

**Instructor Survival Tips**  
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**Policies/Class Management**

- Start slightly more restrictively than you think you should. You can always get nicer as the semester goes on, but you can't get tougher.
- If you make a policy exception for one student, expect that others will hear about it and will want the same thing.
- Decide ahead of time which policies are flexible and which are not.
- Be able to defend/explain why you are not flexible on certain issues

**Syllabus**

- Binding contract – no surprises. List all deadlines and assignments.
- Other points to ponder include:
  - Attendance/participation
    - When you do participation, is it worth it to you? You need to explain your policy. Is just showing up enough?
  - Make ups/late work
    - For example, you may have a late policy that takes off big points up front and also has a drop dead time. (For example, 10 pts off each day and no submissions accepted more than 3 days late) or you can choose to not accept late work at all, with reasonable exceptions.
  - Extra credit
    - If you offer it to one student, you must offer to all.
  - Grading Scale
    - C- is not a passing grade.

**Assignments**

- Resist the urge to assign too many papers or projects. Never give more than you can comfortably grade.
- Have big assignments due slightly earlier than the end of the term
  - Students are less likely to do a good job at that the end of the term because they are overwhelmed
  - Poorly executed assignments are no fun to grade
- Put all assignments in writing. Creating rubrics is time consuming upfront but will save hours in grading and will back you up in case of grading issues.
- Consider staggering the grading of written work. Think about not having everything due at once, but perhaps instead of 45 papers to grade in a week, six or seven due each week might be more manageable. Some assignments can be formative and don't need grading. Think about peer review, but give them guidance.

## **Blackboard**

- Use Blackboard for assignments because it creates a paper trail and eliminates any “I handed it in, you must have lost it!” issues. If you don’t feel comfortable with Blackboard it’s probably worth your time to take a class from IT training; they are amazing and teach a lot in two hours. You can have students turn in hard copies of assignments in addition to submitting on-line if you prefer to grade that way.
- Think about posting class notes. Definitely post assignments and rubrics.

## **Communicating with Students**

- Remind them you can only respond to emails from their official GMU email address.
- The barriers to students contacting you are low – they just have to send an email (not like the old days where they had to come to office hours!) – so you need to guard your time. Set deadlines, for example – state that you will read drafts/answer questions on assignments up until 48 hours before they’re due, but not after that.
- Set expectations of what your response time is. They will expect immediate 24/7 response time. If you say 24 hours, you should be prepared to respond that quickly. If 48 hours is more reasonable, then state that. If you don’t read email on weekends, let students know.
- Set expectations regarding your schedule, too. If you will be away on travel, let them know so that they are not constantly emailing you.

## **Emergencies/Inclement Weather/Missing Classes**

- If you will be commuting to campus during rush hour/after work be sure to have a game plan for the inevitable day there is an accident on 66 and you’re going to be 30 minutes late. Your department may have a contact person or consider listing your cell phone number with strict instructions on how and when to use. For example if you are more than 10 minutes late to class, someone can call. If you do not want them regularly contacting you using your cell, be sure to state that as well.
- Email the class your plan if class is cancelled due to bad weather. You can do on-line assignments or narrated powerpoints to keep from falling behind. Make up classes are very hard to schedule.
- Find another instructor who teaches in your subject area so that you might be able to substitute for each other or guest lecture. That way material is covered and students benefit from a different perspective.