

Learning From Course Outlines:

A Guide to University Learning



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WELCOME FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

- A Guide to University Learning introduces you to many facets of university learning such as course outlines, textbooks, lectures, studying and exams.
- Numerous learning tips and strategies are presented while you interact with content from a simulated Psychology course.
- For additional resources and support please visit [Learning Services](#)

STUDENT GUIDE:

Many students show up for class on the first day, collect a copy of the course outline, stick it in their binder, and never look at it again. However, course outlines are great resources and should be consulted throughout the duration of the course. Course outlines not only contain information about the structure of the course and its requirements, but also a number of important clues about what your instructor expects you to learn during the course, and how you will be expected to demonstrate that knowledge. Because they contain such valuable and necessary information, it is important to keep your course outlines in a safe place so they can be easily retrieved throughout the semester.

Staying "On Track"

The information contained in a course outline provides an excellent overview of how a course will flow throughout the semester. Frequently referring to your course outline can help you succeed academically by keeping you "on track."

Creating a Calendar

Course outlines list due dates for assignments, tests, and exams. At the beginning of the semester it can be useful to record all of the important dates (assignment due dates, tests) from each course outline into a time planner or calendar. You can choose a paper-based calendar/planner or an app that you access through your cellphone or laptop (e.g., U of G Gryph Calendar, Google Calendar). Digital calendars have numerous benefits including reminders, cut and paste editing, and multiple views (daily, weekly, and monthly).

Planning With Your Calendar

Setting up a calendar will allow you to view all of your due dates from all of your courses in one spot. This perspective is extremely useful in predicting how your workload and studying will need to flow through the semester. With a calendar, you can easily identify those times when you have several due dates or exams in close proximity. Seeing where due dates are clustered can help you start the semester on the right foot by planning ahead and allocating sufficient time for readings, studying, and completing assignments. Setting up a time plan and following through on it will help keep your workload more balanced and manageable throughout the semester. This helps you to maintain a sense of control over your workload when many assignments are due around the same time.

Staying "In the Know"

Course outlines are full of useful information that can answer a lot of questions and help boost your academic success.

Preventing Unwelcome Surprises

Having a good grasp of the information found in the course outline will keep you aware of all aspects of the course and prevent any surprises throughout the semester. One way to become familiar with the information in the course outline is to review it on a weekly basis. In addition, review the evaluation section before assignments, tests, and exams to double check dates and make sure you are satisfying all assessment requirements. You don't want to lose marks because you forgot to complete certain project requirements or you were unaware that a particular topic was on an exam.

Seeing the Big Picture

Frequently, professors will list a number of course objectives/outcomes in their course outlines. These can be very useful for students to "see the big picture" in a course. New students often have difficulty determining what content is important or why certain content is included. The objectives/outcomes describe the core knowledge and skills that the instructor wants students to demonstrate upon completion of the course. Review the objectives/outcomes to determine if you understand the core concepts of the course as they are presented. If you have difficulty with the content relating to an outcome, get help while it's still fresh in your mind. It's also beneficial to review the timetable section of the course outline on a weekly basis. This will keep you aware of current readings and will also help remind you of the content and how it is sequenced. The order that concepts are presented is a key aspect of the course's organization. Reviewing topics allows you to visualize how the course subject matter fits together, helping you to "see the big picture" of what your course is all about.

PRACTICE ACTIVITY

This activity will get you to start thinking of your course outlines as valuable resources. It will also get you to practise the skills necessary to utilize your course outlines effectively. A sample introductory Psychology course outline is used for the activity.

Instructions:

1. Read the course outline found in the Appendix at the end of this document.
2. Pull out all the information you think would help you to succeed in the course. Note or record this information in whatever format works best for you.
3. Browse the Course Outline Tips section below for suggestions on how best to deal with different aspects of course outlines.

Professor's Contact Information Tips

Tip 1:

Record the name and contact information for your professors and TAs in your planner and in the contact list of your email app. Most students don't carry around their course outlines, but they do carry their planner and cellphones every day. If you have recorded your professors' and TAs' contact information, you will be able to contact them easily when you have a question about your course.

Include in the Contact your professors' office locations - these may be found in different places in the course outline. If you use a paper planner, record all this information on one page along with your professor's office hours.

Tip 2:

Communicate with your professors in the manner that they specify. For example, some professors may require you to correspond through CourseLink, while others may request that you only send emails using your uoguelph account.

Office Hours Tips:

Tip 1:

Make use of office hours. These times are set aside by your professor and/or TA to answer questions outside of class time. Contrary to popular belief, a lot of your professors are more than happy to talk to you and answer your questions. In fact, many profs complain that no one ever comes to talk to them!

Tip 2:

Visit your profs or TAs well in advance of exams, when they will be much less busy and able to provide greater individual attention. Don't save up all your questions until the last week of classes.

Tip 3:

When you visit a professor during office hours, it is helpful to bring along a clearly-defined question or problem.

Course Website Tips:

Tip 1:

Most University of Guelph courses have their own website, accessed through [CourseLink](#). These sites often contain important information, including course resources such as lecture notes or PowerPoint slides, sample quizzes. CourseLink is often where you access your grades for assignments or tests.

Tip 2:

Make a note in your time planner at the beginning of each week to remind yourself that you need to visit the site to check the announcements and to print out the lecture notes for that week.

Tip 3:

Bookmark the CourseLink login page for easier access.

Class Location and Time Tips:

Tip 1:

Find the locations of buildings such as [War Memorial Hall](#) before classes begin. To see photos of what the buildings look like, use the [Campus Map Locator](#).

Tip 2:

If you're planning on using your laptop in class, check out the classroom first. War Mem, for example, is an older building with few electrical outlets and small flip-up desktops, so for classes there (and maybe elsewhere) you may want to keep your laptop at home.

Tip 3:

Note the classroom location. For some classrooms or lecture halls, it can be helpful to arrive a little early to get a seat where you can see and hear clearly.

Course Overview:

Tip 1:

The course overview gives you a short description of the topics to be covered in the course. Look at the Readings Schedule to find out when each topic will be discussed in class.

Tip 2:

An interactive lecture means that you should be prepared to ask, discuss, and answer questions in class. You will need to prepare ahead of time by completing the assigned readings and formulating any questions that you'd like to discuss in class. The same applies for classes with an online discussion forum.

Tip 3:

The professor wants you to know that this course will require a substantial amount of time and mental energy, perhaps more than in some other courses. You may need to plan additional study time each week for this course in order to be successful.

Teaching Assistant Tips:

Tip 1:

Contact information for your TAs is very important. This is doubly true in this particular course, where the TAs are solely responsible for the team research project. Chances are you'll have at least one question about the project during the semester, and TAs can be a little tougher to track down if they don't attend lectures. Make note of their office hours and location as well.

Required Text Tips:

Tip 1:

Note that two textbooks are required for the course. Sometimes texts are listed in course outlines as "Recommended." You don't need to buy recommended texts and may be better off borrowing them from the Library Reserve Desk if you're looking to save money.

Tip 2:

Guelph has two bookstores on campus, the [University Bookstore](#) and [Co-op Bookstore](#). Both carry new and (when available) used textbooks. Shop early for used textbooks since they cost less and are in high demand. Online bookstores (Amazon and Chapters) are another alternative, but check and compare prices. You may have to wait longer to receive your texts, but you may find cheaper prices.

Tip 3:

You could ask the prof if an earlier edition of the text would be acceptable as few changes are sometimes made from one edition to the next. Older editions are often much cheaper, but you may have to hunt for chapters that have been rearranged and renamed. Check thecannon.ca, an online community where Guelph students can buy and sell used textbooks.

Tip 4:

Ask the instructor where she/he recommends you purchase the required textbooks. Sometimes the instructor can give you some tips on best pricing and stock.

Tip 5:

Ask if the text is going to be placed on reserve. Books that are placed on reserve are kept at the Reserve Desk in the Library, where they can be signed out for two hours, and can't leave the Library. If you're short of textbook money, this system can be your wallet's best friend.

Evaluation Tips:

Tip 1:

Notice that the first exam represents the smallest portion of your evaluation in the course, while the other exams represent an increasingly higher percentages of your final mark in the course. This means that you can do fairly poorly on the first exam without crushing your chances for a good mark. By making the weighting of the exams uneven, your prof is hinting that she views the earlier exams as practice for the final.

Tip 2:

Many entering students don't do as well as they'd hoped on their first midterms or assignments. If this is the case for you, treat the midterm, or early tests or assignments as a learning experience and adjust your study strategies. Advice on studying effectively is available in the Library.

Tip 3:

Note that the weighting of the exams also reflects the relative quantities of material covered by each. Whereas the first exam (which is worth 15%) covers only 3 weeks of material, the second exam (which is worth 25%) covers about six weeks, and the final exam covers the whole course. If the exams are of equal length, the first exam will have to focus on a higher level of detail, as it covers less material. Conversely, the second exam covers more ground, so you'll have to know less about more.

Tip 5:

Notice that there is a period of about two weeks' worth of material which won't be covered by either of the first two exams, so you'll want to pay extra attention to this material for the final. Adjust your study strategies accordingly, matching the time spent on the material to the quantity of material, and matching both of those to the relative weighting of each exam.

Tip 6:

Note that it's practically impossible to get any mark above a B in this course without doing well on the research project. Since the project is due near the end of the semester, you'll want to make sure that your group gets a fair bit of work done during the semester, rather than leaving things to the last minute when group members will each have their own priorities, and will be thinking about studying for their finals.

Tip 7:

Mark the dates, times, and relative weightings of all exams and assignments in your time planner. Use these dates, along with the lecture schedule for the course, to develop a study schedule for the whole semester. Use the relative weightings to determine your priorities if you find that a number of your courses have tests or assignments at similar times.

In-Class Exams Tips:

Tip 1:

Note that all exams in the course are multiple choice. You need to adjust your study strategies to take this into account. For example, you might want to pay extra close attention to definitions of key terms and concepts.

Tip 2:

Note that "No marks are deducted for wrong answers." That means you can guess without penalty, which is good news. However, the key point to remember here is that demonstrating knowledge of course material is what gets you good marks. Being a good guesser will only get you so far on a multiple choice test.

Tip 3:

Try to find old exams or ask the professor to give you sample questions so you can see whether they emphasize isolated facts or require you to integrate a number of broad concepts in order to answer correctly.

Research Project Tips:

Tip 1:

Note that the research project is a group assignment. This means that you'll need to coordinate your work with the work of several other students, while each of you follows different schedules with different priorities.

Tip 2:

Record the class times that have been set aside for the group assignment in your time planner to stay on top of this project.

Tip 3:

During the class time set aside for the research project, you might want to try to convince your group members to spend that time coordinating the pieces of the assignment, saving any independent work for free time outside of class.

Final Exam Tips:

Tip 1:

Note that the final exam is cumulative, unlike the first two exams. This means you should spend time reviewing your errors on the first two exams to ensure that you don't make the same mistakes again.

Tip 2:

Prepare study notes which span the entire course, bringing together material from the first two sections with the material from the last two weeks of the course.

Readings Schedule Tips:

Tip 1:

In most course outlines, the Readings Schedule includes the lecture topics and the textbook readings that accompany them. Pay close attention to this information to stay on track throughout the semester.

Tip 2:

Make a note of each textbook reading in your time planner, combining them with the dates of exams, to form a study schedule for the course which covers the entire semester. When you get the rest of your course outlines, combine the study schedules for all your courses into one master schedule for the semester.

Tip 3:

When you refer to your Readings Schedule throughout the semester, glance over the entire schedule and not just the readings for one week. This will help provide an overview of the course and prompt you to think about how this week's topics are related to last week's.

COURSE OUTLINE TOP TEN TAKEAWAYS

1. Consult your course outlines regularly - they are helpful learning resources.
2. Keep your course outlines in a safe place so that they can be easily retrieved when needed.
3. Check the assessment sections before due dates to ensure you've met all requirements.
4. Record your test and assignment dates from all of your course outlines onto a calendar.
5. Review the course objectives on a weekly basis to help you recall the content and see the big picture.
6. Record all contact information for profs and TAs in a time planner and/or cellphone app so it's readily available.
7. Make use of your professor and TA office hours. Visit well in advance of exams and, if possible, bring a clearly-defined problem.
8. Visit the course website frequently to download notes and to read announcements.
9. Purchase new or used textbooks from the University Bookstore, Co-op Bookstore, or online. Some texts are also placed on reserve in the Library.
10. Prioritize your study time according to how much exams and assignments are worth.

Appendix: Course Outline

PSYC 1001 - Introductory Psychology (Simulated Course)

Professor:

Sheldene Simola, Ph.D.

Office:

MacKinnon 502

Email:

myprofessor@uoguelph.ca

Office Hours:

- *Immediately after class.*
Advise me class if you wish to meet with me, and I will meet with you back at my office.
- *Tuesdays 5:30 to 6:30*
This time coincides with a time at which fewer classes are scheduled, in order to be accessible to as many students as possible.

Course Website:

- On Desire2Learn:
 - Go to the University of Guelph home page at www.uoguelph.ca
 - Click on "STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF LOGIN"
 - After logging in, click on the CourseLink box under "Tools"
 - Contains: Course Outline, Class Announcements (check these often for important updates), Lecture Notes, Online access to grades -Links to online resources

Class Location & Time:

- Location: War Memorial Hall
- Time: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 2:20
- You must attend class on every Tuesday and every Thursday of the term. The only exceptions to this schedule are as follows: On Thursday October 19, Thursday October 27, and Thursday November 2 **only**, you may use the class time in order to work with your research team on your team research project. Do NOT skip other Thursday classes, or you will miss exams or the research team peer ratings process, and receive grades of zero.

Course Overview:

- This course examines behaviour using the tools of experimental (i.e. scientific) psychology. The course will consider how we sense, perceive, learn about, think about, and remember the world around us. We will also consider the complex topics of emotions and motivation. The lectures are designed to be interactive, so please feel free to contribute your ideas and ask questions.
- **Important Note:**
This is a challenging course. It requires a significant time commitment, and will follow the evaluation procedures specified in this outline.

Teaching Assistant:

You will be assigned one of the following Teaching Assistants:

- Mary McTa mmcta@uoguelph.ca
- Ian O'Ta iota@uoguelph.ca
- Jane Smartypants jsmartypants@uoguelph.ca
- Lucy Starvinggradstudent lstarving@uoguelph.ca

Please direct all of your questions regarding the team research project to the TA to whom you have been assigned.

Required Texts:

The course requires the following two texts:

- Eccles, Ryan (2003) Psychology 5th Ed. Oxford University Press
- Kay, Rachael (2003) Study Guide for Psychology 5th Ed. Oxford U.P.

The texts are bound and sold together in the University Bookstore.

Evaluation:

Type	Worth	Due Date
In Class Exam #1	15%	on Thurs. Oct. 5 in class
In Class Exam #2	25%	on Thurs. Nov. 16 in class
Research Project	20%	due on Thurs. Nov. 23 in class
Final Exam	40%	on Thurs. Dec. 14 at 11:30

Table 1: Evaluation Scheme with Mark Breakdowns and Due Dates

In-Class Exams:

- Closed book tests
- Will be multiple choice in format
- Occur during regularly scheduled classes on **Thurs. Oct. 5** and **Thurs. Nov. 16**
- The first exam covers weeks 1 to 3; the second exam covers weeks 4 to 9
- Credit is given for correct answers
- No marks are deducted for incorrect answers

Research Project:

- This is a group project, and a good way to raise your grade in the course. Take it seriously.
- Facilitated by the graduate teaching assistants during the Thursday afternoon classes.
- Designed to teach participants how to identify, research, and use scholarly journals, and to encourage critical thinking and analysis
- Occurs during the Thursday afternoon class each week
- During weeks 1 to 5, your graduate teaching assistants will meet with the class to organize the project and coach students on research skills
- On three Thursdays only, you are not required to attend class. Rather, you may use those weeks to work with your team on your research projects. The days allotted as research time include Thurs. Oct. 19, Thurs. Oct. 26, and Thurs. Nov. 3.
- Do NOT skip other Thursday classes, as you will miss the exams, or the peer evaluations of research, and will receive a zero for missing them
- Specific details regarding the projects/grading will be provided by the graduate TAs

Final Exam:

- Occurs during the final exam period. The final exam is scheduled by the Registrar for **Thurs. Dec. 14 at 11:30**
- Is cumulative (includes material from entire term)
- Will be multiple choice in format
- Credit is given for correct answers
- No marks are deducted for incorrect answers

Readings Schedule:

WEEK of	TOPIC	Required or Optional Prep	Required or Optional Hand-In
Sept. 11	History of Psychology	R: Eccles Ch. 1	
Sept. 18	Research Methods and Statistics	R: Eccles Ch 2, Appendix A	
Sept. 25	Continued		
Oct. 2	Behavioural Neuroscience	R: Eccles Ch. 3	R: First Exam Thurs. Oct. 5
Oct. 9	Sensation and Perception	R: Eccles Ch. 5	
Oct. 16	Consciousness	R: Eccles Ch. 6	
Oct. 23	Memory	R: Eccles Ch. 8	
Oct. 30	Learning	R: Eccles Ch. 7	
Nov.6	Continued		
Nov. 13	Thinking and Language	R: Eccles Ch. 9	R: Second Exam Thurs. Nov. 16
Nov. 20	Motivation	R: Eccles Ch. 11	
Nov. 27	Emotion	R: Eccles Ch. 12	R: Group Research Projects due in class Thurs. Nov. 23

Table 2: Weekly Timetable of Topics, Readings, Exams