



# Teaching Toolkit

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Blackboard: Where to start

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## New to Blackboard?

If you're new to Blackboard basic information on access, 'How To...' guides and instruction manuals are all available on the [IT services website](#). This provides extensive information on the VLE, the range of training courses provided, and tips on using and maintaining your Blackboard pages. The Campus Pack, a suite of social learning tools that integrates with Blackboard, includes details on tools for wikis, blogs, podcasts, and website building tools and can be accessed [here](#).

## Blackboard and a Deep Approach to Learning

For many lecturers Blackboard has merely become a digital repository where students can access lecture notes. Blackboard can be used more efficiently as a tool to promote active and deep learning, and as a means of engaging with your students.

### Deep approach to learning

Research shows that there is a huge qualitative difference in the learning achieved when a deep, rather than shallow, approach is taken (Marton and Saljo, 1976; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998; Biggs, 1999). Students who take a deep approach to learning have the intention of understanding, engaging with, operating in and valuing the subject. Such students:

- Actively seek to understand the material / subject
- Interact vigorously with the content
- Make use of evidence, inquiry and evaluation
- Take a broad view and relate ideas to one another
- Are motivated by interest
- Relate new ideas to previous knowledge

- Relate concepts to everyday experience
- Tend to read and study beyond the course requirements

## Surface approach to learning

Students who take a surface approach tend not to have the primary intention of becoming interested in and of understanding the subject, but rather their motivation tends to be that of jumping through the necessary hoops in order to acquire the mark, or the grade, or the qualification.

Students who take a surface approach:

- Try to learn in order to repeat what they have learned
- Memorise information needed for assessments
- Make use of rote learning
- Take a narrow view and concentrate on detail
- Fail to distinguish principles from examples
- Tend to stick closely to the course requirements
- Are motivated by fear of failure

## Encouraging Deep Learning in Blackboard

### Avoid 'Death by PowerPoint'

Death by PowerPoint refers to the experience in which learners are subjected to one-way information dumps delivered using overheads (predominantly PowerPoint slides). These events are frequently referred to as "training." Some people metaphorically talk about them as lectures.

Learners have become so conditioned to Death-by-PowerPoint that, they feel cheated unless they are provided with copies of the presentation. It is perhaps inevitable that this transmission-dump approach to teaching has spread to the virtual, as well as the physical, learning environment. Driscoll (2003) states:

It should not come as a surprise that death-by-overhead has gone virtual. Live virtual classrooms and asynchronous self-paced programs have extended this phenomenon to online learning. I suspect the phenomenon has taken hold quickly because it is fast, simple and familiar. The only thing every training professional will agree on is that he or she doesn't have enough time. .... using lectures with virtual overheads is very attractive because it can be developed quickly. Related to the

concept of speed is, simplicity, ..... making overheads is something that most trainers and subject matter experts can do in their sleep. Lastly, overheads and lectures are familiar formats. If subject matter experts are being asked to teach online, what could be more straightforward than a lecture online. It is easy to move the metaphor of an instructor-led class to a live virtual class.

(Driscoll, 2002, from: [www-3.ibm.com/mindspan](http://www-3.ibm.com/mindspan))

## Reconsider How Blackboard is Used

In addition to its facility to store large amounts of information Blackboard hosts a large number of tools to encourage deep learning. One such tool is the provision of eLearning. According to IBM e-learning is ideal for learner-centric (student-focused) teaching because:

- ***Courses can be studied at the learners' own pace.*** Learners can visit and revisit topics as many times as they need. They can skip over topics with which they are already familiar.
- ***Learners are more willing, and have more opportunity, to ask questions.*** An interesting and very positive side effect of web-based learning is that people lose their embarrassment about asking questions. Learners in a traditional classroom are often scared to ask questions when they don't understand, for fear of feeling dumb in front of the rest of the class. In front of a nameless black box, learners start to ask fundamental questions once again, and get the answers that they need right when they need them, before the class has moved on to other topics.
- ***Modules can be studied in any order.*** With e-learning, learners are no longer obliged to follow a course from A to Z. They can start at Q, jump over to F, ignore M, and finish on T if they want to. *But only if the courses have been designed to be studied in a learner-centric way.*
- ***The training isn't over once the training is over.*** With web-hosted courses, going back to the class is only a browser's bookmark away.
- ***Revision can be much more effective.*** When writing essays, undertaking projects or preparing for end of course exams, learners can actually revisit the learning experience - instead of just re-reading a few cryptic notes written some time before.
- ***Web-hosted courses can be run continuously.*** This is particularly advantageous if we have external (particularly corporate) clients because they can then buy into our courses at any time. Moreover, once a course is updated on the web, previous

course participants can be notified with a simple e-mail, and suddenly refresher education is available simply and quickly.