

Syllabus Design

The design of a syllabus often betrays the underlying theory of language and learning that the syllabus writers hold. For example, if a syllabus lists only structural items to be taught, it shows that the writers believe that language is structurally based and that learning requires the ability to use structures, grammar and other formal linguistic items successfully.

Nunan (1988:52) points out, in a centrally important text in this area, "*the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology has become blurred*". This is because more recently devised syllabus types clearly require the application of certain types of methodology to deliver the content. A task-based syllabus, for example, demands the application of a task-based teaching approach. Here's a list:

Syllabus	Description	Typical content
Structural	A 'traditional' syllabus, listing formal language items to be learned. The ordering of items usually depends on a judgement concerning their complexity rather than communicative utility. Simple forms are handled first, more complex ones later.	Such a syllabus will usually contain lists of grammar, lexis and phonological features to be covered. For example, First conditional, Gerunds after verbs, <i>going to</i> for future intentions/plans, <i>have got</i> (possession) Imperatives, <i>let's</i> + bare infinitive. Past simple vs. Past progressive Present perfect with <i>for</i> , <i>since</i> etc. Words to describe appearance of people Schwa and other common weak forms
Skills-based	This kind of syllabus targets language abilities rather than the formal aspects of language.	Usually a list of skills to be demonstrated and taught. For example, Delivering a short talk Writing a letter of complaint Understanding a lecture Reading an academic article

Situational	This kind of syllabus will cover the settings in which learners will have to deploy appropriate language. A key distinction is made in such syllabuses between structural and lexical words (<i>by, be, which</i> etc. vs. <i>house, table, gasp</i> etc.)	Typical content will include items such as: At the doctor's In the post office Travelling by air, train, car Renting a flat
Topic-based	This is a syllabus organised around topic rather than language structure which has similarities to both a lexical and a situational syllabus (with both of which it is often combined).	Typical topics in such a syllabus might include: lifestyles personal relationships school technology religion the weather
Lexical	This kind of syllabus focuses on lexical patterns and common ways to express meaning. It usually draws on corpus research to discover patterns and frequencies in the language.	Typical items would include: Collocational patterns: adjective + noun, adverb + verb, etc. Delexicalised verb patterns <i>by</i> : expressing who, how, when, where <i>would</i> : expressing past habit, unlikelihood
Notional	A syllabus which focuses on learning the language to describe universal concepts, notions such as size, temperature, frequency, likelihood etc.	Typical content will cover lists such as: adequacy/inadequacy desirability/undesirability texture delay/earliness frequency speed
Functional / Communicative	A syllabus which focuses on learning the language to perform certain functions in the language such as asking for and giving information, apologising etc.	Typical content will cover lists such as: asking about/expressing likes and dislikes greetings and introductions offering/accepting/declining refreshment expressing forgetfulness expression political opinion granting forgiveness

Task-based / Procedural	This kind of syllabus focuses on using tasks to help learners deploy language communicatively. It is important that the tasks represent real-world language.	Task types are usually listed and sometimes particularly tasks are prescribed. For example, Negotiation tasks: reaching a consensus Forward planning tasks: planning an excursion Judgement tasks: writing a review of a film
Learner-generated	This relies on learners knowing what they need to do in English and what they need to learn to achieve the skills they need. The syllabus is then negotiated between the students and the teacher/institution.	Typically, these syllabuses end up as lists of concepts, topics, skills and structures such as: Using the present perfect Writing an email Interacting informally Giving a presentation at work
Mixed	This is possible the most common type of syllabus and focuses on combining elements of all syllabus types so that each lesson or series of lessons focuses on different aspects of what is to be learnt.	Typical content will include items from any of the areas above.

There are other components of syllabuses which, while not forming a syllabus in themselves, are often inserted into the syllabus.

Two of most common ones are **cultural syllabuses** which list the sorts of things learners need to know about the speech community's shared values and knowledge (for example, systems of government, cultural icons etc.), and **content syllabuses** in which the language to be taught is drawn from the need to teach and learn a different topic – teaching English through the teaching of other knowledge and skills such as happens in English-medium schools situated in many settings where English is not the official language, for example, teaching sciences in English because the majority of texts are in that language.

Reference:

Nunan, D, 1988, *Syllabus design*, Oxford: Oxford University Press