



*The aim of “blueprinting a course” is to uncover the organizational logic-- the **design** of the course curriculum-- in order to diagram it and create a study or learning tool. As a student you want to tap into and use the professor’s design of the course curriculum to get in synch with their conceptualization of the field you are studying and their pathway (‘course’) through it. This shared understanding in the form of a mental map will help you learn and organize your knowledge efficiently and effectively. In college, professors often do not always make this design apparent yet students benefit from knowing it, and using their understanding of the big picture of the course themes and topics to guide their reading, note taking, studying and exam prep with relatively guidance. Learning to think like your professor about course subject matter is one way we become experts in the field, while learning to think about the course as a whole is one way we become expert learners.*

Steps to Creating a Blueprint

1. Do a close reading of the syllabus as a whole, including annotating it, circling key ideas, drawing lines to connect related parts etc. Critically read the course description (the one paragraph blurb) to identify your professor’s goals and objectives. Also, listen carefully for this information in the first-class meetings—course goals will drive every decision of your instructor and all aspects of the class.
2. In the syllabus blurb, identify the main concepts, topics and themes--as well as their relationships to one another--of the course and then cross-reference your understanding with the weekly schedule of topics, readings, and assignments. These should say basically the same thing: think of the blurb as the “preface” to the course and the weekly schedule of topics and readings as the “table of contents” of the course. As you analyze the syllabus look for an overarching organizational structure of the course content: does it follow a chronological sequence; is it comparative; is it organized hierarchically (from lesser to greater complexity or vice versa); is it advancing a thesis, supporting it with evidence, and drawing a conclusion?
3. Diagram (“blueprint”) the connections among the course concepts, topics and themes. Try to create a skeleton or framework around which you will build your knowledge of course topics. This physical and mental representation provides the basic mental “architecture” around which you build more detailed knowledge. If possible, create a chart, table or matrix (which are easy to manipulate on a computer) to organize course content from various sources. You can fill in notes as the course progresses.
4. Use your course blueprint to set a clear purpose for reading and annotation, to focus your listening and note-taking, for anticipating writing prompts and exam questions, for creating an efficient study tool and for generating questions to ask of instructors and fellow students.

A course “blueprint” guides the construction of your knowledge from the information the professor assembles in the course much as a blueprint of, say, a bridge, guides the construction by the engineers and workers to achieve the vision of the architect. This tool helps get you in synch with the course designer.