Getting started with Blackboard – for academics, including research staff

Updated: 7th September 2017

Contents
About this guide...........................................................................................................................................2
1. How to view a course as a student........................................................................................................2
2. How to make an announcement ...........................................................................................................2
3. How to send an email to all students ..................................................................................................2
4. How to create a content area ...............................................................................................................2
5. Using folders ........................................................................................................................................2
6. Using items ..........................................................................................................................................3
7. How to upload a file from “My computer” .......................................................................................3
8. How to add a web link .........................................................................................................................3
9. How to enrol an instructor (or student) on my course .....................................................................3
10. How to make a course available to students ..................................................................................4
11. Other ideas for using Blackboard ....................................................................................................4
12. Setting up groups ...............................................................................................................................4
13. Creating a test (quiz) .........................................................................................................................5
14. Creating a discussion forum ..............................................................................................................5
15. Further Help .......................................................................................................................................5
About this guide
This is an introductory guide intended for academics, including research staff, new to Blackboard. Sections 1 to 10 cover common and basic tasks. Sections 11 to 14 cover some other ideas for using Blackboard. You may also find the “Blackboard course design” guide useful. It can be found on the Blackboard help tab.

If you are using this guide during a Blackboard training session, first log in to Blackboard at www.ole.bris.ac.uk and click on your test course. If you are using it independently and would like a test course for practice, please contact digital-education@bristol.ac.uk to request one.

1. How to view a course as a student
Instructors can view courses as a student by using Student Preview. This is found to the top right of a Blackboard course, next to the Edit Mode button.

2. How to make an announcement
a) Once in your course, ensure Edit Mode is ON (in the top right)
b) Click Announcements in the course menu OR click on Control Panel to open options (if necessary), click Course Tools then click Announcements
c) Click Create Announcement
d) Enter subject and message, then set options as required, e.g., date restrictions
e) To send an email copy of the announcement to students, you must tick “Send a copy of this announcement immediately”. Note: Announcement emails go to all users in a course, including Instructors. If you only wish to send a message to students, add the announcement but do not tick the box to email it, then copy the text and paste it into an email (see 5, below, for instructions on sending an email).
f) Click Submit

3. How to send an email to all students
a) Click on Control Panel to open options (if necessary)
b) Click Course Tools, then click Send Email
c) Click All Student Users
d) Enter subject and message, then click Submit

4. How to create a content area
You can create content areas for organising materials in your course. These appear on the left menu.

a) Ensure Edit Mode is ON (at the top right)
b) Move your mouse over the + at the top left of your course menu
c) Select Content Area, and enter a name, e.g., Learning Resources
d) Tick Available to Users
e) Click Submit

5. Using folders
Folders are useful for organising your course documents, links, and other information. Try not to have too many folders within folders, as this can make content hard to find. Ideally you should aim to restrict the course to three levels, Level 1 being the content area, Level 2 the top folder, and Level 3 sub-folders if required. Top-level folders could, for example, be
structured by topic, week, or person teaching. Within that folder you may then have sub-folders, for example for tasks or activities. To create a folder:

a) Ensure that Edit Mode is ON
b) Click the area on the left-hand menu where you want to add the folder
c) Hover over Build Content with your mouse and click Content Folder, under the New Page heading
d) Enter folder name
e) In the text box you can include further information, for example a summary of what the folder contains. Then click Submit

6. Using items
Items are the basic building blocks of a course. They can be used to add text, images and other media, for example to provide instructions or learning content. Files can also be attached to items (see 7, How to upload a file, below)

a) Ensure Edit Mode is ON (at the top right)
b) Click on the content area you just created
c) Hover over Build Content, then click on Item under the Create heading
d) Enter a name for the item
e) Enter some text and/or other media such as an image, then click Submit

7. How to upload a file from “My computer”
a) Ensure Edit Mode is ON (at the top right)
b) Click on the content area you have just created
c) Hover over Build Content, then click on Item under the Create heading
d) Enter a name for the item
e) Click on Browse My Computer. Locate the file and select it, then click Open.
f) OR Drag the file into the dashed box. It should appear under Attached files
g) Scroll down and click Submit

8. How to add a web link
a) Ensure Edit Mode is ON
b) Go to an area of the course where you want to add a web link
c) Hover over Build Content, then click on Web Link under the Create heading
d) Type a name for the link. Enter or paste the address, and click Submit

9. How to enrol an instructor (or student) on my course
You may wish to enrol other Instructors on a course, or possibly students. Note: all SITS courses (for units and programmes) have students automatically enrolled.

a) Click on Control Panel to open options (if necessary)
b) Click Users and Groups, then click Users
c) Click Find Users to Enrol
d) Enter or browse for instructor/student username(s). Select role as appropriate
e) Click Submit
10. How to make a course available to students
If on your Blackboard home page a course has “not currently available” in brackets, it is unavailable to students. By default new SITS courses are unavailable to students, so they need to be made available when ready for use. This can be done using the Quick Tools on your Blackboard home page.

11. Other ideas for using Blackboard
Here are a few other ideas for using Blackboard to enhance learning and teaching.

- Structured online group discussion, allowing participation over a period of time
- Online submission and marking, using the Grade Centre for providing marks and feedback to students
- Formative tests (quizzes) which provide immediate feedback
- Peer or self-assessment to help students engage with marking criteria and provide more efficient and timely feedback for large groups
- Collaboration or group work – eg use of a wiki (editable group webpage) for collaborative editing of a report/assignment
- Blogs for personal/group reflection, which can be private, or for lecturers to comment on

Case studies in these and other areas are available under “Ideas for Practice” on the Digital Education website: www.bris.ac.uk/digital-education

12. Setting up groups
Once you have set up groups in a Blackboard course these can be used in a variety of ways. For example, you can communicate with the groups by email, or they can use group tools such as discussion fora, file exchanges or blogs.

To set up groups:

a) In the Control Panel click on Users and Groups then Groups
b) Click Create and choose Manual Enrol
c) Give the group a name, and choose the tools you wish the group to have
d) In the bottom section, Membership, click Add Users and select your test student to add to the group, then click Submit
e) Log in as your test student to see the group tools you have made available
13. Creating a test (quiz)
First create a content area in the menu, called “Quizzes” or similar.

a) Make sure Edit Mode is on
b) Click into the Quizzes area of your course
c) In the Assessments menu, choose Test
d) Next to “Create a New Test” click Create
e) Enter a name for the test and click Submit
f) Choose a question type from the Create Question menu, fill in the details, and click Submit
g) Repeat with another question type
h) When you have a couple of questions, click OK in the bottom right corner. You should return to the Create Test screen
i) Select the test you have created and click Submit
j) In Test Availability, click the button to make the link available, and then click Submit
k) Log in as your test student and try taking the test
l) When the student has taken the test, look in the Full Grade Centre in the Control Panel to see the results

14. Creating a discussion forum
First create a tool link in your course menu called Discussions (if one does not exist already):

a) Ensure Edit Mode is ON
b) Move your mouse over the + at the top left of your course menu
c) Select Tool Link, and enter the name “Discussions”
d) From the Type menu select Discussion Board
e) Tick Available to Users, then click Submit

Then create a discussion forum:

f) Click on the Discussion menu item, then click on Create Forum
g) Enter a name (and description, if you wish) for the forum, eg “FAQs about this unit”
h) Edit the settings as required and click Submit
i) Next try posting to the forum, by clicking on it and then choosing Create Thread
j) Type a subject and message then click Submit
k) Then try logging in as your test student and replying

15. Further Help
For further help, see the Help tab in Blackboard, or contact digital-education@bristol.ac.uk