

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 & exams.
- Numerous learning tips & strategies are presented, while you interact with content from a simulated Psychology Course.
- For additional resources & 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 then 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 beneficial to record all of the important dates (assignment dates, test dates) from each course outline into a time planner or calendar. You can choose a paper-based calendar/planner or one that is digitally accessed through a computer (e.g., U of G Gryph Calendar, Google Calendar). Digital calendars have numerous benefits including reminders, cut and paste editing, easy to read digital text, as well as 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 the semester will flow with regards to workload and studying. Using your calendar, you will easily be able to identify those times when you have many due dates or exams in close proximity. Understanding how the due dates relate to one another can help you start the semester in an efficient manner. You can begin the semester 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 will help prevent feelings of being overwhelmed when many projects are due at the same time.

Staying 'In the Know'

Course outlines are full of useful information that can answer a lot of questions and help foster academic success. Examining the information in the course outline throughout the term will help keep you 'in the know'.

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. Try to review the evaluation section before assignments, tests, and exams to double check dates and make sure you are satisfying all assessment requirements. You do not want to lose marks because you forgot to complete certain project requirements or you were unaware that a particular topic was to be studied for an exam.

Seeing the Big Picture

Frequently, professors will list a number of course objectives/outcomes in their course outlines. These objectives can be very useful for students to 'see the big picture', as 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 believes students should be able to demonstrate upon completion of the course. Review the objectives to determine if you feel comfortable with the core concepts of the course as they are presented. If you have difficulty with the content relating to an objective after it has been presented, seek help while it is still fresh in your mind. It is also beneficial to review the entire timetable section of the course outline on a weekly basis. This will keep you aware of current readings and it will help refresh the content and sequencing of content in the course. Reviewing class topics will help you conceptualize how the course subject matter fits together and it will aid you with recall when studying for tests and exams.

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.
2. From the course outline, pull out all the information you think would help you to succeed in the course. Note or record this information in the manner that you feel would be most helpful to you.
3. Read the Course Outline Tips section that follows these instructions to reveal suggestions on how best to deal with the content found in that section of the outline.

Professor's Contact Info Tips:

Tip 1:

Record the name and contact information for your professor in your planner. Most students don't carry around their course outlines throughout the semester, but they do carry their planner every day. If you have recorded your professor's contact information, you will be able to contact them easily when you have a question about your course.

Tip 2:

Record your professor's email address into your contacts / address book in your email application (i.e. Outlook, Gryph Mail, Gmail). Emails can then be sent more quickly as you won't have to look up the addresses. To stay organized, create an "Instructors" folder in your email application for all your professor addresses.

Tip 3:

Ensure to communicate with your professors in the manner that they specify. For example, some professors may require you to correspond through the Desire2Learn course website 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 prof to answer questions outside of class time. Contrary to popular belief, a lot of your professors will be more than happy to talk to you and answer your questions about your courses. In fact, many profs complain that no one ever comes to talk to them!

Tip 2:

Try to make use of office hours well in advance of exams, when your professors will be much less busy and you're likely to get greater individual attention.

Tip 3:

When you visit a professor during office hours, it helps if you bring along a clearly-defined question or problem. Don't save up all your questions until the last week of classes.

Tip 4:

Make a separate note of the professor's office hours, and include the location of the professor's office location in the note, since those two pieces of information are found in two different places on the course outline. Put this information on a page in your time planner with the office hours of all your professors and TAs.

Course Website Tips:

Tip 1:

Most University of Guelph courses have their own website, accessed through [Desire2Learn](#). These sites often contain important information, including course resources such as lecture notes or PowerPoint slides, sample quizzes, and often 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 course login page in your web browser for easier access.

Class Location and Time Tips:

Tip 1:

To find the locations of buildings such as [War Memorial Hall](#) and 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 most classes, check out the classroom first. War Mem is an older building with few electrical outlets and small flip-up desktops, so you may want to keep your laptop at home.

Tip 3:

Note the classroom location. Because the class is in War Memorial Hall you'll need to arrive a little early to get a good seat (War Memorial Hall is a rather long lecture theatre, and acoustics can be a little poor if the instructor is quiet and doesn't use a microphone).

Tip 4:

Note the days of the week that this course occurs. Because this course is on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you won't miss any lectures due to statutory holidays (Thanksgiving). If your classes fall on a religious holiday, notify your professor early in the semester that you will miss class.

Tip 5:

Make note of the three exceptions to the regular schedule. Record these exceptions in your time planner.

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 get ready ahead of time by completing the assigned readings and formulating any questions that you'd like to discuss in class.

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. Make sure you plan some 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 get a hold of if they don't attend lectures.

Tip 2:

Make a note of the TA to whom you were assigned. Record the TA's contact info in your time planner beside the contact info for the course professor. Include the email address of the TA with your contacts in your email application (e.g. Outlook, Gryph, Gmail).

Required Text Tips:

Tip 1:

Note that 2 textbooks are required for the course. Because they are both required you are going to need both of them. Sometimes texts are listed in course outlines as "Recommended". You do not need to buy recommended texts and may be better off borrowing them from the library reserve desk, or from a friend who bought them if you're looking to save money.

Tip 2:

Two bookstores are found 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. 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 a period of 2 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 exams represent increasingly higher percentages of your final mark in the course, while the first exam represents the smallest portion of your evaluation in the whole course.

Tip 2:

Note that you can do fairly poorly on the first exam without crushing your chances for a good mark in this course. By making the weighting of the exams uneven, your prof is hinting that she views the earlier exams as practice for the final.

Tip 3:

Many entering students don't do as well as they'd hoped on their first midterms or assignments. If you don't do as well as you'd like, treat the midterm or assignment as a learning experience and adjust your study strategies.

Tip 4:

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' worth 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 2 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. You'll want to 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. This means you might want 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 the 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 will be trying 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 that was set aside for this research project, you might want to try to convince your group members to spend that time coordinating the individual 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 performance on the first two exams to ensure that you don't make the same mistakes twice.

Tip 2:

Try to 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. You will need to pay close attention to this information if you want 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 others.

COURSE OUTLINE TOP TEN TAKEAWAYS

1. Course outlines are helpful learning resources and should be consulted on a regular basis.
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 course planner and/or email application so it is readily available.
7. Make use of the professor's 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. You can purchase new or used textbooks from the University Bookstore, Co-op Bookstore, or online. Some texts are also placed on library reserve.
10. Knowing how much exams and assignments are worth can help you prioritize your study time.

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 at 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 no classes are scheduled, in order to be accessible to all.

Course Website:

- On Desire2Learn:
 - Go to the University of Guelph home page www.uoguelph.ca
 - Under Web Tools, click on Courselink
 - This will bring you to the login page
 - Login using your login ID & password (use the same login ID & password as you would use to check your uoguelph email)
 - 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 & 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, & use scholarly journals; & to encourage critical thinking & 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, & 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