

---

go.unb.ca/teaching-tips

## Optimal Uses of D2L Brightspace

D2L Brightspace, UNB's "learning management system" (LMS), is software in which you can create an online presence for your course, so students could potentially view course content, interact with each other, submit assignments, take tests, and view their latest grades anytime, from anywhere. Using D2L Brightspace in this way also greatly simplifies work for the instructor, eliminating the paper trail in distributing information, marking assignments and tests, providing feedback, and submitting grades.

### Discussions

You can set up online discussions in which students post typed or audio recorded messages for others to view and reply to. This has the advantage of being accessible for contributions and review anytime, and keeps a permanent record of the interaction for later use, such as for test review or for assignments that involve reflection and critical thinking. For example, an assignment towards the end of the course could require students to do such things as:

- Review their postings on a topic and show how their understanding of that topic has changed
- Review all postings on a topic and report on the range of class opinion on or understanding of a topic, and how it differs from theirs
- Select a topic on which there is divided opinion and show how they engaged meaningfully and effectively with others in class with differing views and to justify their strategy
- Ask, "If you were posting now on a topic from early in the course, what would it be and how would it differ from the postings you contributed at the time?"

Create a grading rubric and use it to evaluate student discussion participation. See the example below.

You can embed online video clips into Discussion messages so people can view the video and see the questions about it all in the same page by first right clicking over the video online and selecting "copy embed html", then in the D2L Brightspace discussion message, click inside the message box to reveal the text formatting bar and select the "Insert Stuff" icon and "Enter Embed Code" to paste the html code.

## Grading Rubrics

Online Discussion Evaluation Rubric				
Criteria	1 Below expectations	2 Meets threshold of expectations	3 Meets expectation level target	4 Exceeds expectations
<b>Volume of contribution</b>	Fewer than 3 posts	3 posts, on different days, one of which is a response to another posting	3 posts, on different days, that meet Burke's criteria	More than 3 posts, all of which meet Burke's criteria, that give fresh insight in each post, and initiate thoughtful responses from others
<b>Critical analysis (Understanding of Readings and Outside References)</b>	Discussion postings show little or no evidence that readings were completed or understood. Postings are largely personal opinions or feelings, or "I agree" or "Great idea", without supporting statement with concepts from the readings, outside resources, relevant research, or specific real-life application.	Discussion postings repeat and summarize basic, correct information, but do not link readings to outside references, relevant research or specific real-life application and do not consider alternative perspectives or connections between ideas.	Discussion postings display an understanding of the required readings and underlying concepts including correct use of terminology	Discussion postings display an excellent understanding of the required readings and underlying concepts including correct use of terminology. Postings integrate an outside resource, or relevant research, or specific real-life application (work experience, prior coursework, etc.) to support important points. Well-edited quotes are cited appropriately.
<b>Spelling and grammar</b>	Utilizes poor spelling and grammar in most posts; posts appear "hasty"	Errors in spelling and grammar evidenced in several posts	Few grammatical or spelling errors are noted in posts	Written responses are free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing facilitates communication.
<b>Expression Within the Post</b>	Does not express opinions or ideas clearly; little apparent connection to topic, little reference to other students' posts	Provides clear expression of opinions or ideas with reference to readings; represents other students' posts fairly	All opinions and ideas are stated clearly and succinctly with each one supported by reference to readings; several connections to other	Expresses opinions and ideas in a clear and concise manner with obvious and consistent connection to readings and other students' posts, all

Online Discussion Evaluation Rubric				
Criteria	1 Below expectations	2 Meets threshold of expectations	3 Meets expectation level target	4 Exceeds expectations
			students' posts, each represented fairly	represented fairly
<b>Contribution Class Learning</b>	Discussion postings do not contribute to ongoing conversations or respond to peers' postings. There is no evidence of replies to questions or comments or as new related questions or comments. Discussion postings are at midpoint or later in the module or contributions are only posted on the last day of the module.	<p>Discussion postings sometimes contribute to ongoing conversations as evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• affirming statements or references to relevant research or,</li> <li>• asking related questions or,</li> <li>• making an oppositional statement supported by any personal experience or related research.</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion postings contribute to the class' ongoing conversations as evidenced by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirming statements or references to relevant research or,</li> <li>• Asking related questions or,</li> <li>• Making an oppositional statement supported by any personal experience or related research.</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion postings actively stimulate and sustain further discussion by building on peers' responses including:</p> <p>Building a focused argument around a specific issue or</p> <p>Asking a new related question or</p> <p>Making an oppositional statement supported by personal experience or related research.</p>
<b>Etiquette in Dialogue with Peers and Instructor</b>	Written interactions on the discussion board show disrespect for the viewpoints of others.	Some of the written interactions on the discussion board show respect and interest in the viewpoints of others, and none show disrespect.	Written interactions on the discussion board show respect and interest in the viewpoints of others. Posts connect with the flow of online conversation by others, and show respect and sensitivity to peers' gender, cultural and linguistic background, political and religious beliefs.	All interactions on the discussion board show respect and sensitivity to peers' gender, cultural and linguistic background, political and religious beliefs, and there are many instances of these. Posts connect well with the flow of other posts, and often initiate helpful discussion on the part of others that leads to helpful insights.

Grading rubrics like the one above can be created in D2L Brightspace and connected to Discussions, Assignments and Quizzes so that students can see them in advance of submission, and so that you can use them for online marking and submission of grades to the D2L Brightspace Grades spreadsheet.

The best way to create a rubric for a course is to find several online examples from other universities, for the same subject and grade level, and use them for criteria and performance level description ideas for your rubric. Ensure that the criteria (items in column 1) and performance descriptions (the performance levels are the column headings) fit with your course's learning outcomes or objectives and the purpose (e.g., the skills you want students to develop) of the discussion, assignment or test to which it pertains.

Then it's a matter of using and refining it from year to year, based on experience.

Rubrics take time and effort to create, but pay off in the long run because:

- They automate detailed feedback that you would have to give large numbers of students, letting you focus your feedback efforts on entering only comments unique to each student.
- They set assignment expectations and improve the quality of submissions
- They provide a basis for detailed discussion during marks enquiries. The discussion is about the specifics of whether the student exhibited detailed performance characteristics described in the table cell in question or rather those of another table cell, rather than putting you in the position of justifying marks based on some more vague "professional judgment."

A drawback can be that proscription may limit creativity or result in formulaic, process-oriented submissions that still miss qualities that can't be quantified easily. As with all things educational, it's a matter of professional judgment.

## Assignments

Use online assignment submission by creating folders for each assignment in the D2L Brightspace Dropbox. Use the D2L Brightspace Word-like content editor to provide the assignment instructions and related files online, link to an associated rubric, and auto-create a Grades column in the grade book spreadsheet. Then you are set up to eliminate the paper trail while still having an always-available submission and feedback record by having students submit online and marking online.

Note though, that if you want quiz-type questions in your assignments, it's best to set the assignment up as a quiz. You can use the Brightspace Word-like formatting to provide all the assignment details you would give in the Assignments feature in the Quizzes feature as well.

## Quizzes

You can set up quizzes and tests using the D2L Brightspace Quizzes feature. Try using quizzes as teaching tools by:

- Providing answer options based on common misconceptions.
- Providing feedback for each question that explains the principle on which the question is based.
- Having several questions on each topic from which the quiz randomly selects a few.

- Set multiple choice questions to display the answer options randomly.
- Let students retake the test several times and count their best mark.
- After each try, students can review the entire test and see their selected answers, the correct answers, and the guided feedback. When they retry the test, they get different questions on each topic and in the cases where questions are the same, the order of the answer options is different.

Contrary to some misconceptions, multiple choice questions can test any learning level in Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (Recall, Comprehension, Analysis, Application, Synthesis, and Evaluation). It's a matter of question construction. Typically the higher levels would use scenarios, cases, or complex examples and provide detailed response options.

Ensure that questions test the learning level indicated by the course outcome or learning objective for its topic. This is also true for questions you use from textbook question banks (especially so).

By using questions randomly selected from a larger question bank and randomizing the answer options, it is probably more effort for students to cheat on an online test than it is to just take the test, even if sitting side-by-side on computers.

## **Surveys**

The D2L Brightspace Surveys feature lets you administer anonymous online feedback surveys to your classes for such purposes as:

- Feedback on your teaching methods, either during your course so you can consider making refinements or at the end of the course for the same purpose or as another information source in addition to the Student Opinion Surveys.
- Determining class opinion on sensitive or controversial topics to inform classroom discussion.
- To focus student attention on a given topic.

## **Group Workspace**

Use D2L Brightspace Groups to provide an online workspace for groups of students that includes a private (from other students, not the instructor) discussion area, a locker for sharing files without having to upload and download them each time members want to edit them, and a dropbox to submit one assignment for an entire group. You can set these up with members you pick, or set up blank ones and let students self-enrol. Group lockers are only available for active courses. Important work should be saved by students in an alternate location (desktop or personal D2L Brightspace locker) before the end of the course.

## **Online Signup Sheets**

You can create a signup sheet using free online software such as Google Docs by embedding a Google spreadsheet in a D2L Brightspace widget or module. Students could then sign up on your embedded sheet whether or not they have a Google account. Only the instructor needs a Google account, in order to create the signup sheet. It takes a few minutes after signing up for the list to refresh and show the

student's name in D2L Brightspace. However, the Google Doc spreadsheet will automatically save information as it is added and multiple students can edit the spreadsheet at the same time.

## **Contacts for D2L Brightspace Assistance**

There are a lot of self-help materials and in-person help available to you to assist with using the above features in your courses. You can email questions to [learning@unb.ca](mailto:learning@unb.ca) or email or phone Kevin or Emily who will be pleased to coach you and answer your questions:

Kevin Cormier: [kgormier@unb.ca](mailto:kgormier@unb.ca); 452-6288

Jeff Mundee: [Jeff.Mundee@unb.ca](mailto:Jeff.Mundee@unb.ca); 458-7272

To view the D2L Brightspace upcoming training schedule:

<http://www.unb.ca/learningresources/workshops.html>

To view D2L Brightspace self-help resources, including instructional videos:

<http://www.unb.ca/learningresources/workshops.html>

## **References:**

Rogers, P. L. (Editor). *Designing Instruction for Technology-Enhanced Learning*. Hershey, PA, USA: Idea Group Publishing, 2002.