Good practice with Blackboard Announcements

What are Announcements?
The Blackboard Announcement feature is a simple tool designed for posting short messages within courses and organisations. This short guide offers some practical advice on using this feature effectively as a communication tool with students.

Why use Announcements?
Announcements can be used as a primary mechanism for delivering messages to students about their learning. You will need to consider:

- the ability of the feature to deliver this information in an appropriate way to students;
- the conventions staff adopt when placing announcements.

How to use Announcements

What are announcements useful for?

- **Time sensitive** messages outside of face-to-face contact time (e.g. room changes)
- **Signposting** for students to new/changed information (e.g. tutorial times)
- **Reminders** and highlighting tasks
- **Motivational** messages and generalised feedback

How do students view announcements?
Announcements can be viewed within course areas or organisations on Blackboard.
Students are alerted to new announcements via:

- the **Global navigation menu** in the Updates section. A number appears in the menu when new updates are available;
- **push notifications** to a mobile device when the Blackboard mobile app is installed;
- **email** if this has been set up by the student in Edit Notification Settings.
Hints and tips

The following suggestions are designed to help you make effective use of Announcements, based on the practical and technical constraints of the tool.

Keep it simple!

- Keep messages short – just a few sentences.
- Keep 'Subject' titles short and explanatory, using keywords.
- Keep formatting simple to avoid layout and appearance issues.
- Copy and paste text as 'plain text' from emails, documents or web pages.
- Use 'Email Announcement' infrequently to send announcements as emails.
- Link to further information or extended details.
- Make sure announcements are targeted and relevant to the module.

Good practice

- Be consistent about what and when you post to announcements. This will reassure students and get them into a routine of looking at them on a regular basis.
- Don't overuse announcements, as it becomes overwhelming and students start to ignore them. Consider digest/summary announcements to reduce the number you post.
- Use date and time restrictions to only display relevant announcements to students.
- Agree standard titling conventions within your course to help students to identify different types of announcements at a glance (e.g. keywords in subject titles).

What to watch out for

- Announcements are displayed in reverse chronological list order. Previous announcements will be pushed down and off the page as new ones are added. Students can miss important messages unless they scroll down.
- The importance of an announcement is not distinguishable. All announcements are shown in the same way and it can be difficult for students to discern what is important or relevant.
- Text pasted from web pages, emails or documents can bring over hidden code that changes the way announcements display, especially when sent as emails.
- Announcements cannot be targeted to Groups within course areas.
- The text editor includes the ability to add images, attach files and format, but these will not be included in emailed announcements.
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**Sending announcements as emails**

Only tick the box for ‘Send a copy of this announcement immediately’ if you want to email out the announcement.

![Email Announcement checkbox](image)

**Be aware:** Ticking this box can generate a large number of emails for staff and students.

If the box is ticked:
- An email version of the announcements is sent to all staff and students enrolled on the course or organisation;
- A text-only version of your announcement is produced in the email generated. Complex formatting, images and attached files and links in the announcement are lost.

Email Announcements should be used sparingly to avoid staff and students being overwhelmed by the volume of emails this option generates.

**Preferred method for email**

Use the Send Email tool in Control Panel > Course Tools, if you want to email students on a course. Send Email has the option to write to the students on the course, selected individuals or a particular group.

**Copy and paste as plain text into an announcement**

Paste as plain text if you are copying text from websites, emails and documents. This will prevent hidden code being brought over that can corrupt the announcement (e.g. prevents you from changing the font format or displays the code on the announcement when sent as an email.)

To paste as plain text: paste copied text into Notepad (PC) or TextEdit (MAC) file to remove formatting before pasting it in to the announcement.

Notepad (PC) automatically un-formats the text when it is pasted into it.

To un-format text copied into a TextEdit file (MAC), go to Format > Make Plain Text [keyboard shortcut is SHIFT+CMD+T].

Copy the plain text from Notepad or TextEdit into the announcement and reapply any required formatting using the text editor in Blackboard.
Further help

Please see additional guides on Blackboard's communication tools located on the Support for Staff tab in Blackboard.

Further help can be found on the Blackboard Help site at https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/9.1_2014_04/Instructor/060_Communication/030_Announcements

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