



Recommendations for Best Use of Blackboard

A Blackboard Tip Sheet

Introduction

The integration of Web-based learning components with Blackboard software brings added value to traditional education. The advantages of online education make a significant impact in higher education today and, as technology evolves, promise to deliver even greater benefits in the future. Blackboard believes that effective use of course management tools plays an integral part in developing quality online education.

The goal of this tip sheet is to give instructors some recommendations for best use of Blackboard products. This information should be provided to instructors planning on using Blackboard course management tools.

Blackboard offers the following recommendations to help instructors develop a successful Blackboard course Web site:

- Skills needed to navigate a course Web site
- Hardware requirements
- Frequently used software suggestions
- Instructional Design basics

Skills needed to navigate a course Web site

Familiarity with computers and an online environment are obvious skills needed to successfully use Web-based course management software. Because Blackboard dynamically generates much of the information entered into a course Web site, the skills necessary to manage a course are minimal. We recommend that instructors have the following basic skills to be comfortable with navigating and creating course Web sites.

- Browsing the Web
- Entering URL's
- Locating and opening files on a computer
- Using drop down lists
- Entering text into Web based forms

While navigating a course Web site, instructors will need access to:

- An Internet connection
- A 4.0 or better Web browser that can accommodate both Javascript and Java. Blackboard officially supports Netscape and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Please note that other browsers such as AOL or Opera may function with Blackboard but are not officially supported.
- An e-mail account.

Hardware requirements

The hardware needed for navigating a course Web site is as follows:

- A live Internet connection. For minimum acceptable performance, Blackboard recommends at least a 56K modem connection, although Blackboard can be accessed with slower connections.
- A monitor capable of at least 800x600 resolution. For best performance, access Blackboard at 1024x768 resolution or higher. Blackboard can be accessed at lower resolutions (such as 640x480) although scroll bars may interfere with the interface at low resolutions.
- As a Web-based application, Blackboard itself has no minimum hardware requirements for your computer. However, since Blackboard does require a 4.0 browser or better, you should refer to the minimum hardware requirements for your browser.

Frequently used software suggestions

Although software other than a Web browser is NOT needed to navigate a Blackboard course Web site, instructors may choose to also use whatever software brand they feel most comfortable using or feel best complements the design of a course Web site. Instructors must remember to consider the user (student) when uploading files to course Web sites. Many files types require the user to have the specific software to open the file.

For example, if a Microsoft PowerPoint (.ppt) presentation has been uploaded into a course Web site, the user (student) needs PowerPoint software to open the file. Users can and should be made aware of options to download free versions of plug-ins or players that can assist them if they do not have the specific software to open the file.

Since Blackboard is a Web-based application, everything entered into the Blackboard forms is dynamically generated as Web pages within a course Web site. Files that are uploaded/attached are not converted to Web pages. These items are treated as attachments, and are opened and displayed within the appropriate software package or players. Here is a list of software types frequently used to produce a successful course Web site:

- A 4.0 or better Web browser (required)
 - Microsoft Internet Explorer
 - Netscape Navigator
- An office suite that may include a word processor, presentation application, database, and spreadsheet applications
 - Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access)
 - AppleWorks
 - Microsoft Works Suite
 - Corel Word Perfect Office (Word Perfect, Lotus, Corel Presentation)
- A compression utility
 - WinZip
 - PKZip
 - CuteZip
 - Stuffit Deluxe
 - Zipt
- A Web authoring tool
 - MS Front Page
 - Adobe GoLive
 - Dreamweaver
 - HomeSite
- A graphics editing and/or publishing tool
 - Adobe Photoshop
 - Corel Draw
 - Corel Photo-Paint
 - Adobe Acrobat
 - Adobe PageMill
- A multimedia player
 - Windows Media Player
 - QuickTime
 - RealPlayer
- A multimedia application
 - Flash
 - Authorware
 - Director
 - Toolbook
- A mathematics application
 - Maple
 - Mathematica

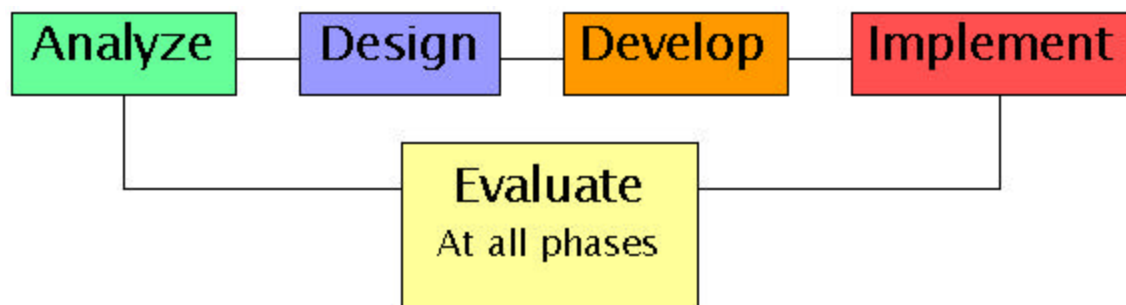
This list is only a handful of brands that can be used to create files for use in a course Web site. There are many others that instructors may feel more comfortable using that are not mentioned. It is important to remember that any type of file can be uploaded into a course Web site, but the user (student) must

be able to open that file by way of the file's specific software package, plug-ins, or players that are usually downloadable from the Internet for free.

Instructional Design basics

Blackboard believes that instructional design plays an important part in developing online education. Not surprisingly, a critical element contributing to the success of an online learning experience is the role of the instructor and the instructional design of the course. "Materials themselves do not teach but provide a medium that with appropriate use can support learning" (Oliver, Herrington, and Omari, 1996). Accordingly, the instructor must incorporate the organization, presentation, and integration of materials into the online environment.

Blackboard software does not require instructors to use a specific instructional design model when building a course Web site. However, this simple Instructional Design model may provide some help in setting up a Blackboard course Web site.



- Analyze
 - Who are your learners and what are you trying to achieve with your instruction?
- Design and Develop
 - What are your objectives, and how will you structure and organize the content of your learning material?
 - How will you assess the learners' understanding and whether or not they have met the objectives of the instruction?
- Implement
 - Carry out the instructional sequence to deliver the instruction you have developed.

Also think about the following instructional design tips to help you develop an engaging and instructionally sound course Web site:

- Provide a transition between learning components.
- Encourage opportunities for knowledge acquisition.
- Encourage student participation.

- Provide ample opportunities for feedback.
- Provide methods for assessment.

Summary

Blackboard believes that best use of course management tools plays an important part in developing effective online education. This tip sheet is provided for instructors to consider best use suggestions for creating an effective Web-based course.

For more educational materials about Blackboard Products visit the Instructor Center at <http://www.blackboard.com/>

