

The Basics of Teaching on the Block

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This guide is designed to support academic faculty at Colorado College. The block plan is a course schedule that includes 8 blocks with each block being an intensive three-and-a-half-week course that allows for deep focus on one subject. It is a full experience course that enhances engaged learning through discussions and hands on experiences. The process of transitioning a standard semester course to an intensive three-and-a-half-week course requires more than simply compressing class material and assignments. This guide outlines various strategies for planning a successful block course.

Pre-Class Information

- On the Sunday before the block begins, send students a copy of the current syllabus, required class material, class meeting time, and location.
- Open the Canvas page the Sunday prior to class beginning. Many students browse the page prior to class to get a better sense of the course.

Syllabus

- Create a clear and understandable course schedule. Look over prior syllabi within the department and rely on other faculty for guidance.
- Tell your students that while the syllabus is a course guide, it may need to change based on the learning needs of the class. That is, as the course progresses, professors and students might decide that they want to add or change material and assignments.
- If time permits, give students a reading, writing, or wellness day. Many classes cannot afford to fully give up a day because of truncated time of the block plan. But giving students a workday of some kind can usually help eliminate stress and give students more time to work on assignments.
- Note when your office hours are. Drop-in office hours are usually held at least twice a week or by appointment. Make yourself available to students, they are eager to learn and reach out for help.

Canvas

- Have an organized Canvas page. Use the Canvas guides that are provided.
- Include the course information and syllabus on the home page. Include any class material under files.
- Utilize the 'Announcements' section, it will post your announcement on that page as well as send it as an email to all students enrolled in the course.

Providing Feedback

- Do not assign more work than you can assess and provide feedback on. Block off time in your schedule to assess and provide feedback on student work.
- If you use exams to assess learning and give grades and give a final exam, consider replacing the final grade with a mid-term grade if that grade is better.
- Offer test corrections or something similar. It can be challenging to fully grasp the material in a few days or a week. This can give students the opportunity to go back and solidify their understanding of the material and show what they have learned.

Assignments

- Have multiple types of assignments (oral, written, etc.)
- Return assignments before the next big assignments are due. (Example: Return essay one before essay two is due). Students tend to want feedback from prior assignments before submitting the next assignment.
- Try your best to evenly distribute the workload throughout the block.

In-Class Structure

- It's best to use the first Monday to do introductions and do a course overview. Review the syllabus, expectations, and the purpose of the course.
- Learn all students' names and have them know each other's names. This is one of the best ways to build community and respect in the classroom.
- Class is typically held between 9-12. Sometimes with a 9:15 or 9:30 start, but usually always ending at 12.
- Have at least one 10–15-minute break during the 3-hour class, usually sometime between 10 and 11.
- Incorporate engaging in-class activities. While presenting information is often necessary in a course, we encourage you to balance lectures with activities (e.g., class discussion, pair share, debates, circle dialogues) over the 3 hours.
- Enhance lectures with videos, first person accounts, social media posts, thought questions, etc.

Links to Extra Resources

- [Field Study](#)
- [Fine Arts Center](#)
- [QRC Tutoring Center](#)
- [The Writing Center](#)
- [Registrar's Office](#)
- [Accessibility Resources](#)

Feedback for this DocuGuide

Thank you for using this guide, we hope that it served as a resource for you. We want this to be a living document that changes as we identify effective teaching practices for the block plan. Please contact Professor Ryan Bañagale, rbanagale@coloradocollege.edu, to share additional practices you think should be incorporated in this guide. We appreciate your feedback!