Top Tips for Portal Admins

Think about your audience

Who are you trying to reach?

Typically students

- who might only pass through the School portal page on the way to their list of courses
- who (like nearly all of us) have a short attention span when faced with information on the web
- whose first language may not be English
- who may have a visual impairment or dyslexia or some other specific need

Please bear these factors in mind when putting information on the Portal.

Page layout tips

Don’t try to put everything on one page

Use headlines and images to grab the user’s attention, then provide a link to the full information

- in the Blackboard Fileshare – see our Fileshare guide for admins and contact the TEL team for further guidance
- on a Blackboard Organisation - contact the TEL team for guidance on setting up and managing School or Department-wide Organisations
- elsewhere on the web e.g. on the University website

Try to avoid having to scroll up and down the page

It may be impossible to eliminate scrolling completely, given the wide range of screen sizes which Blackboard users will have (ranging from desktop PCs with large monitors through laptops and tablets to mobile phones). But try to design your portal tabs so that the important information and links are visible without having to scroll down.

If you work on a large monitor, click on the Restore icon and resize the browser window to see how the page displays at different sizes.

Avoid horizontal scrollbars if at all possible

Sometimes very long strings of text – particularly long URLs – will cause your portal modules to display with a horizontal scroll bar.

There are various things you can do to avoid this, although if you have this problem you might just need to experiment.
In the example shown the problem was overcome by

- omitting the initial http:// or https:// from the link displayed on screen
- changing the format to avoid the use of bullets, so that individual lines were not so wide.

In this example you could also

- omit the word ‘Webpage’ (is it really necessary?)
- instead of showing the URL, just have the link display as Job Shop website

**Avoid non-standard fonts**

Web pages that use lots of different fonts look messy and do not provide a good user experience. Blackboard has a built-in stylesheet, with the font style set by default. As a rule you should accept the defaults, and not specify your own font face or size.

**Avoid pasting text from websites or Word**

Copying text from Word, or from another website, may seem like a quick and easy option, but unfortunately what you see is often not what you get. Text pasted in this way will bring in a whole range of formatting information (only visible if you look at the HTML code), which may clash with the Blackboard default styles, and as a result will often display unpredictably and inconsistently across different browsers / devices.

When copying text, we recommend

- either: paste it into Notepad, then copy the plain text from Notepad and paste it into Blackboard
- or: paste it into Blackboard, then click on the Remove Formatting (eraser) icon
Here’s an example of the sort of HTML code you’re likely to get if you paste text directly from Word:

```html
<p><strong><span style="font-size: medium;">Careers Talks<br /></span></strong><br /><em></em>Careers workshop - 3rd November<br />Look out for more details!<br /><br /><strong>Spring Term 2016<br /></strong><em></em> <span style="color: #000000; font-family: 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; font-style: normal; font-variant: normal; font-weight: normal; letter-spacing: normal; line-height: normal; orphans: auto; text-align: start; text-indent: 0px; text-transform: none; white-space: normal; widows: 1; word-spacing: 0px; -webkit-text-stroke-width: 0px; display: inline !important; float: none;">Careers workshop - 16 February</span><br style="color: #000000; font-family: 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; font-size: 13px; font-style: normal; font-variant: normal; font-weight: normal; letter-spacing: normal; line-height: normal; orphans: auto; text-align: start; text-indent: 0px; text-transform: none; white-space: normal; widows: 1; word-spacing: 0px; -webkit-text-stroke-width: 0px;" /></p>

All of the formatting code highlighted above is completely redundant. After applying the 'Remove Formatting' tool, and using the Blackboard editing toolbar to apply text formatting, the HTML code is reduced to this:

```html
<p><strong>Careers Talks</strong><br /><br /><strong>Autumn Term 2015</strong><br />Careers workshop - 3rd November<br />Look out for more details!<br /><br /><strong>Spring Term 2016</strong><br />Careers workshop - 16 February<br />Look out for more details!</p>
```
Use images to make the page more attractive

A few well-chosen images can make your portal page more attractive and more user-friendly – if there’s too much dense text on the page students are unlikely to read it.

Resize images before uploading them to Blackboard

It’s difficult to say exactly what size your images should be. But normally images used in Portal modules should be no wider than 400 pixels. And often your images will be little more than thumbnails, of around 200 x 125 pixels.

You can set the display size of your images inside Blackboard – and indeed Blackboard will shrink images to fit the user’s screen size – but it is best if you resize images to the desired dimensions before they are uploaded to Blackboard. That’s certainly the case if you’re uploading photos you have taken on a digital camera, which could easily be as large as 4000 pixels wide (far larger than any standard computer monitor) and have a filesize of 3Mb or more (taking up more storage space, and taking longer to download, especially for users with slower internet connections).

Setting a maximum width

This takes slightly more effort, but makes it possible for the image to be displayed at the optimum size for the user’s device, while setting a maximum size i.e. even on the largest monitor, the image will never expand beyond the size you specify.

Insert your image as normal. Then open the HTML editor.

You need to locate the HTML code for your image. This will start with `<img`
(if necessary use Ctrl+F to search for `<img`).

Find the width and height
`
<img src="https://www.bb.reading.ac.uk/modules/_1481_1/flora.jpg" width="2048" height="1536" alt="Flowers in a Welsh field"/>
`

Delete the width and height information, and change these to `max-width` as shown below:
`
<img src="https://www.bb.reading.ac.uk/modules/_1481_1/flora.jpg" style="max-width:800px" alt="Flowers in a Welsh field"/>
`
How to resize images?

If you don’t have any image editing software installed on your computer you should be able to resize images using the Microsoft Office Picture Manager. Right-click on the file and choose Open with...
Once inside Picture Manager, select **Edit Pictures** then **Resize**.

You can reduce the image to a set % of its original size, or specify the size. It’s not immediately apparent, but if you enter the desired width (say 200 pixels) the software will automatically reduce the image height in proportion.

Choose **File > Save As** to save a copy of the image with its new dimensions.
Upload images to the Fileshare or a Blackboard Organisation

When inserting an image, there is the option simply to upload an image from your PC. Although that’s the quickest approach, images uploaded that way are stored in a bit of a Blackboard black hole – it’s difficult to find, update or delete them later.

Please upload your image to your School’s area in the Blackboard Fileshare (Content Collection), or a School-wide Blackboard Organisation, and then pull it in to the portal module.

Please note

- You can upload multiple files to the Fileshare at once.
- Students will only be able to view images if they have the right permissions i.e. if they have read access to the Fileshare folder where the file is stored.

Please see our Fileshare guide at https://www.bb.reading.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/xid-5600716_4
Tips when linking to files

Don’t duplicate files

If the file is already accessible in Blackboard or another website, link to the original file – don’t upload an additional copy of the file. This is particularly important when linking to policies and other documents on the University website.

Upload PDFs, not Word documents

Unless you need students to download and edit the document, it is always best to save your file as a PDF before uploading to Blackboard. PDFs can be opened on any computer or mobile device, whereas not all students will have Word installed on all of their devices.

Store your files in the Fileshare or a Blackboard Organisation

When attaching a file, there is the option simply to upload the file from your PC. Although that’s the quickest approach, files uploaded that way go into something of a Blackboard black hole – it’s difficult to find, update or delete them later.

So please upload files to your School’s area in the Blackboard Fileshare (Content Collection), or a School-wide Blackboard Organisation, and then pull them in to the portal module. This will make it possible to

- update the file when needed (e.g. if you find a typo, or at the start of the next academic year)
- link to the same file from Blackboard courses and organisations
- delete the file when it is no longer needed.

Please note

- You can upload multiple files to the Fileshare at once.
- Students will only be able to open files if they have the right permissions i.e. if they have read access to the Fileshare folder where the file is stored.

Please see our Fileshare guide at https://www.bb.reading.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/xid-5600716_4
Open other websites in a new window

If you are linking to websites and web pages outside Blackboard, we recommend that you set these to open in a new window (in practice, most browsers will open the website in a new tab, but this depends on the users’ browser settings).

Further help

Please see additional guides on Portal administration 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/Administrator/Hosting/User_Interface_Management/020_Modules

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