

# **Creating an Online Course in Blackboard**

Developed by the Office of  
Instructional Technology Services

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This guide supplements the information provided to online course developers by the Director of Curriculum and Classroom Technology, and information provided to Blackboard instructors through the Blackboard Instructor's Manual. The material presented here is primarily intended to assist course writers with the process of turning their course materials and assignments into an appropriate format for online course delivery.

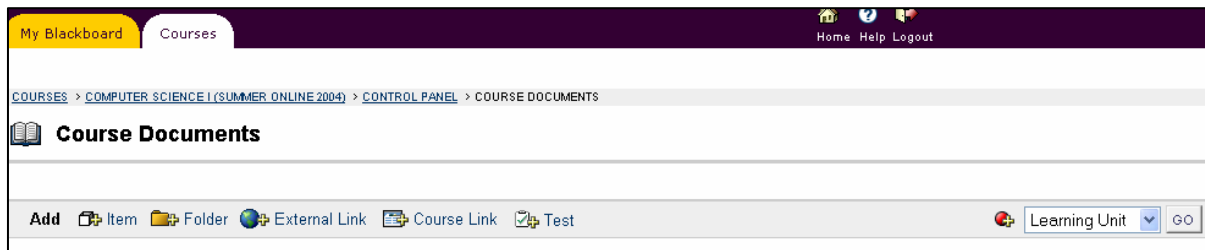
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This guide assumes that you already know your subject, you know basically how you want to develop your course, and you are familiar with the general features of Blackboard. However, if you would like assistance with any of these items, or with any of the techniques discussed in this guide, please contact the Director of Instructional Technology at 903-233-3275, or send an email message to [its@letu.edu](mailto:its@letu.edu)

## I. Content

After you have identified what content you want to include in your online course, you must decide what format will be best for presenting your materials to your students. The main content area you will be using in Blackboard is the Course Documents section. Within this section, inside the Control Panel, Blackboard allows you to add several types of content through the toolbar at the top of the section (see figure below):



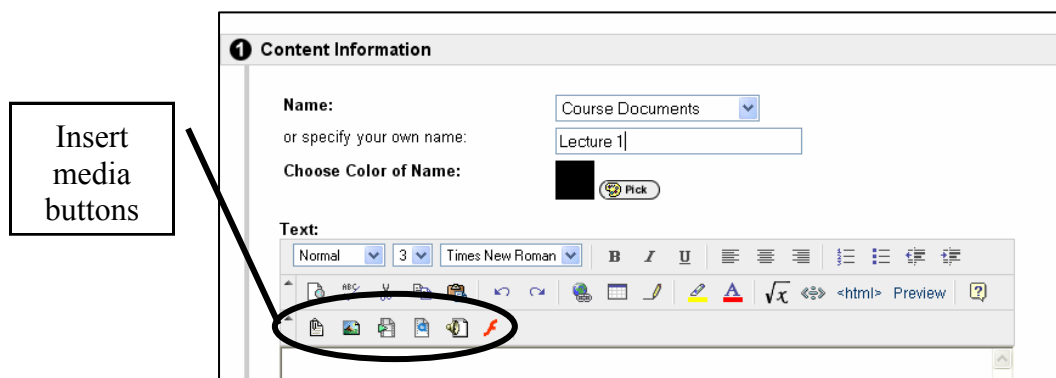
**Item** – this can simply be typed and formatted text that conveys some content to the student. An item can also be text with one or more *attachments*, such as an image file, Word document, spreadsheet, or PowerPoint presentation. Images attached to an item can be displayed directly on the screen for the student, while any other type of attachment will result in a link that the student must click on in order to access the attachment. Pictures, audio files, video files, Quicktime files, and Flash or Shockwave files can all be *inserted* into text items using the available toolbars, and then displayed as part of the content (without a link). An item can also include a link to offline content, which refers to content that students will access from a CD.

### Tips for Creating Items:

- *Enhance text.* Use font effects and color coding where possible to help students recall the information they read online. For example, color all new terms that the student must know in green.
- *Use other text-editing buttons.* Use the other buttons available in the toolbar above your textbox (while entering your text) to create tables, add lines, highlight text, and align text.
- *Edit images.* Before attaching or inserting an image, use image-editing software to adjust the dots per inch (DPI) to 72, and the height and width to the smallest appropriate size. This will help your students load the image faster. If you do not

have an image-editing program, you may want to try IrfanView, available as freeware at <http://www.irfanview.com>

- *Provide alternate text for images.* When attaching an image, choose the “Special Action” of “Display media file within the page”. Then after you submit the item, you will be given an opportunity to provide “alternate text” for the image. Provide a short description of your image as the alternate text – this text is what screen reader programs will read for visually-impaired students.
- *Avoid overusing Word documents.* Avoid attaching a Word document that contains a short amount of text – instead, simply copy and paste that text into a text item box. This will allow the students to access the material more quickly, without having to open another document.
- *Convert Word documents to Rich Text Format.* When attaching a Word document, first save the document as a rich text file (simply open the File menu, choose Save As, then specify the “Save as type:” to be “Rich Text Format (\*.rtf)”). This will allow students with any word processor to be able to read the document.
- *Narrate your PowerPoint presentations.* If you provide your lecture notes through PowerPoint presentations, consider narrating your presentations for your online students. Your students will have a much greater understanding of your presentation if they can both hear it and see it. For help with narrating your PowerPoint presentations, contact the Director of Instructional Technology at [its@letu.edu](mailto:its@letu.edu) or 903-233-3275.
- *Convert PowerPoint presentations to web pages.* When attaching a PowerPoint presentation, attach it in two different formats: one as the PowerPoint presentation itself, which will allow students to download and print the presentation; another as a web page version of the presentation, which will allow the students to view the presentation on a computer that does not have PowerPoint installed. For help in converting a PowerPoint presentation to a web page, see Appendix C.
- *Insert short media files into a text item.* Use the toolbars above your textbox to insert various media files into the text. You may need to click the triangle at the far left of the second toolbar in order to see the third toolbar.



- *Provide large files on CD.* If you have large media files that your students must access, consider providing these on a CD. Then you can create an item with “offline content” to link to the files on the CD.

**Folder** – this creates a folder that can then contain other items and folders. Folders can be used to help organize your content. Suggested folder ideas for the Course Documents section include Lecture Notes, Handouts, Sample Projects, Unit 1 Material, etc. You can even create a folder hidden from student view that contains some special instructions or notes for other instructors teaching the course.

### **Tips for Creating Folders:**

- *Create items inside the folder.* After you create a folder, click on the title of the folder to enter the folder. Then start creating items, folders, links, etc. inside the folder.
- *Don't overuse folders.* When you have too many folders, you are causing your students to click too many times to get to the desired content. Use them wisely.

**External Link** – this is a link to a web page outside of Blackboard, such as your textbook's web page, or a network share. You can also attach files to the description of an external link.

### **Tips for Creating External Links:**

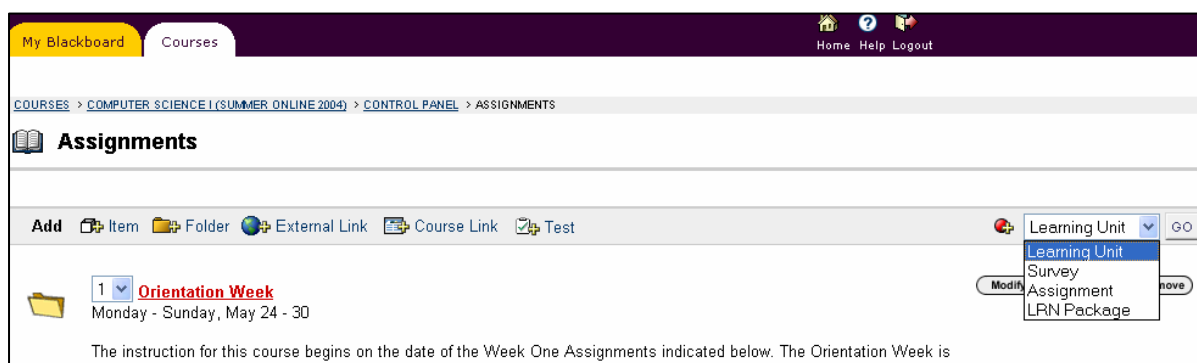
- *Ensure reliability.* Take advantage of the wealth of resources available to you and your students over the Internet by including external links. Take care, though, to link to reliable, verifiable sources.
- *Use network shares.* You may want to link to content that is kept on the LeTourneau University network, inside of a network share. This is useful when content is to be shared across multiple courses, or when the content must be updated frequently. For more information on network shares, contact the IT department at [techsupport@letu.edu](mailto:techsupport@letu.edu)

**Learning Unit** – this is similar to a folder, in that it is a collection of other content items. However, a learning unit forces sequential access to the pages it contains. Students must view page 1 in the unit before going to page 2, etc. For example, a learning unit may consist of a one-page introduction to the unit, followed by a page that presents some text content for the unit, followed by a page that describes an attached picture, followed by an un-graded online quiz that checks comprehension of the presentation. (Note: to create a learning unit, select Learning Unit in the dropdown box at the right of the Course Document screen in the Control Panel, and then click Go.)

## II. Assignments

You will undoubtedly have more assignments in your online course than you do in your on-ground courses. In your on-ground course, you are able to verbally ask your class if they understand this concept, or if they have any comments or questions. And you are able to see their faces and know whether they are “getting it.” However, in an online course, the instructor must rely primarily on electronic communication, and thus assigned communications must be built in to the design of your course.

Each week, you should have several assignments that give you feedback from your students. The section in Blackboard where the assignments are created is appropriately named Assignments. Each assignment may be a stand-alone assignment, or it may be an assignment that refers to another section of your course (for example, an assignment requiring students to utilize the course Discussion Board may be described within the Assignments section). Within Assignments, you have the same options as those available within the Course Documents area discussed earlier. You also have the ability to create an Assignment using the dropdown box at the right of the screen (see figure below):



**Item** – this can be used to create an assignment that requires the use of another part of the course site, such as the Discussion Board or Collaboration. You can also create an item for assignments that you want your students to do, but that will not be graded. For example, you could create an item that introduces the week’s activities and instructs the students to begin by reading a particular chapter and watching the corresponding presentation.

### Tips for Creating Assignments Using “Item”:

- *Assign an online discussion.* Create an item that details an online discussion that you would like your students to have inside the Discussion Board section. Be sure to create a corresponding forum inside the Discussion Board for this assignment. Provide enough directions for your students to understand what makes up an effective online discussion, or consider including a rubric for your students. For a sample rubric for grading online discussions, see Appendix C.
- *Have students submit project results to Discussion Board.* If you have a project that you want your students to share with the class, describe the assignment using an Item,

then create a forum in the Discussion Board where students can post their projects as attachments to messages. You may even want students to provide positive comments on each others projects, which can be handled through replies within the forum.

- *Assign a group chat.* Create an item that describes a group chat that you would like your students to conduct inside the Collaboration section. Be sure to create a collaboration session to correspond to this assignment, and start the recording for that session (so that you can view transcripts of chat sessions later). Provide guidelines for your students, such as how many people should be in the group chat, what topic should they focus on, what roles should be performed (e.g., discussion leader or reporter), and how long the chat session should be.

**Folder** – this again creates a folder that can contain other items and folders. Each week should have a corresponding folder inside the Assignments section. Inside each week’s folder will be an item for the week’s devotional, another item for the week’s learning objectives, and another folder where all of that week’s assignments are described.

**Test** – this is an online quiz, which can consist of multiple choice, multiple answer, true/false, fill in the blank, matching, ordering, and essay questions. Tests can be scheduled for a set time period, timed or untimed, and can be set to allow only one attempt, or multiple attempts. Create a multi-attempt test to help your students check their comprehension or review for an exam. Or create a timed test for students to take only one time that will count as a major exam. For online courses, open-book essay questions that test students’ ability to apply the learned information will work much more effectively than objective tests.

### **Tips for Creating Tests:**

- *Create pools of questions.* Consider creating pools of questions inside the Pool Manager for future instructors of your course to use. Instructors will then be able to create their tests by selecting questions from your pools.
- *Create multi-attempt tests inside the Assignments section.* For tests that are created for review purposes only, with lots of multiple choice and true false questions, you may want to go ahead and create these inside the Assignments section. Make them always available, so that future instructors do not have to deploy these tests.
- *Create timed tests in the Test Manager.* If you feel it is appropriate to have tests already created inside your course, do so inside the Test Manager section of the Control Panel. Then when instructors are ready to deploy a test, they will be able to choose a ready-made test and make it available for a specified timeframe within the Exams and Quizzes section.

**Assignment** – every assignment that will receive a grade should be created through this special “assignment” method. To do this, you select “Assignment” from the dropdown box on the right side of the screen, and then click Go. Then you will fill in the details for the

assignment, including the maximum grade possible. By using this method for creating an assignment, a column is automatically added to the online gradebook. Students will submit their assignments by clicking a “view/complete” link that is automatically created with each assignment. Instructors will view submissions through the gradebook, and will be able to provide a grade for the assignment as well as feedback to the student regarding the assignment.

**Tips for Creating Assignments:**

- *Request a text response.* Create an assignment that contains an essay question, or a few short answer questions. Students will submit their answers simply by typing into the textbox that appears when they click the “view/complete” link. Consider using this type of assignment to check students’ reading comprehension, or to verify student viewing of online content, or to summarize the main points they learn each week.
- *Request a file to be submitted.* Create an assignment that contains a description of a document to be completed, and have your students submit the file to you through the “view/complete” link of the assignment. Consider using this type of assignment for research papers, projects, summaries, journals, PowerPoint presentations, etc.

**III. Gradebook and Course Evaluation**

As the course developer, you will need to decide on the appropriate weights to assign to each type of assignment. In Blackboard, you can assign individual weights to each assignment, or you can assign a weight to a category of assignments. For example, for individual weights, you could assign:

Homework 1	4%
Homework 2	6%
Homework 3	10%
Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
Final Exam	30%

For category weights, you would assume that each item within a category is equally weighted and simply assign an overall weight to the category. For example,

Homework	20%
Exams	50%
Final Exam	30%

Weights are assigned in the Gradebook section of the Control Panel. The Gradebook should automatically contain a column for every “Assignment” type assignment you created, as well as for every test. You will need to create a new item in the Gradebook for any other type of grade that needs to be recorded.

## Appendix A

### Course Content Creation Summary

Content	What to Use in Blackboard	Tips
Organized content	<i>Folder</i>	Don't have empty folders; don't overuse folders
Online text	<i>Item with text</i>	Use font effects and color-coding; use other text-editing buttons in toolbar as needed
Image	<i>Item with attached image file</i>	Edit first to use 72 DPI and smaller size; provide alternate text
Handout	<i>Item with attached Word document</i>	Don't use for short text items; convert to RTF before loading
Lecture presentations	<i>Item with attached PowerPoint presentation</i>	Narrate if possible; provide a web page version as well as the PowerPoint file
Online text content containing multimedia (images, audio, video, Quicktime, or Flash)	<i>Item with media inserted into the text using toolbar buttons</i>	Use for shorter media files
Media files stored on a CD	<i>Item with link to offline content</i>	Use for larger media files; can have CDs created and sold with textbooks
Link to web content, or to files stored in a network share	<i>External link</i>	Ensure reliability of web links
Online content with forced sequential access	<i>Learning unit</i>	

## Appendix B

### Assignment Creation Summary

Assignment	What to Use in Blackboard	Tips
Organized assignments	<i>Folder</i>	Don't have empty folders; don't overuse folders
An un-graded assignment, or an assignment that utilizes the discussion board or online chat	<i>Item</i> with or without attachments, plus a <i>Discussion Board</i> forum or a <i>Chat</i> session	For communication assignments, create corresponding discussion forums or chat sessions
A project that must be shared with the class	<i>Item</i> with or without attachments, plus a <i>Discussion Board</i> forum	Require students to post messages to the forum with their projects attached
Online quiz for review purposes, with students allowed to re-take	<i>Test</i> with options set for multiple attempts	Include objective questions that are automatically graded by Blackboard
Online exam	<i>Test</i> with desired options set	Create question pools for future instructors; include mostly essay questions
A required paragraph to check reading comprehension, or to verify student viewing of online content, or to summarize learning points each week	<i>Assignment</i> without requiring a file to be submitted	Decide on a grading and weighting plan before specifying points for each assignment
A research paper, a PowerPoint presentation, a document containing answers to several questions, or any other student-prepared file that needs to be submitted	<i>Assignment</i> with a required file submission	Provide a sample or a model as a handout for students to review

## Appendix C

### Converting a PowerPoint Presentation to a Web Page

#### ***To save the presentation as a web page:***

- 1) In PowerPoint, open the File menu and choose Save As Web Page
- 2) Click the Change Title button to modify the title that will be displayed in the title bar of the browser window
- 3) Click Web Options from the Tools menu, and change any options as desired; click OK when through
- 4) Specify a location and name for the web page – do NOT include spaces in the file name
- 5) Click Save

*NOTE: Your presentation will be saved as a web page with the specified name, along with a folder of the same name plus the extension “\_files” containing additional pages and images. For example, if you saved your web page as “Chapter3”, there would also be a “Chapter3\_files” folder on your computer after this process.*

#### ***To zip the resulting web page files:***

*NOTE: The following instructions assume you have the program WinZip installed on your computer. If you do not have WinZip, you can download it and install it from the LeTourneau start page – <http://www.letu.edu/start>*

- 1) Open the Windows Explorer by clicking on Start, pointing to Programs, pointing to Accessories, and choosing Windows Explorer
- 2) Right-click on the web presentation folder that was created when you saved your presentation as a web page
- 3) Click Add to xxxxx.zip, where “xxxxx” represents the name of the folder you selected; your Zip file should now be stored in the same folder as your web page folder

#### ***To upload a web presentation into Blackboard:***

- 1) Log in to Blackboard and enter your course site
- 2) Click the Control Panel button

- 3) Click Course Documents (or another area where you want the presentation to appear)
- 4) Click Add Document
- 5) Enter a title for the document
- 6) Scroll down and click the Browse button; locate your Zip file, click on that file and click Open
- 7) Type a name for the link (such as “Web presentation”)
- 8) In the special action drop down box, choose Unpackage these files
- 9) Click Submit
- 10) Click the file named “frame.htm”; this will be the starting page for the presentation
- 11) Click Submit
- 12) Click Return to Course at the top of the page, and then click Course Documents to access the presentation

## Appendix D

### Sample Rubric for Online Discussions

	<b>8-10 points</b>	<b>6-7 points</b>	<b>4-5 points</b>	<b>1-3 points</b>
<b>Frequency of response</b>	4 & up	3 times	2 times	1 time
<b>Evidence of having read the thread</b>	Makes reference to others' responses	Logic of response includes other responses	Little evidence of having read thread	No evidence of having read thread
<b>Evidence of having read the text or applicable research</b>	Makes reference to text or other publications	Logic of response indicates reference text or other sources	Little evidence of reference to readings	No evidence of reference to readings
<b>Adding different ideas to the thread</b>	Adds considerably to the thread	Adds somewhat to the thread	Adds little to the thread	Adds nothing to the thread
<b>Grammatical nature of response</b>	Well-written paragraphs using correct spelling and grammar	Few spelling and grammatical errors	Many spelling and grammatical errors	Poorly written phrases, incomplete sentences