Creating Your Course – Organizing Your Course

Think for a moment about some websites you use frequently. Most are easy to navigate, because the pages are organized in sections, and the content is organized under headings. Now think about what this could mean for students in your Blackboard course. If you want students to find the files, links, and activities in your course, it ought to be organized too.

Part 1 – Bad Example

Let's review one example of content posted in a course. In this Content Area, there are many items and files, in one long list. As I scroll down the page, you may have a hard time figuring out what order the content is in (if any). There are no clues or markers to know when to use each item, or whether and how they are related. All of this can confuse and frustrate students.

Instead, you can present the same content in a structured and organized fashion by using folders, being consistent about naming them, and arranging everything in a logical order. Folders can contain content (such as text, files, or web links), activities (such as Discussion Boards or Blogs), and assessments (including Assignments, and tests or quizzes).

Start by reflecting on the overall structure and order of your course. For example, will you cover one topic each week? Could these topics be arranged in broader units or modules? However you've organized the material, you can create a folder for each chunk of content, making it easier for students to find the correct materials.

Part 2 – Good Example

Now, let's review a second example.

In this example, content is organized by topical "units," using several "Content Folders." Each unit's folder is listed in order and contains a brief description, so students know what to expect in each folder, at a glance.

If we go into the Unit 1 folder, we'll find that everything inside is also organized into a logical sequence, which the other units follow as well.

At the top is a topic overview (a simple text description) of the unit—the material covered in the unit, the activities students are assigned, and the knowledge and skills they should gain by completing the unit. Following the overview are the materials: PowerPoint lecture slides, a list of assigned readings, and the one assessment for this week: a link to a Weekly Quiz.

Part 3 – Creating a Folder

Now that we've compared two competing Blackboard course designs, let's return to our top-level content area, create a new unit folder, then add content to it following the more logical course design.

From the action bar, place your mouse cursor over the "Build Content" tab.

The drop-down menu reveals a number of options to add and organize content. Select "Content Folder."

At the top of the Create Content Folder page, you'll be asked to give it a "Name." Since Name is required, let's type that in. For this example, I'll name the folder "Unit 4 - Designing Successful Group Activities."

After Name is the "Text" field. Here, you can add a description for what is in this folder, to help students find the right unit. In this case let's include: "Group Assignment Feature," and "Group Enrollment Options."

Next are the "Standard Options" which let you determine whether or when to make the folder available. This decision is based on your teaching style. Do you prefer to make all of your content available to your students at the same time? Do you prefer to make content available during the week in which the material is assigned, or a week or two beforehand?

Setting "Date and Time Restrictions" on the folder prevents students from accessing its content, which means you don't have to set date restrictions on each piece of content in the folder. Also, if you use date restrictions, make sure you leave the "Permit Users to View this Content" option set to "Yes," or the dates will not work.

In this case, we will ignore date restrictions, and make Unit 4 available immediately.

It's important to note that these settings can be changed at any time, so you could, for instance, keep the folder unavailable while building your course.

Lastly, under Standard Options is also a setting to enable Blackboard to track when your students view and access this folder, which is useful for ensuring honesty.

Now click on the Submit button to create the folder.

The Unit 4 folder now appears as the last item in our Content Area.

Part 4 – Adding Content

Now let's add some content to our new folder. Open the Unit 4 folder by clicking on its name. Notice we have access to the same tools as we did in the Content Areas, so let's add content to the folder following the structure that was used in Units 1 through 3.

Once again, hover over the "Build Content" tab, and this time select "Item."

Let's begin with a description of the Unit 4 topic, "Designing Successful Group Activities."

First, provide the Name of the item: "Topic Overview - Unit 4."

Now, click in the textbox editor, and type in the content of the Topic Overview. Since I already had a description prepared, I'll paste that in.

When you are done adding text, determine if you want to attach a file in the next area, "Attachments."

Then, under "Standard Options," whether you wish to permit users to view this content immediately, or delay release until a later date in the third option. Finally, click the "Submit" button.

You should now have your first item for this Unit!

When ready, add other items, files, and assessments, following the pattern of the previous units.

Part 5 – Wrap-up

After adding your first folder, it's often quick and easy to create a consistent, logical structure for your entire course. Simply copy the folder for the later weeks or units, then edit the individual files, renaming them, changing descriptions, and swapping files as necessary.

Don't forget that you can also add additional items to the Course Menu to help you provide a clear structure for your course.

You can and should consider how you structure your course by customizing the menu and using folders. Best practices is to structure your course so that its organization, logic, and flow is clear to your students. Your students will appreciate the order and consistency because it will be easier for them to navigate and use the files, links, assessments, and tools that you create for them.

This tutorial discussed the pedagogical value of organizing your online courses, provided examples of organizational structure, and demonstrated how to add folders and content items.