



TALE Teaching Tip:

Better Practices for Creating Content in BOLT

Learner Centered Design is the recommended framework for structuring course **content**. 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, whether or not we are teaching F2F, considerable research on course design, notes that we must consider learner-experiences. A Learning Management System (LMS) such as BOLT has a **Table of Contents** under which “modules” are created. In a F2F class, we might create 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 distance 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 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 BOLT to thrive in their classes.

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[®]](#)

Bloomsburg Online Learning and Teaching (BOLT) is based on the Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace venue. Most course delivery systems like 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 though outlined by Quality Matters[®], to access their course.

BOLT FYI: The new (optional) **course shell** has an initial Table of Contents from BU’s Instructional Media Design Center (**IMDC**). Modules with current links to major university policies are pre-populated into course shells within BOLT, among other features for faculty convenience. Instructional Media Services (**IMS**) also provides support for a wide variety of audio and video equipment, including Mediasite.



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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 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 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 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. 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.

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**).

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



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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 distance education.

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.

Content Module

Figure 1

Add dates and restrictions...

Add a description...

Note: screen readers do not read the "description" field nor will they appear in the Pulse App.

Upload / Create

Existing Activities

Upload Files

Video or Audio

Create a File

Create a Link

1. Create file (see Figure 1).
2. Enter title of unit, lesson, or week number (see Figure 2).
3. 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).



In short, the entire module would appear to the students as a single web page that is dedicated to a unit or lesson.

Module 01 Overview
Web Page

Create a File in "Content Module"

Figure 2

Enter a Title

Select a Document Template

Hide from Users



Paragraph

B *I* U



Font Family

Font

What are our goals? [outline the goals of this module here that is relevant and transparent to students]

How will we do it? [combine textual instructions with **links** that take students directly to their readings, videos, quizzes, etc...]

What's next? [preview next step]



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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/0TO61000000JcxGAE/best-practices>

Videos about Creating Content Modules: Created by D2L-Brightspace

- Activity (1.02 minutes) <https://youtu.be/6SBNFqgTDI0>
- 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/mB7YTi1NC-U>
- Import Course (1.54 minutes) <https://youtu.be/9Ow2oqokSL0>
- Inserts & Files (1.50 minutes) <https://youtu.be/4QcC3KO-0PY>
- 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/fz9eLTQJqk0>
- 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/aAqK-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.



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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 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, IMDC, IMS, and TALE. Thankfully, BU has growing online support.

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.