



Blackboard Best Practices: Digital Drop Box vs. Assignment Manager

A Blackboard Learning Services Tip Sheet

Introduction

The *Blackboard Learning System* (Release 6) introduces a new content type called the Assignment Manager. This new tool combines the file exchange capabilities of the Digital Drop Box with the organization and management functionality of the Gradebook within Blackboard. Due to similar capabilities between the Digital Drop Box and the Assignment Manager, Blackboard Learning Services offers this tipsheet as a means of providing best practices for the use of each tool.

Please note the term “User” in this document refers to a person with an account on the Blackboard system. When applicable, the user is defined as an Instructor or Student in a course. If no indication is made, the example describes a situation that would be present for all users in a course, regardless of their assigned role.

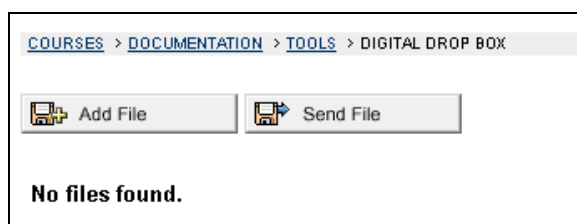
Digital Drop Box

The functionality of the Digital Drop Box tool in the Blackboard Learning System has not changed from previous versions of the application. The Drop Box still provides an area where students and instructors can store and exchange digital files. Students are able to send files to the instructor; the instructor can retrieve and review those files, then return them to the students.

From a student's perspective, the Student Drop Box is bi-directional; students can send files to an instructor, and receive files from an instructor. However, from an instructor's perspective, the Digital Drop Box is multi-directional; an instructor can send files to a single student, selected students, and to all enrolled students in the course.

Note: The Group Pages area of the course has a tool similar to the Digital Drop Box. Within a Group Page, the Drop Box is referred to as the File Exchange Area and it allows a group of students to share files among one another.

An empty Digital Drop Box would appear like this:



Students access the Digital Drop Box from the *Tools* area of a course, or from a direct link that an instructor can create on the course's *Navigation Menu*. Instructors must enter the Digital Drop Box by first entering the **Control Panel** of the course and then selecting the **Digital Drop Box** link under the *Course Tools* area.

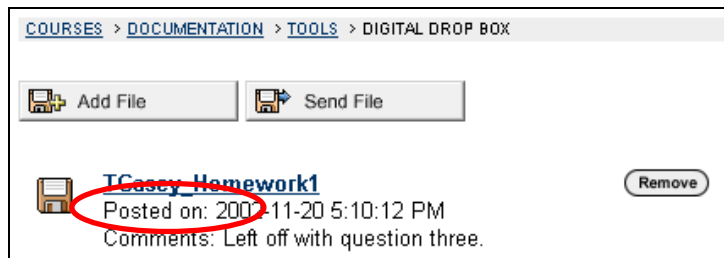
Users have two options in their Drop Box. They can either **Add** a file or **Send** a file. The difference between these two choices sometimes causes confusion for students and instructors alike.

Adding a File

When a user elects to **Add File** they are simply posting a file to be stored as a part of the Blackboard coursesite.

Note: This file is only visible to the user who added it – the instructor of the course cannot view student files which have been added to the student’s Drop Box. Students do not have the ability to view files which the instructor has added to their Drop Box either.

A file that has been added to the student’s Digital Drop Box will appear as shown below.



The important item to note on this screen are the words “*Posted on*” followed by the date and time this file was added to the Drop Box. The presence of these words indicates that this file resides in the Drop Box, but has not been sent to an instructor –or sent to students if a user is viewing an instructor’s Digital Drop Box.

Adding a file to the Drop Box is appropriate when the user wants a place to store the file until they are ready for further editing. Students who use campus computer labs can use the **Add File** option as an area to store their work between edits. Instructors might add a file in the Drop Box so they do not have to carry disks between work and home. The files in the Drop Box can be retrieved from anywhere the user has access to the Internet and their Blackboard coursesite.

Sending a File

The **Send File** button performs two actions. When a user chooses this option in the Digital Drop Box, the file they select will be both added to their Drop Box, as well as sent to the appropriate user.

Clicking on the **Send File** button in an Instructor’s Digital Drop Box will pull up the following screen:

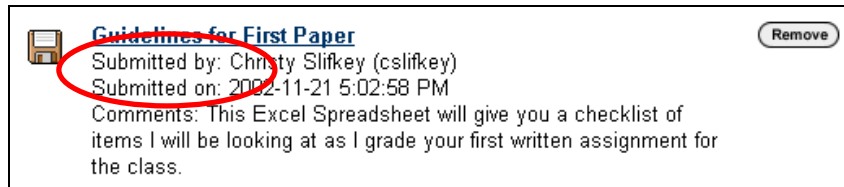
 A screenshot of the 'Send File' dialog box. It is divided into two main sections:

- 1 Select Users:** A 'To:' field with a dropdown menu containing three names: 'Ahemich, Samid (sahem)', 'Casey, Tricia (tcasey)', and 'Thomas, Beth (bthomas)'.
- 2 File Information:**
 - 'Select file:' with a dropdown menu showing a file name.
 - 'OR upload new file:' with a dropdown menu showing 'Homework Questions 1'.
 - 'Title:' with an empty text input field.
 - 'File:' with an empty text input field and a 'Browse...' button.
 - 'Comments:' with a large empty text area.

The Student Drop Box is nearly identical, with the exception of the *Select Users* portion of the page. Since their files are automatically sent to only the instructor they do not have a list of recipient names from which to choose.

When sending a file, the user may select a file which has already been added to their Drop Box, by choosing its name from the drop down list in the *File Information* area. The user may also send a file which does not currently exist in their Drop Box by assigning a *Title* and browsing for the file that they wish to send.

After a file has been sent it will appear in both the user and the recipient's Drop Box as shown below.



Please note the wording for a sent file is different from that of a file which has only been added. The words “Submitted by” for this file indicate that it has been sent from within the Digital Drop Box and is now available to another user in the course.

The **Send File** action is useful when an Instructor wishes to deliver a particular file to a limited number of students in the course. This functionality separates the Drop Box from the general *Content Areas* of the course where all enrolled users can view a file.

From the student perspective, the **Send File** action guarantees that the instructor receives a submitted file in a timely manner. It also alleviates the need to visit on campus to deliver a particular project or assignment, saving users both time and expense.

Digital Drop Box Tips

Time and Date: The time and date stamp is a useful way to determine which students have turned in their work on time. This field is automatically entered once a user has submitted a page and is based upon the time setting on your institution's Blackboard server.

Comments Field: Users often wish to add comments to the file they are placing in the Digital Drop Box. For example, when an instructor were returning a spreadsheet, digital image, or PowerPoint presentation to a student, it may not be feasible to enter comments directly into the file. In these instances, the instructor could do one of the following:

- Use the Comments field to return the file with comments.
- Write comments in a word processing document and send the document to the student via the Drop Box or email.
- Send the student an email with comments.

File Naming Conventions: Blackboard software assigns every uploaded file (in the Drop Box or any other area) a unique identification number. If multiple users upload files with the same name -- for example, "groupproject1.doc" -- the application will be able to distinguish them from one another.

However, it will be more difficult for users to keep identically-named files separate if they are saved to a local desktop or a floppy disk. Thus it is a good idea for users to include their initials or their name as part of the filename for any file they send using the Digital Drop Box. Blackboard does not require any specific naming convention, but it will be helpful to users as they send and save multiple files.

Virus Protection: Whenever a user downloads a file posted or submitted by another user, it is always good to use virus protection software to scan the file for computer viruses. Users may not intentionally send virus-infected files; however, if recipients do not have up-to-date virus protection software installed on their local computer it could become infected.

Assignment Manager

The Assignment Manager in Blackboard provides users an area where course assignments can be posted, related files uploaded with comments, and grades published. This new feature provides Blackboard users with a much-requested organizational capability for the placement, collection, redistribution and grading of assignments.

A posted Assignment will look similar to the image below. As with other content types in Blackboard, the text and attached file are determined by the instructor.


1 Assignment Information

Name: Chapter 1 - Questions and Exercises


Instructions: After reading and reviewing all of the material in Chapter 1, please complete the following assignment.

To complete the assignment:

1. download it to your desktop
2. answer the questions
3. save and rename your file
4. browse to your completed assignment
5. and click submit to send it to the gradebook

Assignment Files:  Chapter 1 - Questions and Exercises
([Ch1-Questions&Exercises.doc](#))

Instructors retrieve, grade, and batch download assignments via the Gradebook. These actions can be done individually, as shown below, or all at once for multiple students' work.

 **View Grades**

Enter or modify a grade for the assignment. Click View to access files sent by the student, to enter feedback or instructor notes, or to send a file to the student.

Student Name	Item Name	Date	Grade	Points Possible	Class Average	Weight	
Tricia Casey (tcasey)	Ch1 Assign (Assignment)		<input type="text"/>	100.0		0.0	View

Student's Comments: I would like to schedule an office hour visit to discuss one of the questions in the exercise. I look forward to your comments.

Feedback to Student:

Instructor Notes:

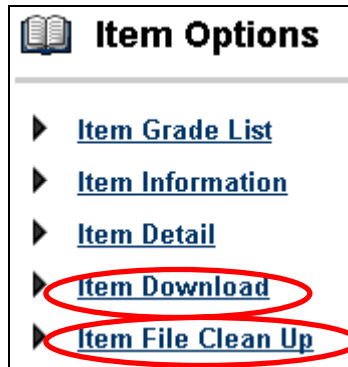
The Assignment Manager is most helpful when students are required to turn in work and receive a grade instead of simply to relaying a file to the instructor.

Assignment Manager Tips

Instructions: When adding an assignment it is important to provide clear and concise directions as to how students are to complete the work. The more detailed the instructions, the fewer questions students will have when completing the assignment.

Instructor Notes: Use this area (see image above) to leave yourself or a fellow instructor comments/a reminder on the student's performance for this assignment. This is a private area which can only be seen by users with access to the Instructor Gradebook.

Course Size Management: If the file size of the course needs to be reduced, batch download a copy of submitted student work to your hard drive or a floppy disk, and keep this version of the students' work. The submitted files can now be deleted from the assignment in the Gradebook via the Item Options, thus freeing up room in your course.



Availability Dates: Use the *Availability Dates* when creating the Assignment to set submission deadlines for work – if students have not completed work by the indicated date and time, they lose their opportunity when the Assignment disappears.

Note: This choice can always be reset by selecting to **Modify** the Assignment. Also, if students turn in a hard copy of the work the new Gradebook allows you to enter a grade for the assignment, without requiring them to have submitted the file via the course website.

Multiple File Submission: The *Add Another File* button allows students to submit multiple files for the same project. When accessing these files they will all appear with one another in the Gradebook, unlike in the Digital Drop Box where they appear as multiple entries.

Which One to Use?

It is important to decide what the final outcome should be for a user's work before selecting the Digital Drop Box or Assignment Manager. This decision rests with each instructor and at times both Tools can be used to achieve the goal.

The following scenarios present several different examples of how the Digital Drop Box and Assignment Manager might be used separately or together to collect student work.

Scenario 1: An instructor has students complete a paper which is counted towards their final grade. The instructor reviews outlines and drafts of the paper throughout the project and timely submissions of these preliminary assignments count toward the total grade for the paper as well.

Possible Solution: The instructor creates assignments for each phase of this project, placing them appropriately in the Content Areas/Folders for the time period in which they are due. Each assignment can detail the expectations of the final product, but should also include specific details about what will be graded for that particular section.

This solution will create multiple columns in the gradebook, but since the instructor's goal is to monitor and reward progress throughout the writing of the paper, this would be appropriate for tracking the grades and responding to the students' work.

Scenario 2: An instructor has students complete a paper which is counted towards their final grade. The instructor reviews outlines and drafts of the paper throughout the project but these do not count toward the total grade for the paper.

Possible Solution: The instructor can follow the solution for Scenario 1 listed above and ignore the grading options for each phase, or indicate completion by placing a check mark in the gradebook for that item.

This solution allows the instructor to track student completion and keeps the various drafts of the paper organized based on when they were due/completed.

Possible Solution: The instructor can create just one Assignment giving the guidelines for the paper and instruct the students to submit all drafts via the Digital Drop Box. When they are ready to turn in the finished work it can be submitted as an assignment.

This solution will create a single column in the gradebook in which a final grade for the paper can be placed. If the instructor does not track submissions throughout the process and just assigns a single grade this option might be a good choice. The drawback to this strategy is this all the various drafts are located in the Digital Drop Box and it can be difficult to manage the separate the versions of each student's work.

Conclusion

Consider using the Digital Drop Box when file exchange is needed between the instructor and one student, a select group of students, or when a project will not be graded. The Assignment Manager is most appropriate for the times when a grade will be assigned to student work and the final product to be graded is one which requires the submission of one document versus multiple revisions.

Both tools provide communication and file exchange capabilities. The final decision as to which tool is the most appropriate choice should be based on the instructor's desired outcome of how files need to be managed.

Education Opportunities

Blackboard Learning Services offers comprehensive classroom training programs and educational materials for the *Blackboard Learning System* and *Blackboard Community Portal System*[™] products. For more information about how Blackboard Learning Services can serve your institution's training needs through on-site events, synchronous WebEx seminars, or via our Certified Education Center partners, please contact your Account Manager at Blackboard or visit the online [Training Center](http://behind.blackboard.com) at <http://behind.blackboard.com>.

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