

## Academic Matters Committee Style Guide for Course Descriptions

It is a benefit to all readers of the Calendar, students especially, that its entries be both clear and uniform in style. Since it is possible to write entries in many different ways, the Academic Matters Committee recommends the following guide for faculty writing or revising course descriptions to be published in Mount Allison's University Calendar.

Course descriptions are general outlines of the topics and themes of a course; they ought not to *justify* the existence of a course, but they should pertain to both the persons teaching the course at present and to those who might do so in the future. For this reason, it is not necessary to explain that the yearly implementation will be described in course outline, WebCT, etc.

### 1. Choose a short title or one that will still make sense when abbreviated.

Course titles appear on student transcripts, but there are only 30 character spaces (including spaces and punctuation) available. Longer titles will be abbreviated, but it is difficult to convey the full sense of a complex title. For example, *World Art from the First Peoples to the End of the Middle Ages* is abbreviated as *World Art First Peoples to Mi*. If title is longer than 30 characters, please also provide a short title that is no more than 30 characters including spaces and punctuation.

### 2. The first sentence of the course description should have 'this course' as its subject and should summarize the course.

**Right:** "This course is an introduction to pickle-making from Carolingian times to the Renaissance."

**Wrong:** "Pickling has been important to humankind for generations ..." *Avoid cheer-leading for the topic.*

**Wrong:** "In this course, students will be introduced to pickles, past and present."

### 3. Use full sentences.

**Wrong:** "An examination of pickling from Carolingian times to the Renaissance."

**Right:** "This course is an introduction to pickle-making from Carolingian times to the Renaissance."

### 4. All sentences pertaining to the course should be in the *present tense* and *active voice*.

**Right:** "It examines brines and their composite elements, such as salt, water, and spices."

**Wrong:** "It will examine brines and their composite elements..."

**Wrong:** "Brines and their composite elements are examined"

### 5. Please use a final, or 'Oxford', comma before the word 'and' at the end of a list of items separated by commas.

**Right:** "It considers various means of combating microbes including heating, sealing, salting, and sugaring."

**Wrong:** "It considers various means of combating microbes including heating, sealing, salting and sugaring."

### 6. Do not use abbreviating symbols in print, such as ampersand or the forward slash to indicate alternatives.

**Right:** "Its second half introduces Humperdink's theory of carrots and beets and discusses his critics."

**Wrong:** "Its second half introduces Humperdink's theory of carrots/beets & discusses his critics."

*Note that usually the form 'and/or' is unnecessary.*

**7. Special terms should be enclosed in single quotes, not double ones.**

**Right:** “It explores the 'saltification' of New World pickle-making.”

**8. Do not describe the format of the course in the course description.**

**Wrong:** “Lectures comprise two-thirds of class time; the remainder is devoted to answering questions.”

**9. Avoid specifics of marking. These are better suited for a given year's course outline.**

**Wrong:** “Students will be evaluated according to their ranking at the Sackville Fall Fair's Pickle Bake-off.”

**10. Adhere to the following general rules of print.**

1. Please hyphenate adjective-noun or noun-noun modifying clusters, such as “twentieth-century Mason jars”.
2. Write out the ordinals of centuries, such as ‘twentieth century’, but use Arabic numerals for years, such as ‘1952 to 1977’.
3. Capitalize ‘Department’.

**11. Please select a 'Format' description from the following list.**

1. 'lecture': any course in which the predominant mode of communication is a faculty lecture. This does not preclude the use of discussion, small group work, etc. It is assumed that lectured courses will also make time for questions, discussions and other alternative teaching techniques.
2. lecture and laboratory
3. 'seminar': any course in which a large part of the course entails student-led seminars. This does not preclude introductory lectures by faculty
4. independent study
5. lecture/tutorial
6. lab/tutorial
7. field course
8. 'independent study/thesis'
9. 'integrated lecture and laboratory': In some courses the distinction between a laboratory and lecture component is intentionally blurred to form a more 'experiential' learning mode. We recommend this description for such courses.
10. variable (for selected topics, only)  
(Note that the forward slash *is* permitted in some of these.)