



Better Practices for Creating Content in D2L (or D2L/BOLT)

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Learner Centered Design is the recommended framework for structuring course **content** in the university's learning management system, D2L (and at BU, BOLT). Students are our audience; we must keep them central to the planning of online and face-to-face (F2F) materials. Any course typically starts with a syllabus that defines course learning goals, details about grading, attendance, policies, and calendar. When we adapt to using a Learning Management System considerable research on course design notes that we must consider learner-experiences, whether we are teaching face-to-face (F2F) or in an online modality. A Learning Management System (LMS) such as D2L/BOLT has a **Table of Contents** under which "modules" are created. In a F2F class, we might create D2L/BOLT modules with titles such as syllabus, reading materials, assignment guidelines, policies, because we plan to hand out a hard copy of the syllabus. However, course content is more than textbooks, lectures, and materials, especially for online learners who also need technical information, a plan for Q&A exchange, in short the course content modules must be created to engage students in a discourse with fellow students and the instructor and be logically organized. This Teaching Tip offers resources and suggestions, informed by research, for creating a Table of Contents in D2L/BOLT with modules that are learner-centered and will improve student experiences. If all faculty were to adopt these approaches, we will create a more seamless flow for our students who, now more than ever, will depend upon D2L/BOLT to thrive in their classes.

Standards for Better Practice

Standards specific to online courses are helpful for both novice and seasoned educators. There are several organizations and publications (links at the end) that provide purposeful guidelines for fully online, synchronous or asynchronous, blended, or hybrid courses. For instance, Quality Matters® is well known for its eight standards that address:

- Course overview and introduction
- Learning objectives or competencies
- Instructional materials
- Learning activities and learner interaction
- Assessments and measurements
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility and Usability

To learn more about these standards, refer to [sixth edition of Specific Review Standards of Quality Matters®](#)



Table of Contents

When D2L was adopted by PASSHE as our learning management system (LMS), Bloomsburg chose to customize the name to Bloomsburg Online Learning and Teaching. It is based on the Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace venue.¹ Most course delivery systems like D2L/BOLT have a predictable online format: a top menu bar and a left-side **Table of Contents** where modules are created to house weekly lessons and supplemental materials. This layout enables students to find and navigate content using the menu and module buttons. Whether teaching F2F or online, faculty can assist learners by adopting standards, such as those outlined by Quality Matters®, to access their course. Contact your D2L campus administrator to find out if they can provide a course shell that has an initial Table of Contents.

Introduction: Create your presence and help orient students with an early email **Introduction** with instructions on how to access content and prepare for the course. You might even consider recording a short video using screen capture software that gives students a virtual tour of the course. The course landing page allows you to create **Announcements**. Compose a **Welcome** message here that can be personalized: when composing a D2L/BOLT Announcement, just type: {FirstName} followed by your greeting. (Note: This is an html tag for the user's name to appear when opening the D2L/BOLT web page. This does *not* work in email.)

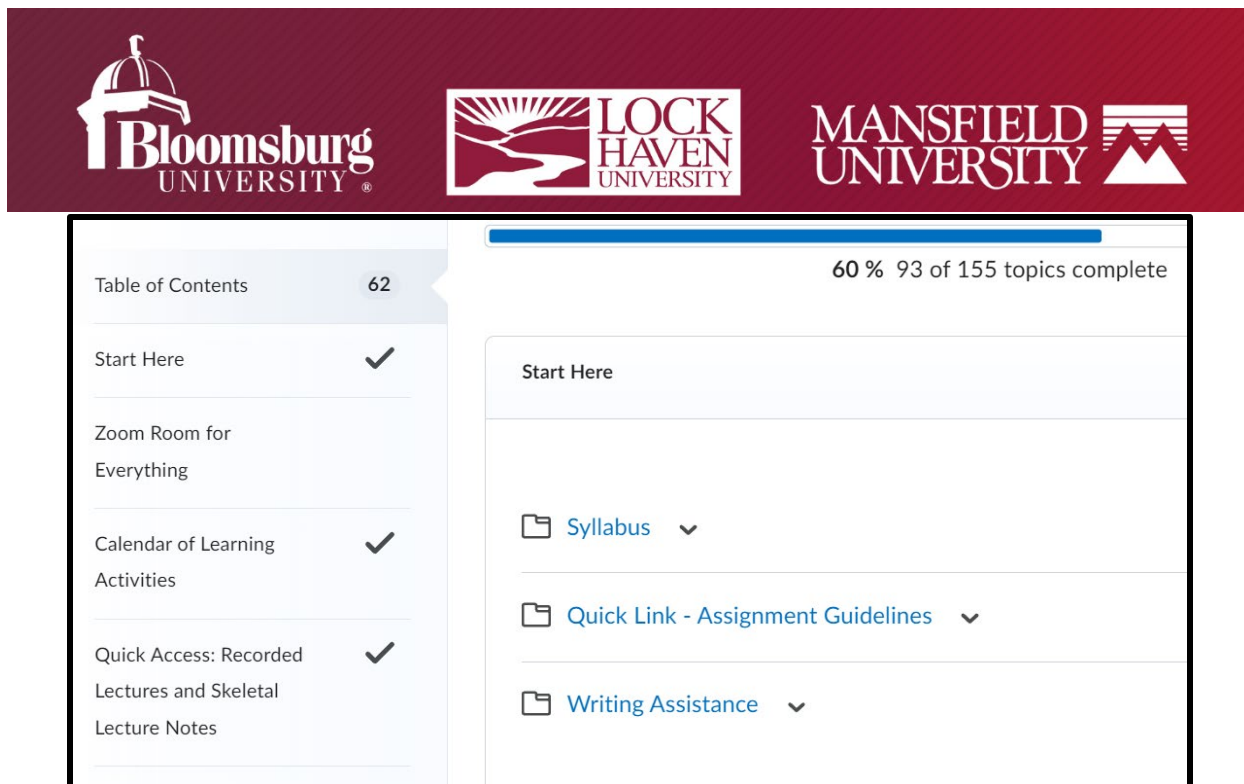
Course Overview: It's recommended that a **Start Here** module be created at the top of the Table of Contents that contains

- information about the instructor,
- syllabus,
- necessary computer equipment,
- technical skills needed,
- accessibility information, and
- how-to hints about communicating and getting help.

Be sure to provide students with links to resources. To help students become familiar with course content, create an activity such as a course scavenger hunt or an orientation quiz. Students will begin to participate and engage in content when locating and answering questions about the course and policies. Early feedback, even automatically conveyed using the quiz feedback features in D2L/BOLT, can establish a faculty presence in this kind of orientation activity. You might also want to create a Q&A Discussion Board, where students can pose questions about the course at any time.

Content Modules: Following the course overview, you should create a series of content modules organized by unit topic, theme, lesson number or weekly calendar that advance students progressively through the semester (see figure below). Each content module should outline learning objectives and provide comprehensive content to allow students to complete the course. Create **short messages** with audio, video, or text statements at the start or end of each week's module to explain the rationale and applicability of the learning activities to help learners see subject matter relevancy. In the partial sample to the right, the modules are organized by syllabus calendar date.

¹ At the time of writing, the integration of D2L across Bloomsburg, Lock Haven, and Mansfield have not been finalized. So the location of D2L features may vary slightly between campuses. Contact your IT Staff if you struggle to find features.



Learning Objectives and Course Equivalency

Face to face and remote courses are expected to be “equivalent,” but let’s **not** confuse this to mean “identical.” Whether F2F or online, the trick is to examine action verbs within Bloom’s taxonomy or competency templates and match all objectives – **course, module or unit, lesson, and general education (GE) goals** with content and assessments. Caution: Avoid making these comparisons and refinements difficult. If the objective’s verb is to “create,” then the learner activity needs to “create” something. The evaluation shouldn’t be multiple-choice questions but rather a project that is “created” and submitted – **either in class or online**. Questions for selecting the right answer align with verbs like “identify” or “select.” To “compose” something results in a written, musical, or artform submission. Whatever the setting, the approved course objectives and content should not change, active learning techniques are adaptable to classrooms, distance education, or a combination of both arenas. By the way, at Bloomsburg University, we tend to speak of SLOs which either is referring to Student Learning Objectives or Student Learning Outcomes. For more discussion of SLOs, see [TALE Teaching Tip: Making Student Learning Objectives Relevant and Transparent](#). While some may have a tendency of using these words interchangeably, they are not synonymous. What is more requirements from program accreditors, guidelines from instructional designers, and standards from organizations like Quality Matters® distinguish between module learning objectives (**MLOs**) and course learning objectives (**CLOs**).

D2L/BOLT has **built-in features** such as **Quizzes** where practice questions can be created as an equivalent activity to clickers or scantrons in the classroom. The **Discussions** area facilitates exchanges between the learners themselves or between learners and faculty. Within directions, the **reasons** for the Discussions or other assignments can be stated. The more rationale given the better; and we know this is true F2F or any online modality.

Sample of D2L/BOLT Better Practice


In adding content to a module, you have several options; if you want to create the most user-friendly, seamless workflow for students, make use of the **“Create a File”** Option (this is the HTML editor). In doing so, you are essentially creating web pages without ever needing to learn html codes. These web pages can be dedicated to individual units and lessons. In the example below, Lisa Stallbaumer took a slightly different approach for an online synchronous course. In her F2F course, students express appreciation for how she outlines the sequence of tasks in the syllabus course calendar as illustrated here.

	appointment as chancellor.
Thursday 25 March, Synchronous Session, 6:30 PM	Course Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What questions do you have about course syllabus, assignments, and expectations? 2. What does it mean to "do history"?
Between classes do the following	<input type="checkbox"/> Study and Make Notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Hitler and the Germans, Part 1 of 3 (17 minutes) <input type="checkbox"/> Hitler and the Germans, Part 2 of 3 (23 minutes) <input type="checkbox"/> Hitler and the Germans, Part 3 of 3 (32 minutes)

So rather than list modules by content topics in D2L/BOLT, she entitled a content module, "Calendar of Learning Activities," then each sub-module sequenced and divided activities comparable to the syllabus calendar (image above). Below is the screen shot of learning activities that students would need to accomplish to prepare for our next synchronous meeting. The video preview explains how their tasks will contribute to course goals. Everything that appears in blue and is underlined links students to content within D2L/BOLT.

[Table of Contents](#) > [Between classes do the following](#) > Between 25 Mar-30 Mar

Between 25 Mar-30 Mar

 Listen

Video Preview sent by email 26 March

1. Study and Make Notes
 - [Hitler and the Germans, Part 1 of 3](#) (17 minutes) - [Skeletal Lecture Notes \(word document\)](#)
 - [Hitler and the Germans, Part 2 of 3](#) (23 minutes) - [Skeletal Lecture Notes \(word document\)](#)
 - [Hitler and the Germans, Part 3 of 3](#) (32 minutes) - [Skeletal Lecture Notes \(word document\)](#)
2. Complete [Online Quiz 1 in BOLT](#) by 6:30 PM, Tuesday, 30 March Bergen, Ch 1 AND video lectures: Hitler and the Germans (parts 1-3)
3. Read and Make Notes for Synchronous Class Meeting: Claudia Koonz, "[Genocide and Eugenics: The Language of Power](#)" (ERT: 45 minutes)
4. Compose and Upload [TASS #1](#) to BOLT Assignment Folder by [6:00 PM, Tuesday, 30 March](#)

Optional:

Read: Bergen, War and Genocide, [chapter 3](#) and [chapter 4](#) (ERT: 75 minutes and 63 minutes)

View [The Nazis, A Warning from History: Chaos and Consent](#) (50 minutes) explores how the Nazis ruled. This documentary might challenge preconceptions of dictatorship. The Nazis did not rule solely by terror but also achieving conformity

ERT = Estimated reading time; a conservative estimate based on a single reading at approximately 200 words per-minute. Deep reading and making notes will extend your time.

Bloomsburg University's IMDC provides multiple tutorials through its [Infobase \(Freshdesk\)](#) on how to add course content to modules. In 2021, the [HTML editor](#) was updated. The illustration below provides a quick explanation of how to "Create a File," i.e. use the HTML editor.

Select Create a File and Assign the Content Module a name

The three most useful functions are the Insert Stuff, Insert Link, and Insert Image. With these options you are able to link students to anything within your D2L/BOLT course and offer external links.



Content Module ▾

Add dates and restrictions...

Add a description...

Upload / Create ▾

Existing Activities ▾

Upload Files

Video or Audio

Create a File

Create a Link

Create a File in "Content Module"

Assign a Name

Browse for a Template

☐ Hide from Users

Paragraph ▾ B I U     

In this box, you can define unit- or lesson-level learning objectives, provide explanations for how that lesson will contribute to student learning and course objectives (i.e. transparency and relevancy), and include links to readings, videos, quizzes, images, etc., using either Insert Stuff, Image, or Hyperlink (pictured here).

Guide-on-the-side, Sage-on-the-stage, or something else?

When lessons are **asynchronous**, is it possible to grab attention while acting and feeling like a teacher? Consider this situation: If you follow a sport, then you know the difference between watching in person, live on television or with a mobile device. Each environment is different, as is F2F sessions, synchronous or asynchronous online, or hybrid lessons. Individuals may have preferences; but, obtaining satisfying outcomes may relate more to the “game” or **content** that catches attention and is viewed as worthwhile (i.e., worth the time and price). That “something else” beyond the sage or guide feeling is possible if faculty use innovations and creativity, combined with adequate and timely communication with learners, even if not F2F. Even if asynchronous, faculty are still making expert judgements about content, they are in the driver’s seat. The technology and software become the vehicle for the content. Initially, try easy-to-use instructional techniques and avoid complexity. Slowly and purposely add advanced features and online tools to facilitate student learning. Our responsibility is to create and teach a course that meets the learning goals, to develop measurements and assessments that indicate student achievement, and to determine the most effective learning and teaching activities for our students.

Online Resources

Brightspace Community – Multiple Best Practice Topics:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/topic/0T0610000000JcxGAE/best-practices>

Videos about Creating Content Modules: Created by D2L-Brightspace

- Activity (1.02 minutes) <https://youtu.be/6SBNFgqTDIO>
- Captures (1.10 minutes) <https://youtu.be/Qpolt1jsMKM>
- Create Audio (2.23 minutes) <https://youtu.be/4C5nnoCZGnu>
- Create Overview (1.23 minutes) https://youtu.be/a6Dq_8nb5Mk
- Create Video (2.30 minutes) https://youtu.be/5LTYIn_7AEs
- Delete Module (1.25 minutes) <https://youtu.be/mB7YT11NC-U>
- Import Course (1.54 minutes) <https://youtu.be/9Ow2oqokSLQ>
- Inserts & Files (1.50 minutes) <https://youtu.be/4QcC3KO-OPY>



- Links & Editing (3 minutes) <https://www.lynda.com/Desire2Learn-tutorials/D2L-content-editor/699342/789266-4.html>
- Modules (1.39 minutes) <https://youtu.be/UilwSb494e4>
- Rearrange Modules (2.16 minutes) <https://youtu.be/fz9eLTQJqkQ>
- Releases (2.31 minutes) <https://youtu.be/pa2NaVsodRA>
- *SCORM (2.21 minutes) <https://youtu.be/eupp9dryxls>
- Tracking (4.52 minutes) <https://youtu.be/TZdQiCZpUqc>
- Upload Topic (1 minute) <https://youtu.be/aAguK-DGqTE>

*SCORM stands for *Shareable Content Object Reference Model* –
These packages use HTML pages to show techniques, skills, and instructional information

Online Challenges do Exist

Some **skills** require **human interaction**, including practicums, labs, clinical rotations, student teaching, internships, and apprentice-type tasks. In-person learning usually involves psychomotor skills with training (**tasks**) and education (**critical thinking**). The benefits of distance education (beyond flexibility, virtual tools, and global reach) include opportunities to reiterate and better understand crucial concepts. For instance, online learners can review problem-solving scenarios with **time** to reflect, remember, and study algorithms and rationale for better choices.

Many decades ago, remote learning was called **Correspondence Courses**. There were modular booklets filled with lessons and written activities that were postal mailed for faculty grading and then mailed back to students. Several disciplines offered correspondence courses particularly during the summer. Baccalaureate degree nursing programs for rural learners with qualified healthcare experience offered such courses, with the added requirement to attend scheduled days in urban settings to perform clinical skills. In addition, distance education wasn't limited to postal-mailed courses, as "School of the Air" using CB radios occurred in Outback Australia beginning in 1951.

As challenging as **Covid-19** restrictions have been, online courses have advantages over historic methods. Today, there are more **videos**, interactive **software**, **simulations**, virtual reality (**VR**), and **Zoom** rooms where webcams capture skills done by learners with lab kits. Nothing, however, replaces **hands-on** experience, and depending upon the program – especially those with state and accreditation requirements – students must eventually complete face-to-face activities.

Conclusion

Better practices for online content focus on learner experiences. Guidelines come from interdisciplinary quality assurance organizations and LMS professionals. Course content is addressed from a broad perspective, while focusing on items typically under the Table of Contents in D2L/BOLT. The subject matter is discipline-specific and left to the "content" experts while the logistics, discourse, and support for online courses is a team effort between faculty members and university staff who support D2L, IMDC, and campus faculty developers.

Resources and Better Practice Standards

National Council for Online Education – NCOE (*Partnership with OLC, QM, UPCEA, & WCET*)

<https://www.nationalcouncil.online/partners>

- Online Learning Consortium – OLC <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/>; OLC's Research Collections: <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/read/instructional-learning-design/>
- Quality Matters® – QM <https://www.qualitymatters.org/>
- University Professional and Continuing Education Association – UPCEA <https://upcea.edu/resources/hallmarks-online/>
- Wireless Communication Engineering Technologies – WCET <https://wcet.wiche.edu/initiatives/consortia>

National Standards for Quality Online Learning – NSO <https://www.nsqol.org/the-standards/>

- Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance <https://www.virtuallearningalliance.org/> -



- *National Standards for Quality Online Courses* (2019), 3rd Edition (QM & VLLA – Creative Commons)
<https://www.nsqol.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/National-Standards-for-Quality-Online-Courses-Catalog3-2019.09.01.pdf>

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission – DEAC

- <https://www.deac.org/Resources/Associations.aspx> with hyperlinks to associated organizations: AACE, ADEC, AECT, C-BEN, CCUMC, Educause, EADL, ITC, ICDE, NC-SARA, Online Learning Consortium (formerly Sloan Consortium), The Presidents Forum, WICHE and WCET.

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