Design for Learning 6 - Course Management

Guide to Tools and Examples of Online Learning Environments

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Introduction

This guide is broken down into two sections to share information about different tools and systems that can help you to manage your online instructional materials.

The Systems section is about full featured systems that provide a variety of functionality in one place. For some of these we’re provided examples of existing online instruction to highlight the features that are available. We have taken screenshots of some existing sites and annotated them to show the different functionality that they are using.

The Tools section is about individual tools that can be combined together when a full system is not desired (or available).

Guide developed by Arden Kirkland and Samantha Settimio for Design for Learning.

Systems

This section includes information about several full-featured learning management systems, or content management systems that you can re-purpose as a learning management system. Your institution may already use one of these. Also, some of them offer free hosted versions that you may consider.

For our purposes here, we’re considering it a system if it includes some kind of functionality for most of the following:

- communication
- sharing content
- assessment
- collaboration
- calendars / scheduling
- analytics

For scenarios where all of these functions are not needed, or systems are not readily available, you may prefer to combine individual tools for such functionality, as seen in the section on Tools.
You’ve already been exposed to a lot of the functionality of the Moodle Learning Management System here in the Design for Learning program, since that’s what we’ve been using. If you’re interested in learning more about it from the teacher side, or setting up your own Moodle site (including a small free site on Moodle Cloud), here’s more information.

**Basics**

- Features - [https://docs.moodle.org/33/en/Features](https://docs.moodle.org/33/en/Features)
- Moodle Cloud for Free - [https://moodle.com/cloud/free/](https://moodle.com/cloud/free/)
- Moodle Cloud Overview and Signup Tutorial for MoodleCloud - [https://youtu.be/lUafVEHzwfY](https://youtu.be/lUafVEHzwfY) (from 2015 - some features/instructions may have changed slightly)
• Documentation - search here for help with any aspect of using Moodle
  - https://docs.moodle.org/33/en/Main_page

Beyond
• Moodle Sandbox Sites - https://moodle.org/demo/ - these let you try out different roles and tasks, to see the different ways that Moodle can be used. The Mount Orange School sandbox may be a little more user-friendly. Please note - any changes you make on any of these sites will be erased - they’re reset every hour on the hour. So, they’re really just for quick testing of features.
• Moodle MOOC - https://learn.moodle.net/
• Do you have access to the subscription tutorials on Lynda.com (some institutions provide subscriptions for employees or users)? If so, they have great tutorials about using Moodle: https://www.lynda.com/search?q=Moodle&f=producttypeid%3a2

Vocab and Tips
• Moodle has a lot of functionality available - sometimes too much! If you are the administrator for your own Moodle site, you may want to turn off some of the functions you’re not using, to get rid of some of the “clutter.” On the other hand, if someone else at your institution is the administrator for your Moodle site, they may have done just that already, and there may be hidden functionality that you don’t know about. Talk to them if there’s a feature missing that you’d like to activate.
• Moodle is Open Source Software, meaning it is free to download and host on your own server, and software developers can customize it as desired. Developers around the world have created and shared a wide variety of additions and changes they’ve made. The modularity of the code allows for this.
• If you don’t have tech support available to host Moodle on your institution’s own server, other companies provide hosting services that you can pay for. One of these, Moodle Cloud, currently offers a small free plan for you to try and use with a small number of learners (under 50).
• Plugins - these are modules that you can add to your Moodle site, to provide different specific functions. On a free Moodle Cloud site you are limited to a small set of plugins they include.
• Themes - these control the way your Moodle looks - the layout of pages, colors, fonts, etc. By choosing or changing settings of your theme, you can change the look of your entire site. On a free Moodle Cloud site you are limited to a small set of themes they include.
“Blackboard Learn is an application for online teaching, learning, community building, and knowledge sharing.” This learning management system is proprietary, and does not offer any free accounts.

**Basics**
- Blackboard Learn: LMS Feature Showcase - [http://www.blackboard.com/learning-management-system/blackboard-learn-features.aspx](http://www.blackboard.com/learning-management-system/blackboard-learn-features.aspx) (choose from the options at the top to see different features for different environments)
- Getting started with Blackboard Learn as an instructor - [https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Getting_Started](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Getting_Started)

**Beyond**
- If your institution uses Blackboard, they likely provide learning tools specifically for your institution, so take advantage of what they offer.
- Do you have access to the subscription tutorials on Lynda.com (some institutions provide subscriptions for employees or users)? If so, they have great tutorials about using Blackboard: [https://www.lynda.com/search?q=Blackboard&f=producttypeid%3a2](https://www.lynda.com/search?q=Blackboard&f=producttypeid%3a2)
Canvas

Canvas

Canvas


Basics
- Home page - https://www.canvaslms.com/
- Getting Started as an Instructor - https://community.canvaslms.com/community/answers/guides/canvas-guide/getting-started/pages/instructor
- Free vs. Paid account comparison - https://s3.amazonaws.com/tr-learncanvas/docs/Canvas_Account_Comparisons.pdf
- Guides - http://guides.instructure.com/

Beyond
- Guide from Santa Fe College about how they provide modular resources that can be embedded in any Canvas course - http://www.sfcollege.edu/library/index.php?section=faculty/canvas

Examples
Here are examples from a few different public / open enrollment Canvas sites, to show their functionality in action.
- https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/32743
- https://learn.canvas.net/courses/24
- https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/815700
Google Classroom

Basics
- Welcome to the Google Classroom Help Center
  - https://support.google.com/edu/classroom/?hl=en#topic=6020277
- Classroom features and benefits
  - https://support.google.com/edu/classroom/answer/6376881?hl=en&ref_topic=7175444

Examples
Here is a video by one of our D4L alums, Suzanne Costner, guiding her students through the content for her “Traditional Tales Unit,” shared with them through Google Classroom.

https://youtu.be/lMd2gqvaoIs
Wordpress

A screenshot of the homepage for Digital Storytelling 106, a popular open online course derived from a course taught at the University of Mary Washington. The site is built using Wordpress.

Wordpress is a type of Content Management System (or CMS) rather than an LMS. CMSs are systems that provide ways of organizing content of any kind on a website. While these are not designed specifically for educational environments, they can often be re-purposed in that way. Also, some have "plugins," modules that you can add, that create functionality specific to learning needs.

Basics

- Get Started with Wordpress.com - https://learn.wordpress.com/get-started/

Beyond


• Do you have access to the subscription tutorials on Lynda.com (some institutions provide subscriptions for employees or users)? If so, they have great tutorials about using Wordpres: [https://www.lynda.com/search?q=Wordpress&f=producttypeid%3a2%3blevel%3a1%5eBeginner](https://www.lynda.com/search?q=Wordpress&f=producttypeid%3a2%3blevel%3a1%5eBeginner)

**Vocab and Tips**

• Wordpress was originally designed for blogs, but then has become very popular for all kinds of websites.

• Use pages for functionality more like a website: sharing content and assignments on individual pages, organizing them in a hierarchical menu, etc.

• Use posts for communication - announcements and discussion forums. You can display them chronologically, along with nested comments / replies.

• With user accounts and visibility settings, you can use logins and password protection to keep class content private as needed.

• Like Moodle, Wordpress is Open Source Software, meaning it is free to download and host on your own server, and software developers can customize it as desired.

• If you don’t have tech support available to host Wordpress on your institution’s own server, other companies provide hosting services that you can pay for. The most popular of these, Wordpress.com, offers free hosting with certain limitations.

• Plugins - these are modules that you can add to your self-hosted Wordpress site, to provide different specific functions. Many plugins are available, both for free and paid, to provide LMS functionality. However, you are not allowed to add plugins to a free Wordpress.com site (they include the most popular plugins already, but that’s it).

• Themes - these control the way your Wordpress site looks - the layout of pages, colors, fonts, etc. By choosing or changing settings of your theme, you can change the look of your entire site. As with plugins, you can’t upload new or customized themes to free Wordpress.com sites, but they provide hundreds of themes for you to choose from.

**Examples**

• Technologies Of Text, Spring 2017, An experiential learning course in the English Department at Northeastern University - [http://s17tot.ryancordell.org/](http://s17tot.ryancordell.org/)

• DS106, Digital Storytelling - a popular open online course derived from a course taught at the University of Mary Washington - [http://ds106.us/](http://ds106.us/)

• “blogs, wikis, and new media” - An Experiment in Republishing OpenCourseWare - [https://newmediaocw.wordpress.com/](https://newmediaocw.wordpress.com/) - this course is a little old now, but is a simple example of sharing content using a Wordpress.com site
Other systems

LibGuides

Don't forget good old LibGuides! If your institution already subscribes to this useful tool from Springshare, a LibGuide could be a great place to share all the content for your instruction. You can embed content from several other services, like YouTube, or link out to just about anything.

Here are some examples of sites with embedded videos / screencasts and screenshots along with text instruction:

http://bsu.libguides.com/distance/articles
http://nmsu.libguides.com/gettingstarted/thebasics
https://nmsu.libguides.com/booksandarticles (videos on the left sidebar)

Google Sites

If you're already using Google tools for some of your course content, you may want to consider creating a simple Google Site as a "portal" to organize all your other content.

Sample template for using Google Sites as an LMS - https://sites.google.com/site/nofrillslms/

Training from Google for using Sites for education - https://edutrainingcenter.withgoogle.com/resources/tools/details?key=ahpzfmd3ZWItZWR1LXRyYWluW5nLWNlbnRlcjIHRWR1VG9vbBBiAgICA-O2dCQw (requires login with a Google account)


Schoology

This learning management system has both free and paid accounts, with options for K12, higher ed, and corporate learning.

Main site - https://www.schoology.com/
Getting Started on Schoology for Instructors - https://support.schoology.com/hc/en-us/articles/206621517-Getting-Started-on-Schoology-For-Instructors
**Edmodo**

Here’s another learning management system with both free and paid accounts. This one is focused on K12 learning.

Edmodo for teachers - [https://www.edmodo.com/teachers](https://www.edmodo.com/teachers)

Training - videos and articles to help you learn how to use Edmodo - [https://www.edmodo.com/training](https://www.edmodo.com/training)

**Wix**

This is another CMS you might consider, that provides both free accounts and paid accounts with more features.

Main site - [https://www.wix.com/](https://www.wix.com/)

**Weebly**

This is another website-builder service, with specific advice for using it for education. Again, this service has both free and premium account options.

Tools

This section includes a variety of different individual tools to consider, grouped by type. Instead of using an LMS, you may wish to use a few of these tools in combination with each other.

They’re grouped by the kind of functionality they can provide:

- communication
- sharing content
- assessment
- collaboration
- calendars / scheduling
- analytics

Communication

As discussed in the Community Module, communication is a key factor to create an engaging learning experience. Be sure to revisit the D4L Guide to Social Media in the Community Module for more details about a wide range of social media tools. In that module there was also discussion of how to research and choose which social media platform might be best for your community of learners.

We'll also re-share a few highlights here.

**Discussion forums:**

Of course there’s always good old email, and you should share your email address with learners as an absolute minimum. However, if you’re working with more than a small group, you may want to use a tool that goes beyond the basics of email. All of these can be set up to send out email notifications, but also archive the conversation online so it’s easier to revisit without hunting through your inbox.

**Google Groups**
Get started with Google Groups - [https://support.google.com/groups/answer/46601?hl=en](https://support.google.com/groups/answer/46601?hl=en)

**Google+ Communities**
Communities in Google+ work very differently from Google Groups - don’t get them confused. Getting started with Communities - [https://support.google.com/plus/answer/6320411?hl=en](https://support.google.com/plus/answer/6320411?hl=en)

**LinkedIn Groups**
Groups Overview - [https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/1164](https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/1164)

**Facebook Groups**
How to Create a Facebook Group - https://www.postplanner.com/how-to-create-a-facebook-group/

**Text chat:**

This can work both synchronously and asynchronously and is especially great for quick questions and getting in touch.

**Slack**

This tool is designed mainly for collaborative work, but can definitely work well in an educational environment.

**Google Hangouts Chat**

While Google Hangouts are a great tool for synchronous audio/video meetings, they also have a chat function that can come in handy too.
https://support.google.com/hangouts/answer/2944865?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en

**Synchronous Meetings:**

Whenever possible, take advantage of opportunities for synchronous online meetings. Revisit the D4L Guide to Synchronous Meeting Tools for guides and examples of several tools.

**Sharing Content**

Sometimes you just need a place to share files. A variety of cloud storage sites were shared in the Content Creation module in the Guide to Content Creation Tools, but we’ll re-share a few here:

- Google Drive - http://drive.google.com
  - how to - https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424384
- Dropbox - https://www.dropbox.com/
  - how to - https://www.dropbox.com/help
- OneDrive - https://onedrive.live.com/about/en-us/
  - how to - https://onedrive.live.com/about/en-us/support/
- LiveBinders.com - http://www.livebinders.com/welcome/education (free or premium)
  - This tool is somewhere in between simple content sharing and more advanced content management. You can upload/embed/link to a variety of file types, and organize them hierarchically, as sections of an online “binder.”
- TesTeach - https://www.tes.com/lessons (free, web-based with iPad app)
  - Combine your own content files in one lesson
Assessment

Most learning management systems have some tools for assessment, especially self-graded quizzes, built in. However, there are also tools outside of an LMS that can help with quizzes and surveys for assessment.

**Google Forms**
https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6281888?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en
These can be used for surveys or quizzes. Quizzes can even be self-grading by adding in the proper "if statements" in the underlying spreadsheet. Google Forms allows you to create many different types of questions, automatically collects usernames if you require a login, and sends data to a spreadsheet. Google Forms also has many public templates with some quizzes that have already been made, you can use and modify them.

**Flubaroo**
http://www.flubaroo.com/
This tool makes it even easier to grade quizzes made in Google Forms. You can identify how many points each question is worth, and provide a key against which all entries can be quickly graded.

**Poll Everywhere**
https://www.polleverywhere.com/
“Engage your audience or class in real time.”

**Quizlet**
https://quizlet.com/
“Flashcards, games, and more.”

**Socrative**
https://www.socrative.com/
“Socrative is a smart student response system that empowers teachers to engage their classrooms through a series of educational games and exercises via smartphones and tablets.”

**QuizMaker**
“create, discover and share online Quizzes for free”

**QuizWorks**
https://www.onlinequizcreator.com/
Online quiz creator.
Collaboration

The most popular tools for collaborative work are in the Google suite:

- **Docs** - [http://docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)
  - [https://support.google.com/docs/answer/7068618?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en](https://support.google.com/docs/answer/7068618?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en)
- **Sheets** - [http://sheets.google.com](http://sheets.google.com)
  - [https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6000292?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en](https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6000292?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en)
- **Drive** - [http://drive.google.com](http://drive.google.com)
  - [https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424384?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en](https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424384?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en)

Calendars / Scheduling

Even if your instruction will take place in a single session, there are some tools to help find the best time. Or, if your instruction is spread out over a longer period of time, a calendar can help students to keep track of important dates and times.

- **Google Calendar** - [http://calendar.google.com](http://calendar.google.com)
  - [https://support.google.com/calendar/answer/2465776?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en](https://support.google.com/calendar/answer/2465776?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en)
- **WhenIsGood** - [http://whenisgood.net/](http://whenisgood.net/)
  - An easy way for participants to indicate all the times that are good for them, and find the one time that is best for most
- **Doodle** - [http://doodle.com/](http://doodle.com/)
  - Another tool to help with scheduling, asking people what times are best

Analytics

In an online environment, there are a variety of tools available to keep track of your students’ activity, participation, and progress. With a learning management, several different forms of analytics are often built in, and can provide a rich perspective of student activity. Outside of an LMS, however, there are still tools to track individual activities. For all of the tools listed in this section, look for whether or not they have some kind of dashboard or admin account from which you can see different reports. Most social media tools or CMSs will have something for this built in.

- **YouTube** - [https://www.youtube.com/analytics?o=U](https://www.youtube.com/analytics?o=U)
  - [https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/1714323?hl=en](https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/1714323?hl=en)
These can be very helpful - look to see how long people keep watching particular videos. If you see they drop off at a particular time, you know you need to make your videos shorter!

- **Twitter** - https://analytics.twitter.com
  - https://support.twitter.com/articles/20171990

- **Facebook** - https://analytics.facebook.com/
  - https://developers.facebook.com/docs/analytics

- **Wordpress**
  - Wordpress.com Stats - https://en.support.wordpress.com/stats/
  - Self-hosted Wordpress
    - The Jetpack plugin provides many of the same features available on Wordpress.com, including Site Stats
      - https://jetpack.com/features/traffic/site-stats/
    - There are also many plugins available to tie a Wordpress site into Google Analytics - one of the most popular is at https://wordpress.org/plugins/google-analytics-for-wordpress/

If not, you can always set up a Google Analytics account to track activity on a particular webpage or set of pages. If you’re sharing content for your instruction within an existing LMS or CMS at your institution, be sure to check with the administrator for that system to see what kinds of analytics are already in place.

- **Google Analytics** - http://analytics.google.com
  - https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1008015?hl=en