

Three ways to set up your course more efficiently

The semester is underway; a review of previous semesters may help you change your workflow now or prep for your next course. Here are my tips on setting expectations, managing your workflow and reusing layouts.

SET EXPECTATIONS

USE DUE DATES: As an instructional designer I encourage faculty to use due dates; students tend to work to deadline. Letting them know your required due dates is essential for their planning. Reiterate deadlines when communicating with students.

FIX IT YOURSELF: SET DUE DATES FOR ASSESSMENTS

Look for Set Grade Center Due Dates in Blackboard. If it is not showing as an option, go to Customization, Tool Availability, scroll down to “Grade Center Due Dates” and click the box in the “Available” column.

EXPLAIN LATE WORK POLICIES: As an adjunct, I’ve seen students turn items in late. I expect this during the add/drop period. When students have extenuating circumstances I ask them to email before the due date and ask for a specific extension timeframe. Due dates and rules about late work help me with time management; I communicate those expectations to the student. *In the early years, I received a lot of late work in the last three weeks of the semester!* Setting deadlines and sharing them via a schedule and announcements make a difference.



UNDERSTAND GRADING VIEWS: Recent updates in Blackboard allow the student to see four views in My Grades: 1) All, 2) Graded, 3) Upcoming, and 4) Submitted. Now students get email notifications when they submit work.

MANAGE YOUR WORKFLOW

FEEDBACK ROUTINE: Suggest to students the best times to email or call. I preschedule office hours in an

online environment, log in weekly, and grade, create announcements, respond to questions. Keeping these activities in my mind during scheduled office hours helps me stay focused.

GRADING: I use three methods. *Hearing what I do may help you plan your grading.*

In Blackboard use the Grade Center > Needs Grading and select by Item. If I am doing this I try to make my way through all of the submissions in one sitting. It flows smoother and I am more consistent with responses.

Download the Grade Center and open it in Excel or Google Sheets. I can navigate easily, use calculations and send progress updates as needed.

View the full Grade Center for missing assignments. This helps me plan my weekly grading and feedback activities. Lots of missing items may mean another announcement is in order.

REDUCE SCROLLING: If you use graded discussions, assignments, and tests with many assignments, navigating the Grade Center can be a nightmare of left-right scrolling. Use the Filter button to view one category type.

SIMPLIFY AND REUSE

I embed Google Slides in my course. When I’ve made one I like the look of, I choose File > Make a Copy and use that as my template for the next set of slides. If I have an idea of how many lecture notes I am presenting by slide, I make all the copies and name them with a convention like module and topic, and store them in one drive folder. As a result:

- I can find my work
- I spend less time choosing fonts and layouts
- course materials are more consistent

I’m a fan of fonts and colors and images, but using different styles can fatigue the student.

This makes it sound like I am ruthlessly efficient, on the contrary I slip into dither mode all the time. I need to remember and reign myself in especially when it comes to fonts, colors, and graphics. By setting expectations and setting up my workflow I can focus completing feedback and grading faster and more consistently.