Blackboard Good Practice Checklist

Enhance Student Learning

Good educational design practices in Blackboard classrooms enhance student learning. Good design principles and practices apply to:

1. Course Design
2. Interaction and Collaboration
3. Assessment
4. Learner Support

Use these principles and practices to enhance student learning in your Blackboard classrooms. These are based upon Blackboard's Exemplary Course Program Rubric.

1 Course Design

Good course design underpins good learning experiences. Course design occurs across three areas:

- Course organisation
- Content structure
- Content for learning.

Course Organisation

Principles

Course organisation should be simple, intuitive and consistent across courses (in a program).

Results

Increases predictability and reduces cognitive overload on students, helping them to intuitively locate information, assessment and resources.

Content Structure

Principles

Content structure should be logical, easy to navigate and consistent.

Practices for good content structure

- Logical side navigation (text links NOT buttons – accessibility), with menu items divided into logical sections
- Should include a definitive start area, e.g. Start here, that has pertinent course information including overall course goals and objects, e.g. Course guide.
- Course content should be structured in folders/modules
- Folder/modules should use consistent headings, e.g.:
  - Learning outcomes
  - Learning resources: readings, links, videos etc.
  - Learning activities
  - Assessment (tasks, dates and criteria)
  - Next (if applicable)
- Entire course content should be available to promote individual learning journeys.

Results

Content is easy to find and predictable, and supports flexible and individual learning pathways.

Practices for Universal Instructional Design (incorporating accessibility)

- Keep writing and instructions simple and direct. Readers don't read on-screen, they scan. Keep writing concise, scannable, and objective. (See How users read on the web)
- Use headings to structure content (information hierarchy)
- Use numbered lists for sequences
- Use bullet lists for ordering
- Use consistent formatting, this helps with information hierarchy and predictability.
- Use visuals, e.g. pictures, graphs, charts, tables etc. for complex information
- Avoid jargon/slang/idioms to assist language comprehension, particularly for English as Second Language (ESL) students, e.g. international students.
- Provide a glossary of terms, including terms in readings, textbooks and assignments
- Alt (Alternative) text descriptions are required for all content images, that is images with text in them (Accessibility)
- All external links should open in a new browser window for copyright purposes. But, users **must** be told in the link text that they are leaving Blackboard (accessibility), e.g. The Age (opens in a new window).
- Closed captions (CC) or transcripts are required for any audio content. Great for hearing impaired students and ESL students.

Results

Improves comprehension and reduces cognitive overload. Makes content accessible for all.

Content for Learning

Principles

Content should actively engage learners, promote deep learning, and support students to achieve course goals and objectives.

Practices for learning

- Course goals and objectives are easily located in the course and available from multiple areas
- Learning is scaffolded to assist learning development and higher order thinking skills
- Theory is mixed with practical examples and activities to practice/apply learning
- Content is presented in multiple ways to cater for different learning styles
- Students should be actively engaged in constructing their own learning and learning pathways (all course content should be visible)
- Copyright approved learning resources, e.g. electronic journal articles, can be accessed off campus (appropriate links required and stored in eReserve)
- Content can be downloaded and printed for working offline
- Multi-modal content, e.g. image, videos, websites and interactives, are used
- Lectures (and mini-lectures, e.g. Echo 360 Desktop recordings as just-in-time teaching tools) are recorded so students can revise/revisit as required.

Results

Students learn disciplinary theory and practices that directly relate to course goals and learning outcomes, through access to scaffolded learning experiences that use multiple (copyright approved) resources.

Course Design Checklist

Course Organisation	Yes	No
Is there consistent course organisation across the courses in your program?		
Do you consider the course organisation to be clear and intuitive?		
Course Structure		
Is there a logical side navigation menu?		
Are the menu items divided into logical sections?		
Is the course content structured into folders or modules?		
Is there a consistent structure to the information in the modules/folders?		
Do you consider that the content is easy to find and predictable?		
Content for Everybody		
Is all text, including instructions, simple and direct? Is it concise, scannable, and objective?		
Are headings used to structure content?		
Are numbered lists used for sequences?		
Are bullet lists used for order?		
Is there consistent formatting?		
Are visuals, e.g. pictures, graphs, charts, tables etc. used to present complex information?		
Is text free from jargon, idioms and slang?		
Is there a glossary of terms?		
Are Alt (Alternative) text descriptions provided for all content images?		
Are users notified if they leave the current browser window?		
Are transcripts, or closed captions, provided for audio content?		
Content for Learning		
Are the course goals and objectives located in multiple areas?		
Are learning resources and activities scaffolded to assist learning and higher order thinking skills development?		
Is content presented in multiple ways to cater for different learning styles?		
Can students construct their own learning pathways through the course content?		
Are the resources copyright approved and stored in eReserve through appropriate links so they can be accessed off campus?		
Can content can be downloaded and printed for working offline?		
Is multi-modal content available to assist different learning styles?		
Are lectures recorded for revision?		

Need a quality check? Ask a colleague to review as well, and compare results.

2 Collaboration and Interaction

Collaboration and interaction are the foundations of developing a community of learners and participative learning networks. They provide supportive learning environments that:

- encourage participation and risk taking
- promote peer learning and enquiry
- reduce fear of failure.

Principles

Provide multiple opportunities for collaboration and interaction using a variety of synchronous and asynchronous tools.

Practices and tools that promote interaction and collaboration

Discussion boards (Blackboard)	Wikis (Blackboard and Google Apps)
• Class collaboration and problem solving • Class online discussions, at course or topic level • Informal peer support • Assessment of learning/contributions	• Group problem solving area • Group communication space • Group project space • Group assessment space
Group blogs (Blackboard and Google Apps)	**Blackboard Collaborate**
• Reflection • Record • Exploration • Critical learning • Personal assessment	• Interactive classroom • Peer learning space • Virtual tutorials

Results

The development of a community of learners that leads to improved student learning and course satisfaction.

Collaboration and Interaction Checklist

Checklist	Yes	No
Have you provided students with a generic class discussion board?		
Have you provided students with topic discussion boards?		
Have you provided students with opportunities for online group work, e.g. using group blogs, wikis or Collaborate?		
Have you provided students with opportunities to have collaboative communication/problem solving areas?		
Have you provided students with opportunities for peer learning/interactions?		
Have you provided students with opportunities to engage in personal reflection?		

3 Assessment

Assessment validates student learning and outcomes. It provides feedback to students and teachers on student progress. Use formative and summative assessment practices.

- Formative assessment is useful for consolidating learning, diagnostic analysis and extension work.
- Summative assessment provides evidence of learning.

Principles

To provide, authentic and unambiguous opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning.

Practices for authentic assessment

- Outline assessment tasks in course guide
- Provide clear and unambiguous assessment tasks and instructions in Blackboard
- Give explicit assessment dates, criteria and task instructions
- Assessment tasks should measure what they are meant to measure!
- Authentic assessment: how does the assessment task relate to what is required in the disciplinary/professional practices in the workplace?
- Timely feedback must be provided
- Use rubrics for pragmatic and explicit marking criteria to provide detailed feedback, including areas for improvement (diagnostic for students)
- Use multiple types of assessment, and allow multiple attempts, e.g.:
  - Quizzes
  - Multiple choice
  - Self-correcting
- If possible, provide creative assessment tasks, e.g. create a video
- Progressive complexity in assessment to measure deep learning
- Provide exemplars of good assessment practices
- Provide alternative assessment arrangements or conditions to accommodate disabilities. Speak to the Disability Liaison Unit for further information.

Results

Student assessment output represents meaningful and consolidated learning across time.

Assessment Checklist

Checklist	Yes	No
Are assessment requirements and tasks clearly stated in the course guide?		
Are there clear and unambiguous assessment tasks and instructions in Blackboard?		
Have you provided explicit assessment dates, criteria and task instructions?		
Does the assessment measure what it is meant to measure?		
Is the assessment task authentic: does it reflect professional practices in the workplace?		
Are there feedback timelines?		
Are there explicit marking criteria, e.g. rubrics?		
Are there multiple types of assessment used including creative assessment tasks if applicable?		
Does assessment increase in complexity across the course?		
Are there multiple opportunities for formative assessment?		
What percentage of assessment is summative?		

4 Learner Support

Learner support provides students with resources and information to enhance their learning experiences. Support should cover both the online environment and a variety of university/student services.

Principle

Provide students with just-in-time resources to support their learning needs.

Practices for supporting learner needs

- Provide a dedicated learner support section
- Provide access/links to guides, e.g. vendor resources, on how to use Blackboard
- Provide guides/links to specific common tasks, e.g. creating a discussion board post and submitting assignments
- Provide support resources any additional tools, add-ins or specialist software, e.g. Lynda.com (Must be accessed through the Library)
- Provide academic and systems support information for:
  - eAssessment guidelines
  - Turnitin
  - Plagiarism information
  - Referencing guides
  - Library services and databases, including searching
  - The Learning Lab
  - Study and Learning Centre
  - Disability Liaison Unit
  - IT Service desk
- Provide teaching staff information
  - Personal and contact details: email, phone, chat etc.
  - Staff contact availability

- Provide course management information
  - Assessment feedback timelines
  - Feedback enquiry timelines
  - Netiquette in the classroom
  - Regular announcements

Results

Students can find information and services required to assist them when they need it.

Learner Support Checklist

Checklist	Yes	No
Is there a dedicated learning support section?		
Are there guides/links available for Blackboard, e.g. vendor resources?		
Are there guides/links to common tasks?		
Are there guides/links to all other software, add-ins or tools used in the course, e.g. Lynda.com		
Is there academic and systems support information? • eAssessment guidelines • Turnitin • Plagiarism information • Referencing guides • Library services and databases, including searching • The Learning Lab • Study and Learning Centre • Disability Liaison Unit • IT Service desk		
Is teaching staff contact and availability information provided? • Personal details • Contact details: email, phone, chat etc. • Staff contact availability		
Is course management information provided? • Assessment feedback timelines • Feedback enquiry timelines • Netiquette in the classroom • Regular announcements		