

Creating the Container: Organizing Your Course Web Site

By Claude Whitmyer, Co-Founder
The University of the Future, LLC (aka FutureU™).



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601 Van Ness Avenue, Suite E433
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415-648-2667
manager@futureu.com

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Course Outline	<p>Syllabus or course contents description and general course instructions. Should also contain locations of course materials, navigation instructions, grading or assessment criteria, and so forth.</p>
Schedule/Calendar	<p>Course assignments and events with due dates. Posting a course schedule online makes it easier for participants to track their own progress and greatly reduces the number of requests participants make for information about “What’s next?” or “What did I miss?”. Put your course calendar online, and you can simply refer the student to the URL rather than answer each question anew.</p>
Announcements	<p>A place to post information about changes in the course or any thing else that the instructor wants the student to pay attention to as the course unfolds. Can also include reminders about what's currently due or coming up.</p>
Lessons	<p>Course designs usually use two methods of organizing course contents into lessons: by topic or by time period. For example, “Week 1,” “Week 2,” “Week 3,” and so forth alert course participants to the expectations for each time period. When organizing by topic, be sure to include clear instructions about start dates, due dates, and any event dates.</p>
Electures	<p>Most courses use lectures as a primary source of learning material. In the online course, this function is met by "electures." An electecture is based on the same lecture notes that an instructor might use in a face-to-face course, but is presented in a finished—that is, fully edited—format for participants to read online or download and read offline.</p>
Readings	<p>Books, articles, instructor designed readers, etc. Books and readers can be distributed in the same manner as they are to a regular face-to-face class. There are many online companies who specialize in providing textbooks and/or readers. Participants can order them online and have them delivered in the mail. In many instances it is possible to obtain permission to distribute articles online. Instructors can provide a link to the article as a part of the online lesson pages. In some circumstances, entire textbooks or readers can be delivered as web pages or downloadable electronic files.</p>

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<p>Lessons (cont.)</p> <p>Writing Assignments</p>	<p>Essays, term papers, etc.</p> <p>In colleges or universities, most courses include a strong writing component. Most discussion forum software allows participants to post at any time convenient to them as long as it occurs before the assignment due date. This encourages a more reflective type of writing that closely resembles regular writing assignment products in its character and length.</p> <p>It can be a serious mistake to require the same amount of writing as you ordinarily do and then add discussion forum assignments on top of that. Instructor’s who make this mistake can easily burden themselves with an enormous reading workload.</p> <p>A wiser course design might calculate some or all of the discussion forum posting assignments as part of the overall writing workload for students, thus keeping the instructors reading workload closer to that of an ordinary face-to-face course.</p> <p>In non-academic courses there is frequently no need for formal writing assignments. However, discussion posting assignments are still a good idea to help learners deepen their learning and retention.</p>
<p>Exercises</p>	<p>Practice activities of various kinds, including self-paced drills, group study, simulations, role plays and so forth.</p>
<p>Quizzes</p>	<p>Testing activities including multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and essay—just as in a face-to-face course.</p>
<p>Discussion Questions</p>	<p>Formal questions about the topics or lessons of a course help to stimulate exchanges among learners in the discussion forums. Also see “Writing Assignments” above.</p>
<p>Discussion Forums</p>	<p>A place for learners to communicate about course content, exchange ideas, discuss topics, and share experiences.</p> <p>Discussion forums are asynchronous. That is, participants can participate at anytime from any place. Such conversations unfold more slowly than the typical face-to-face classroom discussion. For example, it is not uncommon for a discussion that might have taken an hour in-person to take several days to unfold online.</p>
<p>Chat/ Whiteboard</p>	<p>Another place for learners to communicate about course content, exchange ideas, discuss topics, and share experiences.</p> <p>Chat rooms and whiteboards are synchronous. That is, participants and instructors must all be online at the same time. Chat rooms are difficult to manage and require a set of well enforced rules to succeed. Whiteboards make it possible to point at shared graphics or use chemical or mathematical symbols that are not possible with a normal computer keyboard.</p>

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Participants Pages	A set of student tools that support online learning.
Directory	A list of all course participants and their email addresses.
Tools	A set of functions that allow participants to update their personal homepages, submit assignments, create/edit projects, and create/edit portfolios.
Portfolios	A way for participants to organize and present their course projects and other course work.
Café	A place for participants to socialize. Virtual Cafés have proven to facilitate the creation of a learning environment in three ways: in the beginning they provide a safe place to practice participating in an online discussion, they make it easier for participants to develop interpersonal rapport, and they remove most of the off-topic chit chat from the regular discussion forums.
Study Aids	Search engine/index for course Web site. Automated glossary builder . Links to online dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedias . Links to online library access —on campus and on the Web. And so forth.

Help/Utilities	Provide password protection, student guide, and instructions on how to seek technical support.
Student Guide	Documentation on how to use the electronic classroom software. Downloadable or available online with hyperlinked table of contents.
Change Password	Allows student to password protect access to the course and to their private pages.
How To Get Help	Provides explicit instructions on how to get technical help with the electronic classroom software. Includes links FAQs, email link to help desk, etc.

Instructor(s) Home Page	This page establishes an identity and a presence for the instructor . It should minimally contain contact information, office hours—including both face-to-face office hours and online/chat office hours if applicable—and any links to information that are not specifically a part of the course, but that the instructor knows will be recommended to most participants in any class. It also humanizes the instructors online persona to include a photograph, especially if the course is 100% online.
Contact Info	Name, title, office phone, mailing address, email address. If the course meets in an "on-the-ground" classroom, the building name and room number and directions to get there if it is at all out of the way or unfamiliar to the participants. Optionally, home phone, fax phone

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Office Hours	<p>Face-to-face and online.</p> <p>Online office hours can be held synchronously using a chat function or asynchronously using a discussion forum or email.</p> <p>Chat office hours are real hours because instructor and participants need to be online at the same time. Sometimes it is useful to hold office hours for the whole group to discuss common problems or frequently asked questions, but for the private conversations that usually take place during office hours, it helps to make appointments for individual chat sessions involving the instructor and one student at a time.</p> <p>Using the discussion forum for private one-to-one office hours requires setting up individual discussion forums for each student. For larger classes this can become unwieldy and it is probably better to simply use email.</p> <p>On the plus side, however, a discussion forum creates an accumulating permanent transcript of the office-hour conversations the instructor holds with each student. Email, on the other hand, requires that the instructor create a folder for each student for storing the email office-hour messages.</p> <p>During a review of past exchanges, the discussion forum messages are all visible at once, whereas the email messages must be opened one at a time.</p> <p>Discussion forum office hours are virtual, or anytime/anyplace for both the instructor and the student. For this to work the instructor must announce a specific "turn-around" time for how fast participants can expect to receive replies to their questions in the private discussion forum..</p>
General Links	<p>URLs to local files or Web links that contain information the instructor wants every student to have. For example, an instructor of literature classes would probably want to include a link to Project Gutenberg, the Web site that contains all the classical literature that has entered the public domain.</p>

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