Layout

Maintain a layout as simple as possible. Be absolutely consistent. Consistent organization in small bites is essential to creating an online course that will run smoothly.

- Put a button on the left labeled "Start Here." Under this button, instructors should provide information about the course and about how they organized the online experience for learners. To see what learners will see, instructors can use the "student preview" button (looks like an eye) at the top right of the screen to switch between instructor and learner (student) view.
- Keep the button for Announcements, and remind learners to access it regularly so that they can follow what is happening with the course and receive any information necessary to their success. When using Announcements also select the box to send the announcement via email to the class.
- Include the syllabus in its own folder so that learners can access it if they have questions. Instructors who plan to use additional courseware or software can indicate that in this space. Instructors can provide information about textbooks or Open Educational Resources (OERs) in this space as well.
- Consider a separate folder for Course Policies where instructors can include information such as Course Ground Rules, information about how attendance will be counted, etc.
- Instructors should be sure to include information introducing themselves to learners and providing contact pathways. How will learners contact the instructor? How long will a reply generally take?
- Indicate to learners where to find the Information that they will need to complete the course successfully. Will the course be organized by weeks, modules, or units? Are these roughly equal in weight for required homework and/or grading? Is any one week, module, or unit foundational for course success? Identify that week, module, or unit explicitly. Put an assessment at the end of that week, module, or unit for learners to test themselves or for them to demonstrate their knowledge before they proceed to the following materials.
- Keep information bites small so that learners are not overwhelmed by the amount of material and the skills that they will need to acquire.
- Within the Content button, organize weeks, modules, or units in exactly the same way throughout the course so that learners do not spend time looking for materials, but spend time engaging with the materials and each other.
- Directly connect each week, module, or unit to the course objective(s) toward which learners will move.
- Clearly identify which objective(s) learners will meet when they complete assignments and assessments.
- If the course includes additional resources, create a button for them. If the course includes discussions, direct learners to them. Indicate how discussions link to objectives.
- Add a button for Evaluations so that learners know where to look for each assessment activity. Include rubrics for assessments so that learners know how they will be assessed.
- Point learners to My Grades to track their progress through the course.

Sources and Relevant Links

- Building Learning Modules
- Three Things to Know about Course Design in Blackboard
- Favoriting Your Course
- Adding a Button or Button Missing in Blackboard
- Student Preview Button
- Creating an Assignment
- Discussion Boards
- Using Rubrics in Blackboard
- Viewing Assignment Grades and Feedback - Students