

Developing Course Attendance and Grading Policies

Stockton University's [course attendance policy](#) expects students to attend all class sessions and/or engage in online course interaction as described in applicable University procedures including [Procedure 2030](#). Faculty members retain the right and the responsibility to clarify their specific course attendance policy. Students should be provided with a clear written statement outlining expected course attendance and attendance grading in the course syllabus. Further discussion regarding your attendance expectations and grading related to attendance should occur at the start of the course. In some cases, programs, schools, or accrediting bodies provide additional guidance on policies and grading related to attendance and class participation. To support students equitably, it is important to consider the implications of your course's attendance grading policies on various student populations.

This document is designed to help you as a course instructor consider attendance policy and grading that addresses course, student, faculty, and institutional needs. Information is provided as guidance and is not an exhaustive list of options. There are a variety of creative attendance policies and grading options available including mixing elements of the different approaches to obtain the right fit for your course.

The [CTLD sample syllabus](#) is available to help you create a syllabus responsive to current best practices. You may [consult with CTLD staff](#) to get assistance in creating your attendance policy or for any other pedagogical issue. A January 2022 [article](#) in the Chronicle of Higher Education outlines some of the foundational issues to consider when developing a course attendance policy.

Faculty Considerations Related to Attendance

Faculty can [encourage student attendance](#) by establishing clear expectations about attendance and explaining why course attendance is important in alignment with your course design and teaching methods. It is useful to provide students with [engaging class activities](#) during each class session. In addition to lecturing, have students work on solving problems related to course content, engage in discussions about the assigned readings, take a low stakes quiz, participate in polling to check understanding of concepts, or provide feedback on the course material and course structure. Make sure attendance matters and is valued by students. You may consider having students from previous classes write about the benefits of attending class and share that information with current students.

To increase accountability and trust related to attendance expectations, work with students collaboratively to determine course expectations. Be sure to foster a supportive course climate where all students feel safe and welcome. Make sure students understand your commitment to their success. Contact students as soon as possible after an absence without notification to show that attendance matters to you.

A syllabus statement regarding attendance must include accommodations for disabilities, religious holidays, participation in university events, death in the family, and other life circumstances that impact student attendance. There are special legal protections for students who are [pregnant](#) or on [active duty in the military](#). Additionally, awareness of health and safety issues has increased awareness that people should not attend an in-person class when experiencing symptoms of a transmissible illness.

In special circumstances, students may require support through an excused extended absence from in-person learning. Stockton's classroom technology permits students to join class remotely. Faculty may consider [additional options](#) to assist students learn during an extended absence. It is important to clearly communicate the extended absence plan so a student is certain what is expected and knows the level of support peers or faculty will provide during the extended absence.

Should I Create a Stringent or Flexible Attendance Policy?

There are a variety of views regarding the merits of creating stringent or flexible attendance policies.

The following views are expressed in favor of having a more stringent attendance policy:

- Attendance is required for students to learn the course material and obtain a passing grade.
- Attendance policies prepare students for careers and promote professionalism.
- Students must attend class to engage in learning activities and contribute their perspectives to class discussion or other group work.
- A student's absence negatively impacts other students' learning experiences by limiting peer learning opportunities and discussion opinions.
- Some students need a form of accountability (attendance grade) to attend class, or an accrediting body has rules related to attendance or seat time.

Views expressed supporting a more flexible attendance policy include:

- A student missing class will likely perform poorly on course assessments (lower grades). Grading penalties for absences further penalizes the student.
- Students need to be responsible for managing their time and showing up for class. It is their responsibility as an adult to manage attendance.
- Requiring an unmotivated student to attend class may impact other students negatively. The student may lower the quality and learning in class discussions and activities.
- If a student can learn course material without coming to class, requiring course attendance is not necessary.

Which view resonates with you and supports the student learning outcomes for your course? Engagement and learning should be considered a priority as opposed to having students attend class for the sake of meeting a specific attendance policy. Additional information necessary for developing your course attendance policy and determining if you will or will not assign a grade

for attendance or participation is discussed below. In addition to class attendance, faculty may want to add information about late arrivals or leaving early in their course attendance policy.

Should I Request Documentation for a Student Absence?

Some faculty state in an attendance policy that documentation is required for an absence to be excused. **Faculty may not request or receive medical documentation directly.** All medical documentation should be handled through the Student Health Services / [Stockton Cares program](#) to comply with privacy legislation. Students may complete this [form](#) to notify faculty of a medically necessary absence. Consider that requesting medical documentation may create a difficult burden on students. It may not be appropriate to assume all students have access to health care services or need to see a medical provider. For example, students may have a respiratory illness or experience a migraine and not require medical attention. A policy requesting documentation potentially burdens a student to make a medically unnecessary trip that may be expensive or difficult for a student that relies on public transportation. Requiring documentation could result in more students coming to class when sick.

As an alternative to required documentation, an absence may be considered excused if the student contacts the instructor. Faculty should provide clear instructions on acceptable methods for contacting the instructor (email, phone call, text message) and note that students should provide this notification as soon as possible (at least 1 hour prior to class) except in certain emergency circumstances (i.e. a car accident) when notification may be delayed and provided after the class session. This approach is more flexible compared to requiring documentation. However, there are students that may find contacting the instructor to be burdensome and end up losing attendance points if the absence is not excused. Likewise, some students may end up falling behind or getting lower grades because they use too many excused absences.

Another type of policy permits a specific number of allowed absences with no documentation or notification required. An attendance policy is more equitable if faculty do not attempt to judge the worthiness of the excuse for an absence. This approach allocates a set number of absences based on knowing the level of attendance needed to succeed in your course. Explain to students that missing any class will require the student to work with classmates to review the course activities that were missed. Be explicit in explaining your expectations of what students must do to catch up on missed class work. A common approach for a class that meets twice a week is to provide two excused or flexible absences (one week of class) or in a class that meets three times a week up to three absences (one week of class) are permitted without any penalty or excuse required. This policy is easy to implement and avoids faculty having to determine if an absence is excused or unexcused. Recognizing this approach provides flexibility, it is important to note that the number of allowed absences may not be sufficient for students in certain situations, which can lead to students being penalized for being sick for an extended period or having special family or work obligations.

This syllabus statement may be used for the policy outlined above: Attendance and participation are critical to your success in this course. Two absences are considered excused for the semester without any documentation or specified reason for the absence. You are expected to notify the instructor by email prior to being absent or as soon as practical. You will contact classmates to obtain content

covered during the missed class session and are responsible for the completion of any missed in class assignments within one week of the absence. Completion of missed work should be submitted on Blackboard.

Should Attendance be Graded?

One of the most common types of policies for attendance grading is factoring attendance into the final grade. This approach is easy to implement in a variety of situations. Typically, all students are provided with a specific number of excused absences during the semester. Faculty take attendance (may use the [Bb attendance tool](#)) and are not burdened with determining if an absence is excused or unexcused. If students exceed the number of allowed excused absences, the final grade is lowered in a manner specified in the faculty's attendance policy. Some faculty lower the letter grade (an A becomes a B or A- or B+) or faculty deduct a certain number of points from the final grade for each absence beyond the allowed number of excused absences (lose 2 points from final grade for each class missed beyond allowed number of excused absences which do not result in a point deduction). However, students encountering an unexpected emergency situation may need flexibility beyond what is described in the policy. Be certain to consider special protection for students who are [pregnant](#) or on [active military duty](#).

This syllabus statement may be modified to address the policy outlined above: If you miss more than two class sessions, the final course grade will be lowered by one grade (cumulative grade earned on assignments is a B but will be lowered to a C). It is understood that in an unforeseen emergency that is clearly communicated to the instructor in a timely manner, the instructor may choose to not impose the lowering of the final course grade. As written, this statement represents a very stringent approach and should only be used when course attendance is mandated by accreditation or vital to student success. Students who missed class and performed poorly on graded assignments are additionally penalized with this approach. Faculty may choose not to lower by a full grade unless course absence was excessive.

Another approach to grading attendance is to have an attendance grade that represents a specific percentage of the final grade for the course. For example, attendance is worth 10 points or 10% of the final grade of 100 points. After 3 excused/provided absences, students lose 2 points for each additional absence. If a student misses a total of 8 classes (3 excused and 5 additional absences), the student's attendance grade is 0. If course attendance is a significant aspect of course learning, faculty may increase the number of points/percentages allotted to attendance and adjust the grading to fit the level of attendance required for students' success in the course.

This syllabus statement may be modified to address the policy outlined above: Much of the learning in this course comes from our discussions and class activities. The assigned readings are designed to prepare you for learning that occurs in our discussions. Attendance and participation in our class sessions is important. You may miss up to three class sessions for any reason with no penalty. Beyond these

three, each absence will lower your attendance grade by two points unless we have negotiated an agreement in advance for a specific issue such as a medical condition. You are responsible for making up missed work and reviewing materials from any missed class by working with your peers. In-class work missed due to an absence must be submitted within one week of the absence on Blackboard to receive credit for the activity. An absence does not excuse late submission of other graded assignments.

Some faculty choose not to grade attendance and instead have a participation grade in their policy that relies on students completing in-class activities that earn the students points for a participation grade (or pass/fail grading of the activities). Some faculty have a participation activity as part of each class or select a specific number of class sessions with participation activities. This type of policy supports student engagement or learning and is not limited to being in class. If provided with an opportunity to complete learning activities outside of class for students who are absent, this policy encourages learning while providing flexibility. A flexible approach might also allow students to drop the lowest score for a participation grade activity before calculating the final grade. This approach may require more faculty time depending on the type of assignments and the handling of make-up opportunities for students who miss class. Like an attendance grade, faculty should consider a fair number of in-class activities that will result in a participation grade. Some faculty use completion of a set number of participation activities as extra credit and the activities are not calculated as a percentage of the final grade.

This syllabus statement may be modified to address the policy outlined above:
Each class provides you with important review activities such as a short quiz or activity to reinforce learning. If you participate in all class activities, you will receive extra credit of 5 points added to the final course grade. If you are present for at least 75% of the class activities (not meeting 100%), you will receive extra credit of 3 points added to the final course grade. If you participate in less than 75% of the course activities, you will not receive any extra credit although participation in the activities will be beneficial to your learning. Faculty may choose to have activities at the start of class if lateness is an issue or at the end of class if students are leaving early or vary activities based on course content.

A more personalized approach to address attendance issues includes meeting with faculty after a specified number of excused absences. In this approach, students are required to attend a meeting with the course faculty if the student is absent more than the specified number of excused absences. In the meeting, the student may discuss reasons for any absences and in response, the faculty member may suggest resources to develop a plan to promote student success. This approach may or may not be paired with a grade penalty.

This policy is designed to assist students in recognizing support is available to meet their needs. Faculty may make referrals to Academic Advising, Cares, Learning Access Program, or other appropriate services. This type of policy works best for relatively small courses or program cohorts but could be adapted to other situations.

Some faculty choose an approach that provides flexibility for students that need it, but also removes accountability for students coming to class. If your course is designed with learning

activities and content dissemination occurring in class, students will miss valuable learning opportunities if there is no attendance expectations. This approach is likely to result in lower final grades and student disengagement. If students can easily pass a course without attending class, it may be worth exploring a different course modality that aligns to self-directed learning.

This syllabus statement may be modified to address the policy outlined above:
In this course, you are an important member of our learning community. This course offers many opportunities to engage directly with your peers. To maximize our learning experience, I expect that everyone attends class, shows up on time, and is mindfully present. Being active, engaged, and respectful will provide everyone with a beneficial learning experience. Attendance is recorded for this class but will not penalize students by decreasing the course grade due to absences. Excessive absences may impact your financial aid.

Regardless of the grading approach to attendance/participation, faculty must consider if absences or missed activities may be made up by remote participation or submission of missed work. With a focus on learning and engagement, providing opportunities to engage with content missed during an absence helps promote student success. Faculty have the responsibility to clearly communicate an attendance policy to students and clarify if attendance is or is not graded for the course.

How Should I Grade Attendance in Online Courses?

Asynchronous online courses will benefit from having policies like those described for in-person class experiences. The main difference is that an online course does not require physical attendance but relies on student engagement with course materials. Faculty may monitor student engagement using [Blackboard Student Activity Details](#).

This syllabus statement may be modified for an online course: *While an online course does not require physical attendance, active engagement and participation is necessary to successfully meet the learning outcomes. You are expected to login to our Blackboard course at least three times per week, participate in course discussions, and complete assignments by the due date. The instructor will use Blackboard analytics to verify your logins and interactions with course materials. Students completing work and engaging with course materials at least three times per week will receive an attendance grade of 100. Students with lower levels of participation in a week will receive a point deduction of 7 points on the attendance grade for each week when participation and logins are deficient.*

The [CTLD sample syllabus](#) is designed specifically for online courses. You may also [consult with CTLD staff](#) to get assistance in creating your attendance policy or for any other pedagogical issue.