



Options for Using Offline Content

A Blackboard Tip Sheet

Purpose

There are many ways to create content in your Blackboard course Web site. You can add text and images to Blackboard course areas, link to documents or presentations, and unpackage full Web sites within your course Web site. Another way of using content in a Blackboard course Web site is by linking to offline content. For purposes of this tip sheet, we will define offline content as any supplemental content provided to the student outside of the Blackboard environment that can be accessed through a Blackboard course Web site. Offline content is not uploaded to the Blackboard server; it is usually stored on a CD-ROM, a floppy disk or even a shared network drive. This Blackboard tip sheet will provide instructions and options for how to use offline content.

Reasons for Using Offline Content

Much of the content used in Blackboard can be added directly to content areas of the course Web site, but many instructors like to use multimedia supplements in a course. This can be easily uploaded by an instructor, but may not be so easily downloaded by a student. Individual Internet connections and slow processor speeds can force a person to wait hours to download one multimedia file, e.g. a video segment or sound file. As a result, many instructors and educational content providers store much of that memory intensive multimedia offline. The offline content is then provided to the student for immediate access, without the excessive waiting involved in downloading files.

Options for Using Offline Content

The options discussed in this tip sheet are just a few of the ways that offline content can be successfully incorporated in a Blackboard course Web site. The first option for using offline content is to link to files on a CD-ROM. The second deals with content that is stored on a shared network drive. And the third option deals with creating your own compressed archive of content, and delivering it to your students. All three options are feasible, but you may find that one option suits your needs better than the others.

Linking to content stored on a CD-ROM

Many textbook publishers are now offering content on CD-ROMs as a supplement to the text. You can easily link to this information, i.e. media rich

content like videos and/or sound files, from any of the content areas in Blackboard. First you must know the *path* of that content, as it is stored on that CD-ROM. The *path* of a file refers to the directory structure of the content. An example of the path of a movie file stored on a CD-ROM might look like this:

/content/movie1.avi

This example shows that the *movie1.avi* file can be found in the *content* folder at the top level of the CD-ROM.

In order to link to content located directly on a CD-ROM from within a Blackboard course Web site, you must first know the path to the file. Once you know the file path, you can enter the Instructor Control Panel of a course Web site, and add a document to the Course Information, Course Documents, or Books sections of the Content Areas in Blackboard.

Note: The default names of the Content Areas may be modified, either by the Blackboard System Administrator or the Instructor (depending on how your Blackboard system is configured), so these areas may be named differently on your institution's server.

- Step 1:** Enter the Control Panel.
- Step 2:** Select Course Information, Course Documents, or Books.
- Step 3:** Click the Add Item button.
- Step 4:** Scroll down to the *Options* area and select **Yes** for “Do you want to add offline content?” Checking this box will refresh the screen to include fields to fill in the path and link to file.
- Step 5:** Type in the path to the content **without** the drive letter of the CD-ROM you wish to have linked through your course, and title the name of the link.

Options

Do you want to add offline content? Yes No

Type in the path to the content **without** the drive letter of the CD-ROM (i.e. /content/movie1.avi)

Path to Content

Name of Link

Do you want to track number of views? Yes No

Do you want to add Meta-Data? Yes No

Do you want to make item visible: Yes No

- Step 6:** Before submitting the offline content link, you must give the added document a title. Scroll to the top of the page

and enter a title in the **Name** field, and it is good practice to enter instructions or directions for the file in the **Text** field.

1 Item Information

Name:

or specify your own name:

Choose Color of Name:

Text:

Click the link above to access the movie file for Exercise 1 in Lesson 1. If you have trouble accessing this file, you may need to change your CD Drive letter in the Personal Information editor. Click the Student Tools button to the left, then select Personal Information to change the drive letter. If you still have problems accessing this file, please email me in the Communication area, or call the web services help desk at (123)456-7890.

Smart Text Plain Text HTML


Step 7: Click **Submit**, review the receipt, and click **OK**.

Note: Once you have created the link to the offline content, it is a good idea to go to the student view and check to see if the link is working properly.

- Announcements
- Course Information
- Staff Information
- Course Documents
- Assignments
- Communication

Course Documents

Current Location: Course Documents



Lesson 1 - Exercise 1 - Link to Movie

[Lesson 1-Exercise 1-movie](#) (Offline Content)

Click the link above to access the movie file for Exercise 1 in Lesson 1. If you have trouble accessing this file, you may need to change your CD Drive letter in the *Personal Information* editor. Click the **Student Tools** button to the left, then select *Personal Information* to change the drive letter. If you still have problems accessing this file, please email me in the *Communication* area, or call the web services help desk at (123)456-7890.

Linking to content stored on a shared network drive

Some institutions give students and instructors access to a shared network drive from desktops or computer labs. Again, if you know the path of that content, you can link to it through Blackboard. (Please refer to the previous section for clarification.) The steps you would follow are the same as above for adding the link to the content stored on the shared drive. The student will most likely need to change their CD Drive in the *Personal Information* area to match the letter of the

shared network drive. For institutions that use shared network drives, this option works well for a couple of reasons.

- The student does not actually need the CD-ROM to access the content. This can save on related costs with purchasing or producing CDs, and there is no disk to get lost or damaged.
- Shared drives typically have more space for large multimedia files and eliminate the need to maintain multiple copies of material(s).
- Bandwidth/connectivity issues such as download speed may sometimes be minimized when accessing files through a network drive.

Linking to content from a compressed archive

Some instructors have their own collection of files that they would like to use in their Blackboard course Web site, but may not have the resources to create CD-ROMs, or the access to a shared network drive. One option that has worked for instructors in this situation is to use a compression utility that will compress all of their files into one file. This file can then be provided to the students with directions on how to download and save the files, and then each file can be directly linked through their course Web site. There are many utilities that you can use to create compressed archives. On Windows, the most common is WinZip. On Macintosh, Aladdin Systems' StuffIt Deluxe is the most popular compression tool. You will need to download and/or purchase this software. There are many utilities that you can choose from in addition to those listed above, some of which are free or shareware. For the purposes of this tip sheet, we will provide instructions using WinZip.

Note: To find out more about archiving files using compression utilities, see the *Importing Web Sites into Blackboard* tip sheet at the following link: [Blackboard Training Center](#).


The steps for linking to the compressed files will be the same as above, as long as you know the path to your content, i.e. files. Since you created the archive, you should know the path. One of the benefits of using utilities like WinZip and StuffIt Deluxe is that these programs have the ability to create a *self-extracting* archive. This creates an **.exe** file extension that will automatically extract those files into a drive and folder of your choosing when the student opens that compressed file. This way you can create a file that could automatically be placed on a student's hard disk, zip, or jazz drive. Refer to the documentation for your compression utility to learn how to operate that particular program and create self-extracting archives.

Note: The method of using a self-extracting archive is not a feasible option for students using Macintosh computers since there is no specific naming convention used by Apple hard drives. You can still use a compressed file for students to download to their local computer, but they are responsible for following your directions on how to save the files. In order for the offline content links to work, the directory structure the student uses must be consistent with the path of the link.

To facilitate students' access to your course content, provide specific directions for downloading the compressed file, setting the student's CD-ROM drive to match where they will locate the content on that CD-ROM. The image below shows what a course Web page might look like with instructions for using the compressed archive of files.

Course Documents


Current Location: Course Documents


 **Directions for Using the Offline Content Provided**
There are a few steps you must complete before you can access the offline content I have provided for you. These directions are provided for you below:


1. First, you must download the *Self Extracting Zip File* I have attached to this page. If you are using a Macintosh, please select the *zip file for Mac users* file, and skip the rest of this step. Once you have saved the file to your local computer, click to open the file. Since it is self extracting, it will automatically be saved to your C: drive in a folder called *Lesson 1 files*. **Do not change the name of this folder!** Doing so will break the links to the content provided.
2. Next you must set the CD drive letter on your local computer to C: (or whatever you may call your Macintosh CD drive). To do this in Blackboard, click on the *Student Tools* button to the left. Then choose *Personal Information* and select *Set CD-ROM Drive*. Set the drive to C:. You can now access these files directly through the links that you will see in each lesson.

Note: You can always change this setting if needed for other courses and their offline content.

You should now be able to access the content provided for you. If you have any problems or questions concerning this procedure, please email me through the *Communication* button.

 **Lesson 1 - self extracting zip file**
[Click here to access the file](#) (123283 bytes)
This is the package of compressed files that you will need to successfully complete the exercises in Lesson 1. Click on the link above to begin downloading the file. Once the file has downloaded, be sure to read the directions for extracting the files to your local computer. If this file does not work, please download the basic compression of the files from the Lesson 1 - zip file for Mac users.

 **Lesson 1 - zip file for Mac users**
[Click here to access the file](#) (106600 bytes)
Since the self-extracting zip method may not work on Macs, I have provided you with the basic compressed file. Once you have downloaded this file, please move the folder with all of the Lesson 1 content onto your hard drive. You will then be able to access the files through the course links.

 **Lesson 1 - Exercise 1 - Link to Movie**
[Lesson 1-Exercise 1.movie](#) (Offline Content)
Click the link above to access the movie file for Exercise 1 in Lesson 1. If you have trouble accessing this file, you may need to change your CD Drive letter in the *Personal Information* editor. Click the **Student Tools** button to the left, then select *Personal Information* to change the drive letter. If you still have problems accessing this file, please email me in the *Communication* area, or call the web services help desk at (123)456-7890.

Other Resources

Here are some common compression utilities for creating zip archives.

Windows Compression Utilities

Winzip (<http://www.winzip.com/>)

Pkzip (<http://www.pkware.com/>)

CuteZip (<http://www.globalscape.com/>)

Macintosh Compression Utilities

StuffIt Deluxe (<http://www.aladdinsys.com/>)

DropStuff (<http://www.aladdinsys.com/>)

Ziplt (<http://www.maczipit.com/>)

Summary

This tip sheet has defined offline content and provided you with options for using offline content in Blackboard. The options discussed in this tip sheet are just a few of the ways that offline content can be successfully incorporated in a Blackboard course Web site.

For more educational materials about Blackboard products visit the [Training Center](http://trainingcenter.blackboard.com)
(<http://trainingcenter.blackboard.com>)

