



Tips and Checklists for Organizing your Course in Blackboard

In the online environment, Blackboard is your students' gateway to your course. Here they should find everything they need to know about the course, including course materials, expectations, resources and assignments. A well-organized Blackboard course helps students navigate your course according to your expectations and helps them stay on track.

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Basic Organization

Perhaps the most important piece of building an online course is to stay consistent throughout. This means that students will always know where to go to find particular content items, assignment descriptions and due dates, and will know how and where to submit assignments.

Your Blackboard course will have the following areas. Consider the suggestions for each course menu item:

Getting Started

- Use this area to outline specific instructions for students on how to begin the course. Add a welcome message to introduce yourself and explain the organization of your course.
- Inform students of required technology, as well as university and course policies.

Announcements

- This tool allows you to communicate directly with students. Introductions to new material and upcoming assignments, reminders of due dates, updates of changes in schedule/content, and messages about current events relating to course content can also be posted here. Every announcement is also sent out as an email to students.

Course Information

- Provide an overview of your course for students. You should include your syllabus here, as well as the following: a short instructor bio, contact information, communication protocol, required textbooks and technology, course schedule, grading policies, exam schedule, and relevant links to institutional supports and policies. You can copy much of this directly from your syllabus into this section to make it more easily accessible for students.

Learning Modules

- Use this area to organize your weekly or module folders that pertain to a particular topic. Each folder should have a consistent structure so that students can easily navigate your course. Each folder might include module outcomes, readings, videos, files, presentations/lectures, links to external sources, and assessments/assignments.

Discussions

- The discussion board is a place where students can interact. You can create a discussion forum for students to further explore a topic and/or to provide a space where students can ask course-related questions.

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Groups

- This tool allows you to establish groups of students. Each group can collaborate, have their own discussion board, and submit group assignments.

Virtual Office

- Include an item that outlines your office hours, with a link to the sessions. Also provide links to any recorded office hours sessions.

My Grades

- This area provides a direct link for student to see grades.

Tools

- This provides a direct link to available tools. You can hide tools in this area that students will not be using for your course.

Help

- Provides a direct link to Blackboard help pages for students.

Course and Content Availability

- If you copy your previous course content into your current course, remember to update the due dates and adaptive release dates to match the new term.
- Likewise, when creating announcements, it is important to set availability dates for them. Otherwise, students may receive irrelevant messages and incorrect due dates from previous years.

Is Your Material Accessible?

In the checklist, below, OIT has put together steps to improve accessibility in the online environment; these suggestions will help improve the educational experience, not just for students with disabilities, but for all students. In general, it is helpful to students to

- Provide options for learning by presenting content utilizing a combination of text, video, audio, and/or image format.
- Ensure that acronyms are spelled out
- Avoid or define jargon
- Allow adequate time for activities, projects, and tests; for example, give details of project assignments in the syllabus so that students can start working on them early
- List Office Hours and contact information clearly on the syllabus

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CHECKLIST

Basic Organization

- Is your course organization consistent, with similar items found in the same place?
- Does your course flow in an order that promotes scaffolded learning?

Course and Content Availability

- Do your announcements have expiration dates?
- When the course semester is completed, have you made it unavailable? (If desired)

Accessibility

- All images have a short, descriptive alternative text (alt text)
- Make sure there is enough contrast between text color and background, all text should be very easy to read (e.g. **white txt on blue** vs. **black txt on blue**)
- All fonts should be at least 12pt (16px) or larger
- There should be no blinking or flashing images in your content
- All weblinks work, go to the correct page, and are descriptive (e.g. 'Project One Directions' vs. 'Click here')
- Utilize the 'Check Accessibility' feature in Microsoft Office Products
- All documents, modules, and media elements have proper titles (e.g. Week One Paper vs. weekonepaper)
- All content follows proper outline form, such as, Heading 1 (or h1) is the title, followed by Heading 2 (or h2) as subheading, with headings 3-6 to follow
- Avoid scanned PDFs. If you have scanned PDFs you can utilize the [Blackboard A11y file transformer](#) while it is free for a limited time
- Minimize the use of PDFs, especially when presented as an image; make sure the text is accessible by testing to see if you can copy and paste it. Always offer a text-based alternative

Video and Audio Accessibility

- Ensure captioning is turned on in all videos
- Enable automatic captions in PowerPoint presentations (or in any other presentation software), if available
- Review all automatic captioning for accuracy
- Create accurate transcripts of videos and audio files on Word or in a plain text file (.txt)

Resource: [In-depth ideas and examples of what to incorporate in each area of your Blackboard shell](#)

Resource: [directions to view sample Blackboard course](#)

For further information

If you are having difficulty deciding the best way to replicate a certain course experience, please contact oii@ohio.edu; one of our instructional designers will be happy to assist you.

For help or questions with technology tools, please contact servicedesk@ohio.edu

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