ELMS: Managing Course Content and the Content Collection in Blackboard Academic Suite

Institute for Instructional Technology
Office of Information Technology

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Table of Contents

ELMS: Managing Course Content and the Content Collection in Blackboard Academic Suite 1
- Content Collection Area—My Content and Course Content 3
- Viewing the Content Collection 3
- Organizing the My Content Collection Area 4
- Create a Folder 5
- Uploading a Single Item to the Content Pane 6
- Upload a File 6

Uploading Multiples Files and Folders to the Content Pane 6
- Open a Web Folder (instructions for Internet Explorer) 7

Moving a File to a New Location 8
- Move a File 8
- Adding External Links 9

Modifying the Permissions on Files and Folders 9
- Extending Permissions to the My Content Collection 9

Structuring Content in a Content Area 10
- Adding a File to a Content Area 10
- Adding a Folder in a Content Area 12
- Adding Files to the Folder 13
- Managing and Removing Content 13
- To Change the Order Of the Content 13
- To Edit the Content Link 13
- To Remove Content 13

Organizing Content in a Learning Unit 13
- Adding a Learning Unit 15
- Creating a Learning Unit “Slide Show” 16

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Managing Content and the Content Collection in Blackboard Academic Suite

The Blackboard Content System is a powerful feature that enables users to manage and share content from a central location. Content that is placed in the Content System can then be linked into content areas in the Blackboard Learning System. As currently structured in the University of Maryland's implementation of Blackboard Academic Suite, users have access to two content collection areas: Course Content and My Content. The Course Content area can be accessed (and its content managed) by the instructor(s), teaching assistant(s) and course builder(s) associated with the course; the My Content area is accessible only by a specific user, identified by their Directory ID, however, the user can provide permission to access content to other individuals of their choosing.

This workshop will explore the following concepts:

- Identifying the My Content and Course Content Collection areas and the uses of each
  - Adding Files and Folders to a Content Collection Area
  - Single file upload (a review of content provided in *Getting Started with Blackboard*)
  - Uploading multiple files with Web Folders
  - Adding external links
  - Modifying file and folder permissions
- Strategies for organizing resources in the Content Collection Area
- Structuring content in a "Content Area"
  - Adding a file (from the Content Collection System)
  - Adding a folder
  - Managing and removing content
- Developing content as a "Learning Unit"

Content Collection Area—My Content and Course Content

The Content Collection areas provide central repositories for materials you plan to make available within one or more course spaces, as well as provide a personal storage area online that you can access from any networked computer at any time. The Course Content collection can be accessed by those with an instructor, teaching assistant or course builder role in that course. And, while the My Content collection area is, by default, only accessible to a specific user id, the collection owner can make specific files or folders available to others on a course development "team".

Viewing the Content Collection

To view the Content Collection, click on the Content Collection tab at the top of your ELMS homepage.

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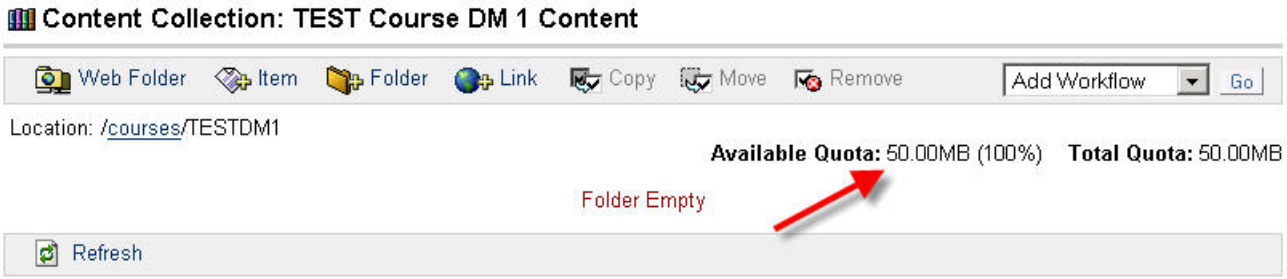
The Content Collection window is split into two parts: the Navigation Pane (see right) and the Content Pane (see below). The Navigation Pane provides access to the My Content collection and the Course Content collection. Click on the *users* folder under My Content, then click on your user id to open your personal content collection in the Content Pane. Click on the *courses* folder under Course Content to reveal folders representative of all courses in which you have a role of instructor, teaching assistant or course builder. Click on any specific course folder to open the content collection for that course in the Content Pane.

The Content Pane will be empty until you begin uploading single files or multiple files and folders and external links into the space. Note that the default space quota available for a Course Collection is 50 megabytes; the default space quota for the My Content Collection is 150 megabytes. Additional space can be requested via elms@umd.edu should you need it.



Organizing the My Content Collection Area

If you plan to use the My Content Collection area to house materials for several different courses, it would be expedient to organize the content into a logical system of folders. One model of organization might be as follows:

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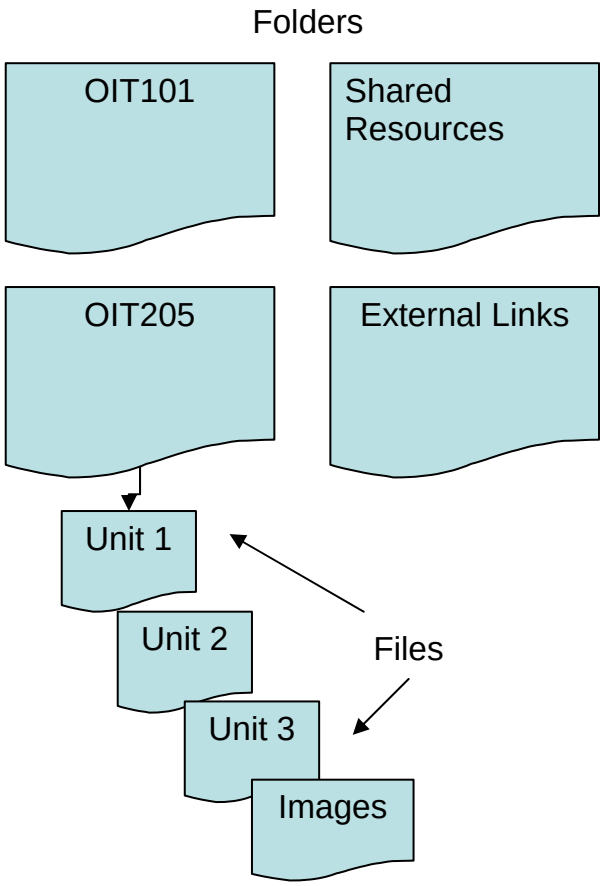
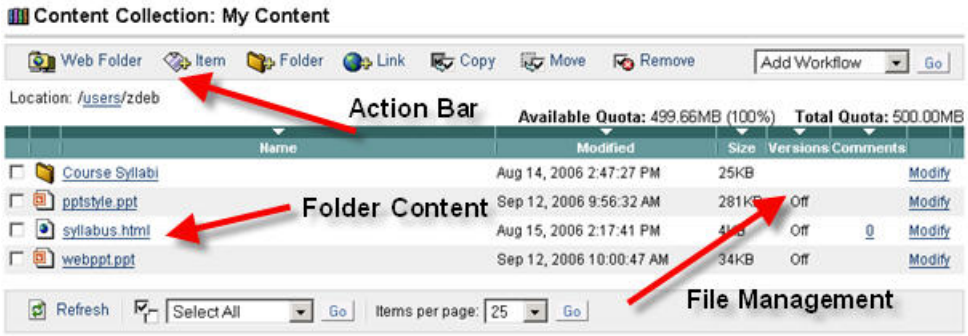


You can create this folder organization within the Content Pane and upload files or multiple folders and files using the tools available on the Content System Action Bar.



Create a Folder

1. Click on the **Add Folder** icon on the Action Bar.
2. Provide a name for the folder; e.g., *Unit One*.
3. In most instances you can leave the Quota option blank.
4. If several people have access to the Content Collection area, the creator of a folder can choose to “lock” it so that no one else can access it or its content when linking to the Content Collection from a Blackboard content area.

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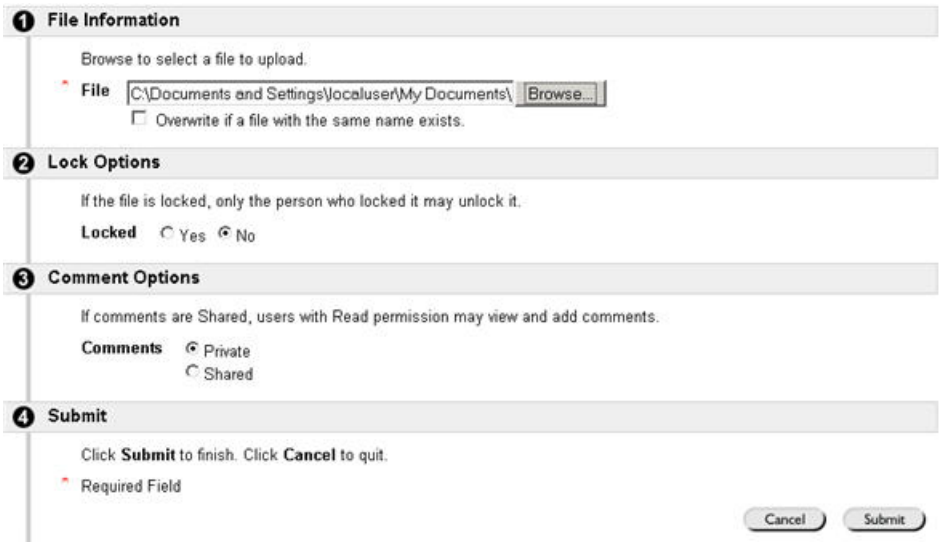
5. The creator of a folder can choose to invite others with access to the folder and its content to share comments about the content. By keeping the folder "private" no one will be able to provide comments on its contents.
6. Click on the **Submit** icon to create the folder.
7. Create a second folder called *Shared Resources*.

Uploading a Single Item to the Content Pane

Blackboard refers to files as "items". You can upload all kinds of files to the Content Collection—.doc, .ppt, .pdf, .html, .xls, .rtf, .jpg, etc. HTML, PDF and web image files (.gif, .jpg, .png), when accessed in a content area, will open in the browser window; all other file formats will prompt the user to open the file in an application on the user's computer that understands the file format.

Upload a File

1. Click on the **Add Item** icon on the Action Bar.
2. Browse your local computer for a file (e.g., **MyDocuments/ELMSTraining/ContentManagement/netiquette.html**)

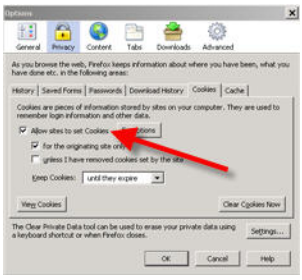


3. Click on the **Submit** icon.

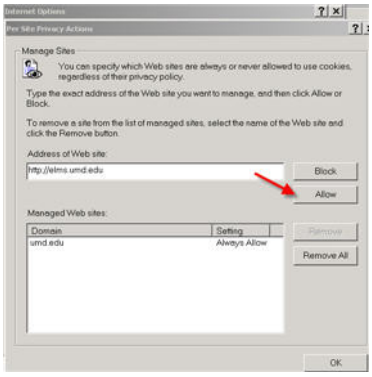
Uploading Multiples Files and Folders to the Content Pane

You may have developed much of the content for your course on your local computer, and it may exist in a variety of files and directories. An efficient way of making this content available to your courses is to connect to your local computer from your My Content Collection area and drag and drop files between the two locations. Blackboard uses a file transfer protocol called "Web Folders". Web Folders use WebDAV technology in which the Content Collection area becomes a network drive visible from the local desktop. Files can be edited via the Web Folder and folders and files can be uploaded in groups.

Note: Web Folders requires that persistent cookies be enabled for elms.umd.edu, or you will be prompted to authenticate your access when opening a Web Folder. This is handled through your browser's Internet Options settings (usually found under the TOOLS menu).



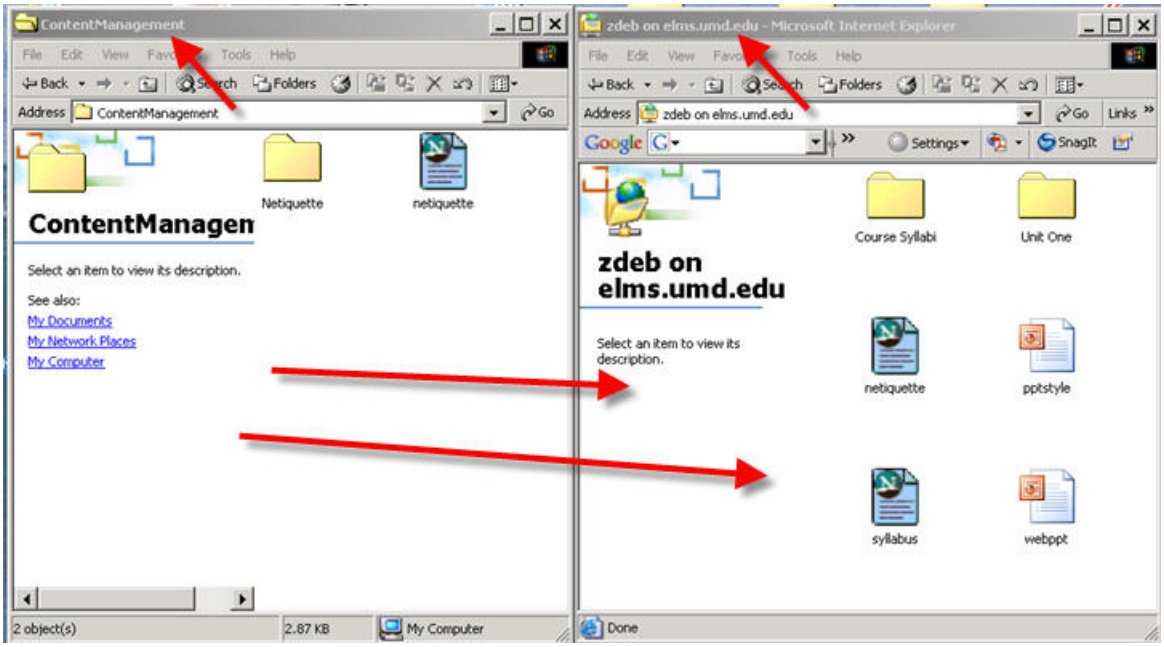
Firefox



Internet Explorer

Open a Web Folder (instructions for Internet Explorer)

1. Click on the **Web Folder** icon in the Action Bar.
2. The contents of your Content Collection pane open in a new window.
3. Minimize your elms.umd.edu IE browser window and resize the second IE window so you can see other areas of your computer's desktop.
4. Open the My Documents folder and locate the ELMStraining folder. Double-click to open this folder and locate the ContentManagement folder. Double-click to open this folder.
5. Make sure the ContentManagement and IE Web Folder windows are sitting side by side.



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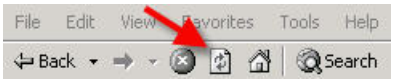
6. CTRL-click on each folder and file in the ContentManagement window to select them (or click in the window itself and choose the **Select All** command from the EDIT menu).
7. Drag the selected files and folders to the Web Folder window.
8. Maximize the IE browser window that contains your session with Blackboard.
9. Click on the browser **Refresh** icon on the browser's navigation bar.



10. Note that the files from your local computer have been uploaded to the My Content Collection area.

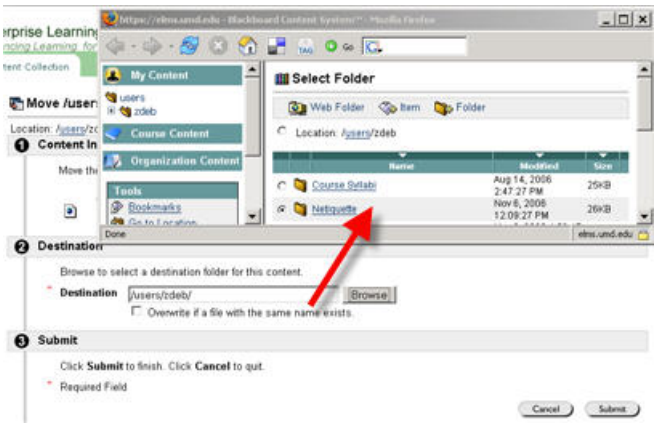
The Web Folders process works seamlessly with Internet Explorer. To use Web Folders with Firefox or Mozilla requires a few extra steps for set up, but provides equally seamless drag and drop capability. Please see **Appendix A** for these steps.

Moving a File to a New Location

The Copy and Move tools on the Action Bar enable you to rearrange the location of a file or folder (either within the My Content Collection area, or between the My Content and Course Content Collection areas).

Move a File

1. Click in the checkbox to the left of the **netiquette.html** file.
2. Click on the **Move** icon in the Action Bar.
3. Click the **Browse** icon to view the folder and file collection of the My Content Collection area.



4. Click in the Radio button to the left of the **Netiquette** folder.
5. Click on the **Submit** icon to move the **netiquette** file into the **Netiquette** folder.

You can also Move or Copy a file or folder into a Course Content Collection folder.

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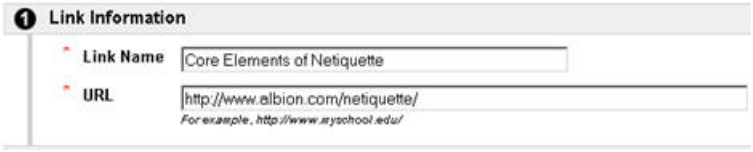
Adding External Links

You can also store links to external Web sites in your Content Collection. Once created, external links, as well as links to HTML files you have uploaded into the Content Collection, will be represented by a globe icon: When entering a URL, always enter the full Web address to the link, e.g., http://www.umd.edu



Links stored in the My Content Collection area will be available for you to use in any course you may be developing; it acts very much like the Bookmarks menu of your Web browser. The usefulness of keeping important external links in your Content Collection, rather than the browser Bookmarks file is that these links reside in a centralized repository and not on a specific computer or in a specific browser.

Modifying the Permissions on Files and Folders

The files and folders in your My Content Collection can only be read, modified, linked, removed or managed by you. Within a Course Content Collection area, instructors, teaching assistants and course builders have the ability to work with content in this way, by default; however, the instructor can modify the permissions assigned to any of these other roles.

Extending Permissions to the My Content Collection

1. Click on the checkbox to the left of the Netiquette folder link. Click on the **Modify** icon on the right side of the screen.

   You can modify the properties, permissions or comment sharing associated with the select folder.
2. Click on the **Permissions** link. You will see that, as the owner, you have Read, Write, Manage and Removal permissions for this file.
3. To provide permission for another individual to access the folder, first click on the **Add Users** icon. Provide the Directory ID of the individual (or individuals, separated by commas) in the University Directory Name field.

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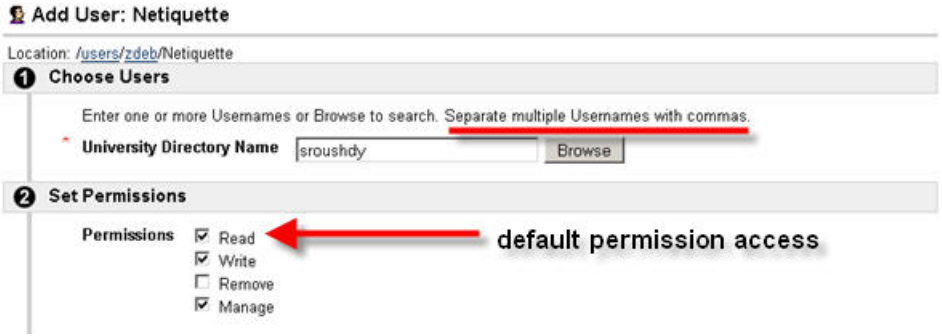
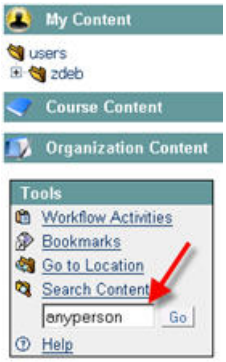


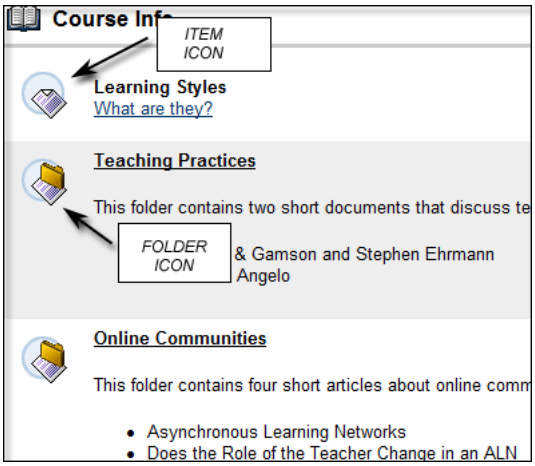
4. Select the kinds of access you wish to provide to these chosen users. Click on the **OK** icon.

In order for an individual to see the files and folders to which they have been given access, he or she must provide the Directory ID of the content owner in the Search field in the Content Collection navigation pane. Depending on the kind of permission provided, the user can read, modify, or even remove the file or folder. Providing permission to view a file to a teaching assistant or course builder also enables the person with that role in a course to link to the file from within the course space.



Structuring Content in a Content Area

There are many options for organizing course content in Blackboard. There must be a content link from the Course Menu for students to access the content. If a link doesn't exist, one can be added via the Control Panel/Manage Course Menu command. Content can then be organized from this link as a series of files, or grouped in folders, or both options can be used to present students with course content. Below is a sample of what a student view looks like for a Content Area that contains a single file and a couple of folders.



Adding a File to a Content Area

1. Select a **Content Area,** such as "Course Documents", on the Course Menu (or select from the Control Panel).
2. Click on the **Edit View** link in the upper right hand corner of the page.

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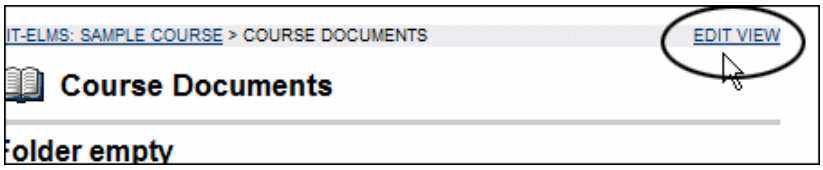
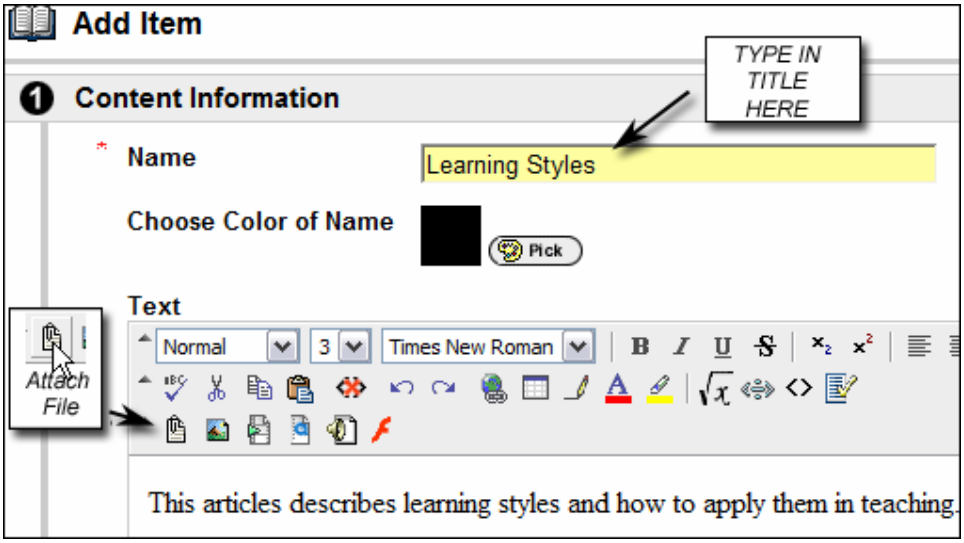


3. Click on the **Add Item** icon on the Action Toolbar at the top of the page.

4. Type in a **name** for the Item (in this example, “Learning Styles”). This is a required field (note the red asterisk).
5. In the text box, more information, such as a description or directions, can be added.
6. Click on the **Attach File** icon on the third row of tools in the Visual Text Editor.



7. This will bring you to the Insert Content Link page. There are two ways to link files to your course:
    - Single File Upload – browsing to a file that exists locally on your computer and uploading it into your course directly.
    - Content Collection Link – a link is created to files that are uploaded to the Content Collection area (either “My Content” or “Course Content”)

    ***Note*:** The Single File Upload method enables you upload a file directly; however, the file cannot be shared with other courses. To update the file, it would need to be deleted, edited locally and then uploaded again. You cannot download the file from the course either. This is the traditional way Bb handles files.

8. For our purposes we will **Link from the Content Collection**. Click on the **Browse** button next to this option and navigate to the **roleofteacher.html** file in the **ContentManagement/LearningStyles** folder in the My Content Collection area.

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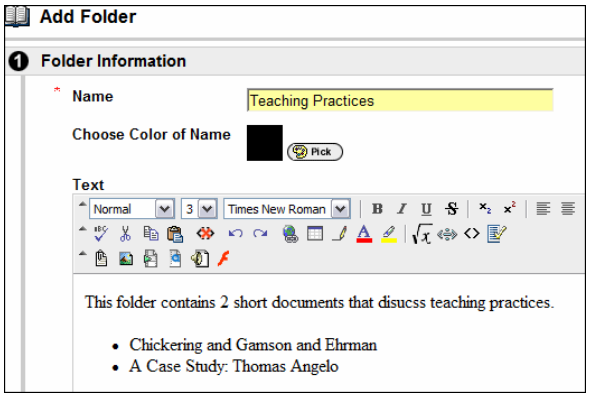
9. Click on the radio button next to the filename.
10. Click on the **Submit** icon.
11. This brings you back to the Content Link page. Under **2. Content Link Options,** you may add a name for the link, choose to launch in a new window, and add alternate text for disabled users.
12. Click on the **Submit** icton.

Adding a Folder in a Content Area

You may need to organize several readings together. Create a folder to group these documents together.

1. Again, click on a **Content Area,** such as “Course Documents”, on the Course Menu (or select from the Control Panel).
2. Click on the **Edit View** link in the upper right hand corner of the page.
3. Click on the **Add Folder**

icon on the toolbar at the top of the page.
4. Type in a **name** for the folder under Folder Information (in this example, “Teaching Practices”). This is a required field (note the red asterisk).



5. In the text box, more information, such as a description or directions, can be added.
6. Under section **2. Options**, you can select to make the folder available, track views, or chose start and end dates for availability. These are the same as the file options.

7. Click on the **Submit** icon.

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Adding Files to the Folder

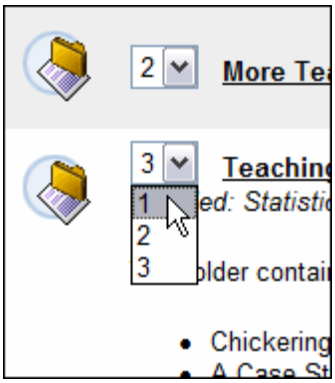
Now you have an empty folder. To begin adding files to the folder, make sure that you are inside the folder area. Then proceed as in the “Adding a File to the Content Area” above. You may add a file, another folder, external or course links or a test.

Managing and Removing Content

After placing your content in the Content area, it may need to be modified, reorganized or removed.

To Change the Order of the Content

8. To the left of the title of each content is a number, click on the **arrow next to the number.**
9. **Select the correct order** in which this item is to appear from the numbers in the drop-down box
10. When you release your mouse, the items will **automatically be reordered.**



To Edit the Content Link

Select this option when it is necessary to edit the information that was given when the item was created. Some examples would be to change the name, a file link, or availability.

1. Click on the **Modify** icon to the right of the title.
2. This takes you to the page from which you added the file, folder, link, etc. **Edit the link** as desired.
3. Click the **Submit** icon.

To Remove Content

4. Click on the **Remove** button to the right of the title for that item

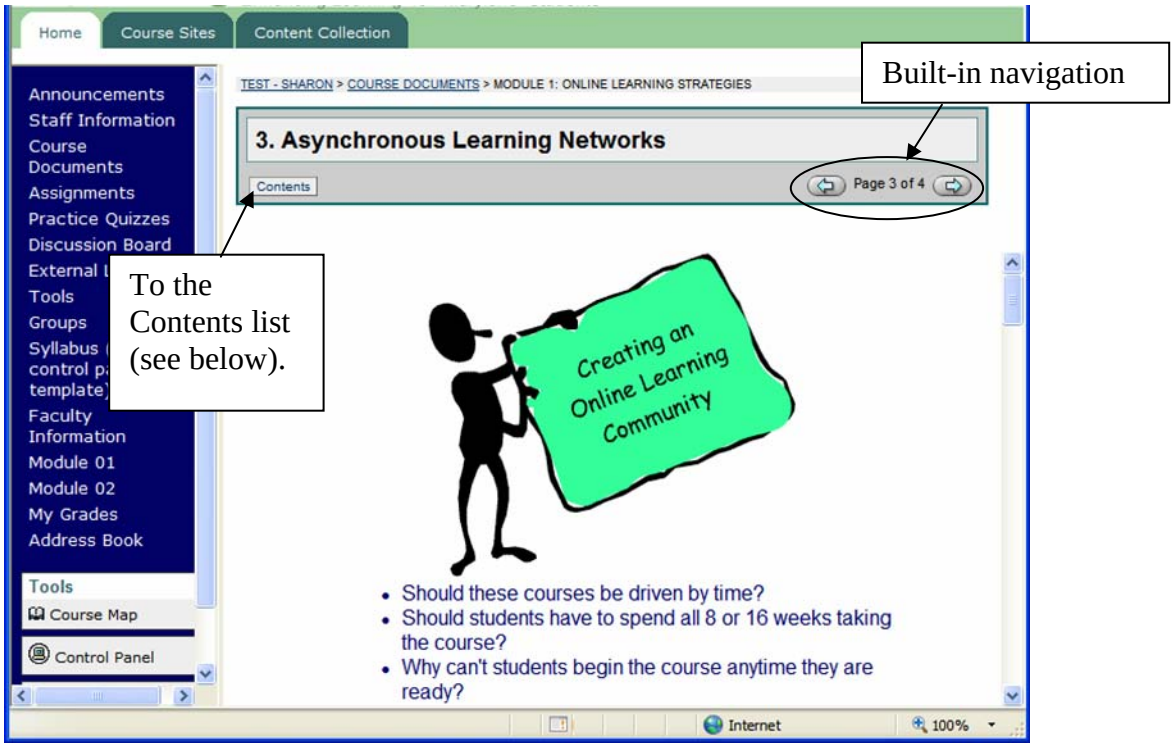
5. A warning box will display, click **OK** and the item is instantly removed.

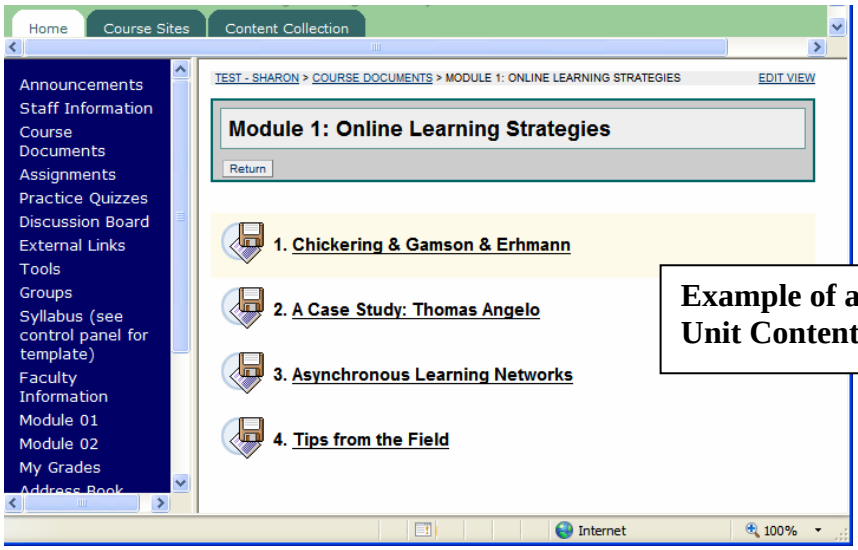
Organizing Content in a Learning Unit

Learning Units enable Instructors to set a structured path for progressing through content within a course. All types of content, such as Items, Assignment, and Assessments can be included in a Learning Unit. The Instructor can allow students to access content in a Learning Unit nonlinearly or force them to view it sequentially. For example, a Learning Unit on Shakespeare is created, including files, Assignments and an Assessment. The Instructor can require students to proceed through the Learning Unit in a specific order or they can allow students to view the contents in any order.

Content within a Learning Unit is added and managed just like content in a folder. The Learning Unit is a shell to which other content, such as files, is added. Learning Units can be modified like any other item within a Content Area.

Example of the third page of a Learning Unit.





Example of a Learning Unit Contents list.

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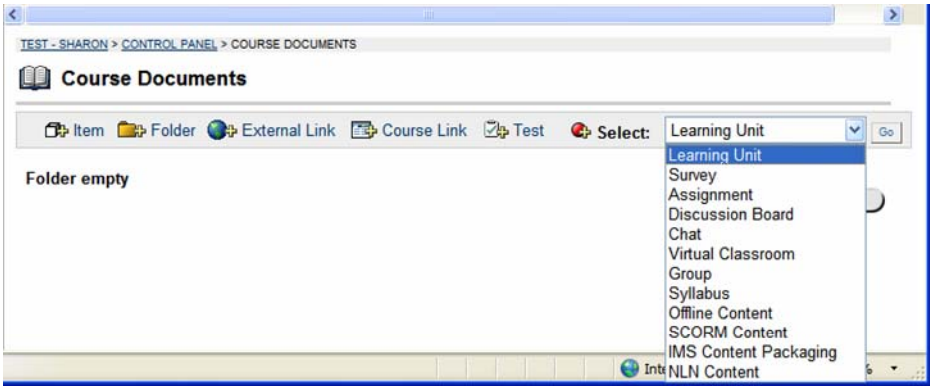
Adding a Learning Unit

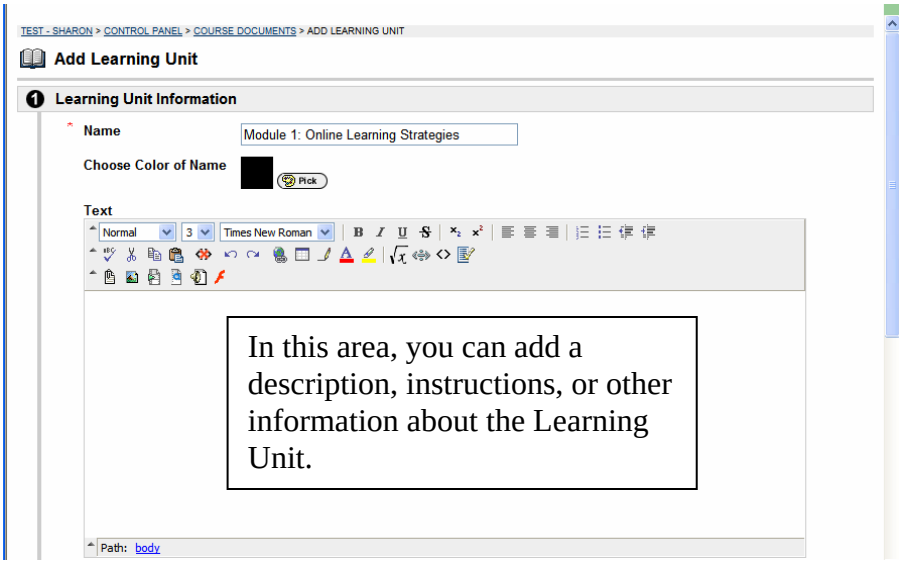
Follow the steps below to add a Learning Unit to a course Content area. At this step, you are adding a title, description, and setting availability options.

1. Select a Content Area, such as Course Documents, on the Control Panel (or, from the Course Menu, select a Content Area, and click **Edit View**.)
2. Select **Learning Unit** in the drop-down list on the Action Bar and click **Go**.

   Note: Learning Units can be viewed sequentially or non-sequentially. If sequential viewing is enforced, students will view the Learning Unit in the order items within it are listed. Students will not be able to advance to a page within the unit without having viewed the previous page. If sequential viewing is not enforced, items in the Learning Unit may be viewed in any order from the Contents page.



3. Complete the *Add Learning Unit* page and click the **Submit** icon.



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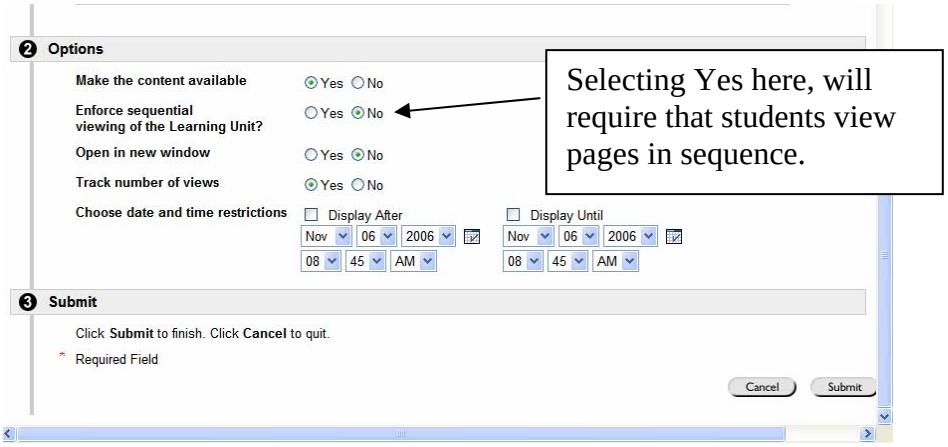
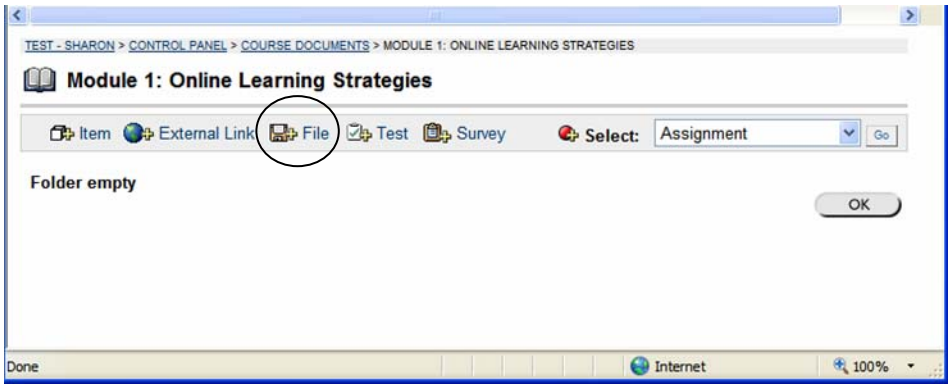


Creating a Learning Unit "Slide Show"

After a Learning Unit is added to a Content Area, you can create a slide show within it. The slide show will allow users to easily navigate from page to page, view pages sequentially or non-sequentially.

1. Open the Content Area that contains the Learning Unit.
2. Click the name of the Learning Unit to open it.

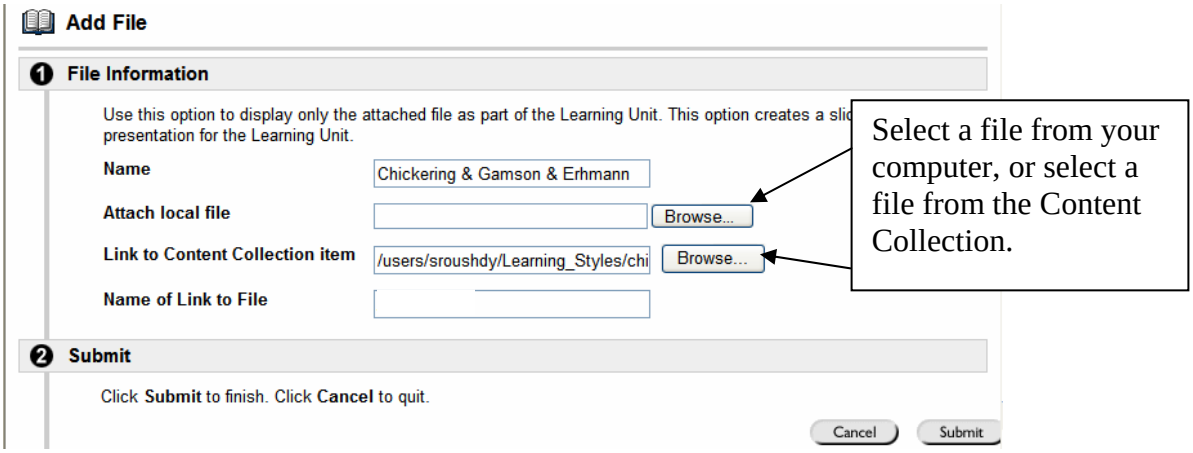
3. Select **Add File** in the Action Bar.



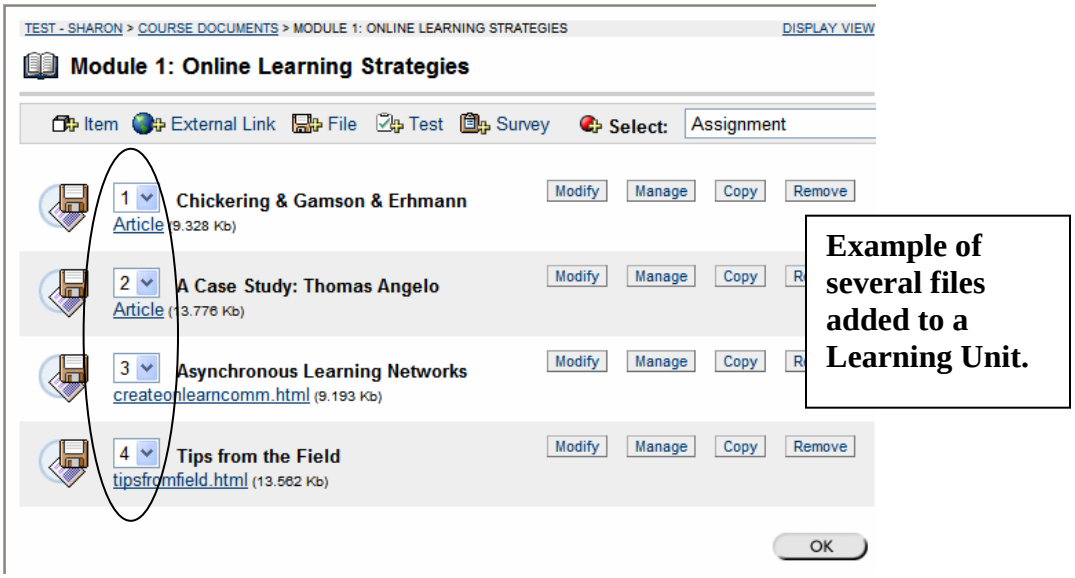
The **Add File** (+File) page is used to add files to a Learning Unit and create a slideshow. This includes Course Links, links to local files and links to files in the Content Collection to the Learning Unit. This option can be used multiple times to add multiple files to a Learning Unit.

Note: You can also add External links, Tests, and Surveys. For files, it is usually best to use +Files, as shown here, rather than +Item.

Add a Name you want the students to see, and then click one of the Browse options to select the file; then click **Submit**.



4. Continue adding files to complete the Learning Unit.
5. Use the numbers to the left of each item to order the content. If the Learning Unit is viewed sequentially, this is the order in which the content appears.



6. When done, click **OK**. The Learning Unit is now ready for viewing.
7. Click on the **Display View** link to view the Learning Unit as your students would.

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Appendix A: Web Folders with Firefox

1. Using Firefox as your preferred Web browser, click on the Web Folders icon in the Content Collection area.
2. Note the address identified in the text and copy the address
   Current web address: https://elms.umd.edu/bbcswebdav/users/**youruserid**
3. Minimize the ELMS Firefox window so you can see your Windows desktop.
4. Double-click on the My Network Places icon on the desktop and double-click on the Add Network Place option.
5. Enter the URL you copied above into the text field, then click the Next icon.
6. You may be prompted at this point for your ELMS login ID and password. Provide it.
7. You will be prompted the enter a name for this network place; you can either accept the one provided by default, or type a different name into the text box.
8. Click on the Finish icon.
9. You may, again, be prompted for your login and password. You will then see the Web Folder window open. You can drag and drop files between another drive/directory and the drive that now represents your Content Collection area.

   The network place you created will always be available to you from here on. The next time you want to move files from your desktop to your Blackboard course space, go to My Network Places on your computer, select the network identity for your Blackboard Content Collection area, login, and drag and drop files. When you log into ELMS and go to your Content Collection area, you will see the new files/folders in that space.

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