progress of both the class and the individual.

**Course Schedule**

**September–December 2008** (subject to change at the discretion of the instructor)

<b>Class Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Practice</b>
9/7, 9	Review course syllabus; discuss goals for the year. Introduction of gentle stretching, barre and center exercise to ease the class back into technique.	Stretch gently at home.
9/14, 16	Full barre: focus on fondu and développé. Introduce Pilates hundreds after barre to build core strength. Center adagio includes développé and fondu.	Practice doing Pilates hundreds each day.
9/21, 23	Full barre: focus on changement & royale facing the barre. Continue hundreds after the barre in each class. Center: introduce the 8 body positions with tendu; use changement and royale in petit allegro.	Go over body positions. Written quiz: 10/5 Practical test: 10/7
9/28, 30	Full barre. Introduce entrechat quatre facing the barre. Center: go over spelling of body positions on dry-erase board; drill	Read handout on Vaganova. Practice spelling body positions. Practice beating thighs in entrechat quatre.



	body positions; use entrechat quatre in petit allegro. Handout on Vaganova.	
10/5, 7	Written quiz on Mon.Practical on Wed.Shorter barre and center.	Stretch!
10/12, 14	Full barre: focus on line; work on penché. Center: incorporate body positions into adagio, include penché. Practice for lecture-demonstration/parents week.	Practice saying and demonstrating your part for Parents Week.Remind your parents about Parents Week.
10/19, 21	Parents WeekLecture-demonstration with full barre and center. Each student will introduce an exercise and explain its purpose.	Discuss the class with those who came to see you. What improvements did they notice?
10/28, 30	Focus: “scary” Halloween music for class. Discussion about composers (Bach, Brahms, and Mozart to start). Center: let students improvise and choreograph to <i>Carmina Burana</i> . Use pairs or trios if that suits the class. Present on Wed. after the barre.Recommended music:Bach: Toccata and Fugue in D minor Grieg: <i>In the Hall of the Mountain King</i> Brahms: Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 25Bartok: Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta (movement 3, adagio)Mozart: <i>Requiem</i> , “Dies Irae”Orff: <i>Carmina Burana</i> , “O Fortuna”  Ives: <i>Robert Browning</i> overture  Brahms: Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G minor  Webern: Variations Op. 27, “Ruhig fliessend”  Mussorgsky: <i>A Night on Bald Mountain</i>	Work on your improvised dance so that you don’t forget it for Wed.
11/2, 4	Introduction of the arabesque positions.Full barre: combine royale, entrechat quatre, and changement facing the barre. Center: allegro includes barre work. Drill arabesque positions.	Read and study handout on arabesque positions.Practice arabesque positions.
11/9, 11	Full barre: introduction of assemblé battu. Center: arabesque practical in groups facing away from the mirror.	Practice the arabesque positions for practical exam.Practice assemblé battu.
11/16, 18	Full barre and center: review all material as	Stretch.

	incorporated into barre and center combinations. Glissade assemblé battu down the room. Wed.: practical exam in groups facing away from the mirror.	
11/23 off for Thanksgiving on 11/25	Dance Dice! ( <a href="http://www.dancedice.com/index.html">www.dancedice.com/index.html</a> ) Roll the dice (each die has a ballet term), then put them together in the order they fall and see what happens! Discuss: Chance Dance and Merce Cunningham.	Happy Thanksgiving!
11/30, 12/3	Full barre: introduce entrechat trois facing the barre. Center: adagio—focus on port de bras; allegro—combining beats. Begin to learn Sugar Plum variation. Discuss the history of <i>The Nutcracker</i> .	Find the story of <i>The Nutcracker</i> online or in a book. Read it and try to remember details.
12/7, 9	Short barre using holiday music, e.g., <i>Christmas Music for Ballet Class (Vol. 2)</i> by Lynn Stanford. Center: “add on the story.” Instructor starts the story of <i>The Nutcracker</i> and each subsequent student adds the next part. (Did they read?) Watch selected variations, including Sugar Plum. Work on Sugar Plum variation. Wed. full barre; perform variation in the center. Parents invited to the end of class.	Listen to the entire score of <i>The Nutcracker</i> . Note your favorite musical moments.
12/21	Stretch class. Teach various stretch exercises that students can do over winter break to stay in shape. Work in partners; explain uses of various muscles and why certain exercises are important and helpful. Use relaxing holiday music.	Go to a production of <i>The Nutcracker</i> if possible. Or rent the video and watch the story come to life. Keep stretching! Happy holidays!

A note about quizzes and practical exams: Formal grading for the written quiz is not necessary. Corrections and words of encouragement work better in this situation. Re-test the students later.

For the practical, allow the students to perform in groups of three facing away from the mirror. There is safety in numbers! Written comments are always helpful.