

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Use Announcements to guide students through assignment sequence, and to remind them of deadlines.

COURSE INFORMATION

Include documents such as:

- Course description
- Learning goals and outcomes
- Required texts and other materials
- Participation guidelines, including "netiquette" and other communication policies for e-mail and discussions
- Grading policies; incomplete and drop policies
- Special instructor's notes: how often will instructor log on to course? How quickly will instructor respond to e-mail? Will instructor hold regular online "office hours" using the Collaboration Tools? Does instructor prefer being contacted by telephone or by e-mail? Should students contact instructor, TA, I.S. Customer Support, or Blackboard for specific questions?

COURSE DOCUMENTS

- Consider using a single organizational structure for each unit or module of work. Once students become familiar with the standard components in each unit, they will find it easier to navigate the course materials. Each unit might contain some of the following:
 - Module description (this can appear on the module folder, or as a separate document contained within the module folder)
 - Learning outcomes and task list for the module, with any deadlines clearly indicated
 - Readings for the module
 - Lecture notes or handouts (if your course has face-to-face lectures)
 - Quizzes (including self-tests) for the module
 - Discussions for the module (you cannot place discussions within Course Document or Assignment folders directly, but you can create a short description of the module's discussion topic and a prompt for students to go to that discussion within the Communication area of the course. Advanced web users can locate the URL for a particular discussion, and paste this URL into a course document as a clickable link [`URL`].)
 - Links for further research on a module's topic (you can create an HTML document containing the links, or you write a short page telling students which links to pursue in the "External Links" area of the course)
- Develop and post weekly "task lists" that students can print and check to monitor their own progress.
- In your description of online components, clearly relate the online materials to classroom lectures and other "face-to-face" activities.
- If you use Blackboard to post long readings, consider the most appropriate and accessible ways for presenting the material. If users have to do a lot of scrolling to read lengthy readings, they may have difficulty keeping their place and maintaining attention. Some formatting considerations:

HELPFUL HINTS:

Many faculty work their way into Blackboard slowly, beginning with posting announcements and their syllabus, and then adding more functionality each semester, such as discussion forums and digital homework submission, as they become more comfortable with the interactive tools available.

COURSE DOCUMENTS (continued)

- If you use Blackboard to post long readings, consider the most appropriate and accessible ways for presenting the material. If users have to do a lot of scrolling to read lengthy readings, they may have difficulty keeping their place and maintaining attention. Some formatting considerations:
 - Break up a long reading into several, sequential parts. Each part should be clearly labeled to indicate the proper sequence.
 - Rather than post a long reading to be viewed on screen, provide a link for students to download the document for offline reading.
 - If you have access to an HTML editor and know how to link documents, break up the reading into small, screen-sized "chunks" that are linked sequentially to one another. At the bottom of each "chunk" or page, include a link to go to the next section. To upload a series of linked web pages, save them in a separate folder and then use a file compression application to turn them into a .zip file. Upload the .zip file as a course document, making sure to select the "Unpackage these files" option from the choices. Blackboard will then ask you to select the first page of the linked documents: this is where users will begin access to the files you've uploaded.

ASSIGNMENTS

- If you decide to use both the Course Documents and Assignments areas, make sure that your students understand what type of materials are in each area. The more areas you use in your course, the more likely it is that students will get "lost" or miss important components.
- You may choose to use this area for quizzes and surveys. If you create a quiz that is associated with a particular set of Course Documents (for example: you may have a folder for each week's course documents, and a weekly quiz on these materials), it is a good idea to create a short "pointer" file within Course Documents that tells students to take a particular quiz in the Assignments area.
- Group projects: if your course will make extensive use of learning groups, this is a good place to post a list of each group's members. Don't forget that Blackboard allows you to create special group communication areas (group discussion, chat, file sharing, e-mail...).
- Consider posting a list of course "deliverables" (assignments that students must submit to instructor) with due dates clearly indicated. This can be formatted as a checklist, so students can keep track of which assignments they have completed.
- Use this area to post assignment submission guidelines, special formatting requirements, and revision policies for your course. Redundancy in an online environment is not a bad idea: don't be afraid to repeat important information that may also be contained under "Course Information."

COMMUNICATION

- Discussion boards: When you create a new forum, give it a clear title so that students will be able to locate it easily. If the discussion is associated with a set of course documents (example: a folder of materials titled "Week One" or "Module 4"), title the discussion so that it is clearly associated with that set of course documents.
- Because discussion forums are located in the Communication area of your course, rather than within Course Documents or Assignments, you may find it helpful to post "pointer" messages to students about the beginning of a new discussion. Use the Announcement area to inform students that a new discussion (provide the discussion title) is now available. Send an e-mail to everyone about the new discussion, and tell people how long this discussion will be "open for business." If you are organizing your course materials in weekly folders or modules, post a file within those materials that reminds students to participate in the associated discussion.
- Consider establishing specific discussion forums for:
 - Technical Issues (where students can post questions and share tips about technical aspects of navigating the online course environment, and where instructors can post updates on any technical matters as needed)
 - General Course Questions (where class members can discuss issues generally related to the course materials and topics, but which are not specifically covered in other discussion forums)
 - "Water Cooler" or "Student Lounge" (where class members can talk about issues that have no explicit relation to course materials)
- Establishing discussion areas like this before the class begins, and pointing out the location and purpose of these areas to students early in the class, may help you to keep topic-specific discussions on track.