

TeachOnline

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Blackboard Tips and Tricks

MAY 27, 2014 BY [CHRISTOPHER SHEEHAN](#) — 1 COMMENT

Blackboard is the learning management system used at Arizona State University. A learning management system is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of face to face, blended, and completely online education courses.

Arizona State University is one of the largest Blackboard accounts in the world. **Academic Technologies** in conjunction with **UTO Training** has compiled a list of the top "tips and tricks" which instructors, designers, and technologists should be aware of. These Blackboard "tips and tricks" reflect answers to the largest percentage of help tickets and information requests submitted by students, faculty, and staff at Arizona State University. With the coming Blackboard upgrade to version SP14, we want everyone to have a clear picture of the top issues our users have experienced and all of the associated solutions to these issues.

the most important Blackboard tips and tricks you should know



Image by Martha Steinacker

Take a Workshop

Blackboard is a complex Learning Management System that is constantly being modified. Learning the tools and features of Blackboard must be an ongoing process. We strongly recommend continuous Blackboard Training. UTO Training offers **weekly Blackboard training both online and in person**.

Use 'Force Complete' with Caution

We see a great deal of help tickets because of Force Complete. When instructors use Force Complete, it begins a session. After a session begins, the student must complete all assigned work within the session. The major downside to Force Complete is that students may not exit a session for any reason. So, if that same student has to restart their computer or exit the test for issues such as internet connectivity, they are then kicked out of the session and the only way to regain access is to email their instructor to have their attempt reset. **We strongly recommend NOT using Force Complete.** Instead, an instructor can easily set a timer and enable auto-submit inside Blackboard. Using the timer/auto-submit option, students can re-enter the test and continue where they left off as long as there is time remaining. The timer/auto-submit option accomplishes the same goal of Force Complete, without students having to email the instructor because they lost connectivity.

Submit a Ticket Through the Help Desk

For faster resolution of tickets please include specific information about the course, the problem, and the location of the problem within the course. A list of steps to recreate the problem is very useful and time saving. Many submitted help tickets lack this basic information and are sent back to the original ticket submitter with a request for more information. Providing limited information on a help ticket means the resolution of the problem will take longer. If you submit a help ticket, please be specific on what the issue is and where the issue is located! You may submit a help request [here](#).

Never Delete Items

Never delete anything that is connected to the Grade Book or has student submissions. It is always better to make things unavailable and hide from view than to delete something. Once you delete something in Blackboard it is gone, there is no recycle bin! To make an item unavailable, access the items contextual menu and change the setting for "permit users to view this content" to NO. Content areas located on the page menu are made unavailable in a different way. To make a content area unavailable select it's contextual menu and select "hide link".

Clear your Browser Cache

When you receive any error messages, we strongly recommend to first **clear your browser cache** and cookies or try using a different browser before submitting a help ticket.

Clear Word Formatting

This is an ongoing problem in Blackboard. Unfortunately, MS Word copies proprietary HTML code into Blackboard that doesn't play nice with standard HTML code. Occasionally, Blackboard does not strip all of the bad code out and the web browser will display the content incorrectly. You can clear the formatting by highlighting the text and clicking on the "Remove Formatting" button that is to the right of the highlight button (in the text formatting box). In most cases this works. If not, copy text into Notepad or **Text Wrangler** and then paste back into Blackboard.

Avoid Using Special Characters

The term "Special Characters" represents all the possible punctuation marks and symbols which are available on a keyboard. The use of special characters in any **name or title** in Blackboard may cause error messages and display problems. To be clear, you can use special characters in any content but not in any name or title. Many of the issues related to the grade book not functioning correctly are caused by the accidental use of special characters such as (@#%\$%^&*) in an assignment title. Using a-z, A-Z, 0-9 are all acceptable in names and titles. Using the following: (underscore _, dash -, and period .) are acceptable ONLY if they are used once in a name or title. Using multiple underscores, dashes or periods can cause display problems. Example- Black board-Assignment_1.doc is acceptable.

Get a Student Test Account

If you are an instructor, designer, or technologist you should have a student test account. This will provide you with a second Blackboard account that you can use to enroll into your courses. If you wish to submit work (digital assignments, tests, or discussions) or see My Grades, you have to be a student in the course. After a successful login with your student account you can see and interact with your courses exactly as the students do. **Request a student test account**

Allow Mixed Content in Browsers

All new versions of browsers are set to block mixed content by default until the user changes this setting. If a picture, presentation, audio track, or video is missing inside Blackboard, most likely the problem is the decision to embed HTTP (un-encrypted) content into a HTTPS (secure) environment. If you **MUST** embed HTTP content, then we suggest linking out to the content but opening in a new window. If you need to embed the HTTP content in a HTTPS page, see this **tutorial** on how to allow mixed content on Firefox, Chrome, and IE. Please remember that to view HTTP content in a HTTPS environment, every student has to follow the tutorial directions, not just the author/instructor.

Request a New Course

When requesting a new course with no special instructions, do not provide any comments in the course request special instructions area. Instructors, designers and technologists who post comments such as "please process this course request as soon as possible" are actually slowing down the automated process as the comments push the request out of the automated system and into a pool of course requests that need to be reviewed by a tier 2 blackboard administrator. Please reserve the use of the special instructions on the course request page for the explanation of course specific special instructions. You may request a new course [here](#).

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About Christopher Sheehan

Chris's particular strengths lie at the intersection of teaching and learning and educational technology. He has earned advanced degrees from Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University.

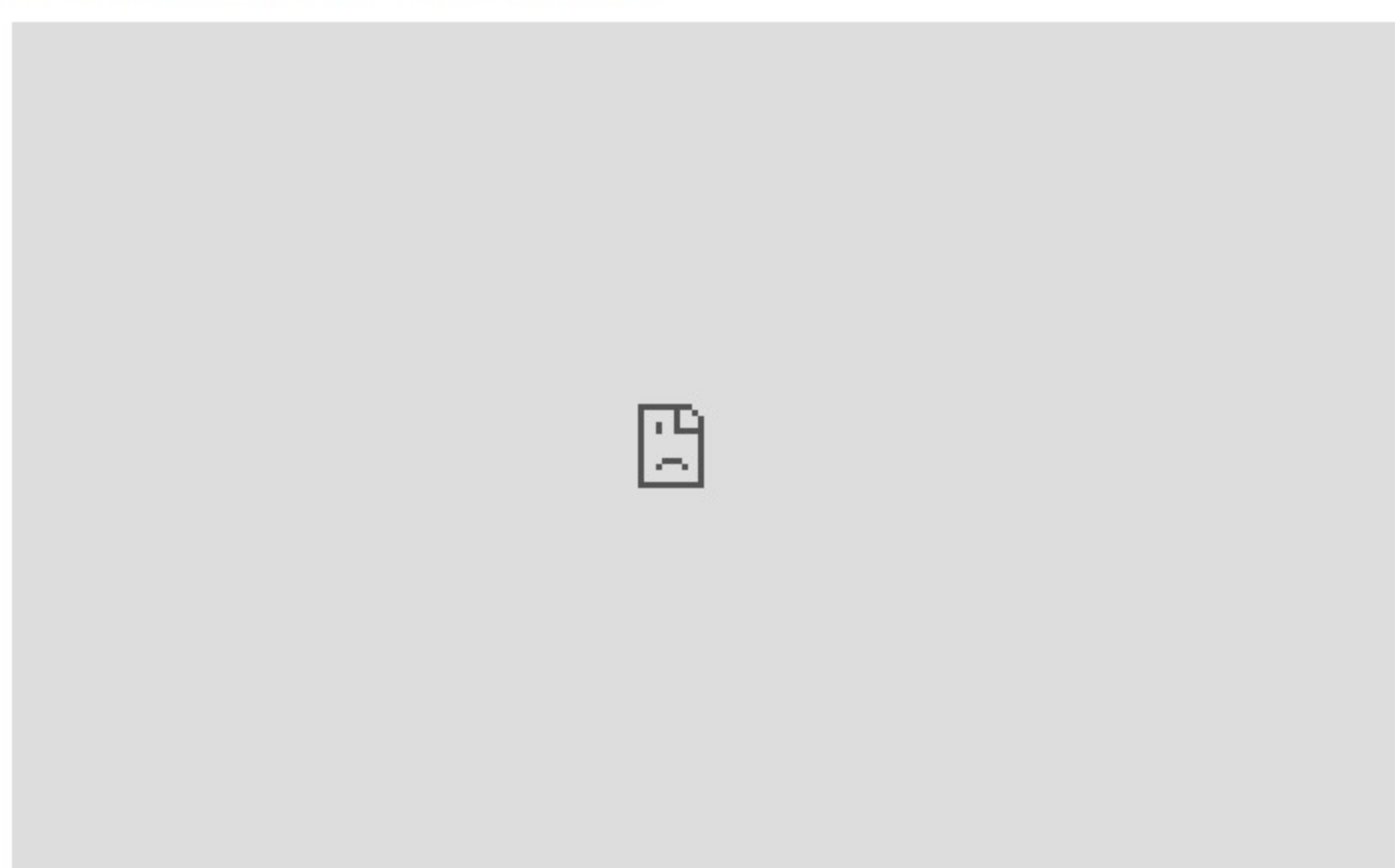
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Lisa says
JANUARY 31, 2015 AT 4:37 AM

Is it possible to create a sign-up sheet in BB?

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