Best Practices in Content Delivery in Moodle

In a previous article, Organizing Your Course, we learned how to develop different types of structures for your courses and how to customize them so that they meet the needs of the university, students, and instructors.

Now we are ready to look at the content of the course, which will include the course material as well as activities and assessments. We will look at the best ways to deliver your content, which involves reviewing the types of content, formats, and tools. If you take a look at your Moodle course options, you may feel overwhelmed at the number of choices that you have and we hope these articles help to make your choices easier.

We're going to streamline the approach by looking at three different categories of content: resources, activities, and assessments. Considering this approach, it will be much easier for us to cover all that we need to, in order to create a course that helps us achieve our desired learning outcomes as well as accommodate all kinds of learners.

In this article, we will show you the best ways to deliver content in your Moodle course, which includes:

- Managing types of content
- Adding resources
- Adding key activities
- Incorporating assessments
- Using tools to build more complex content

Managing types of content

Your Moodle course may be fairly simple with basic instructional materials, assessments, and tools for interaction. Even at its most basic, though, you'll have to be mindful of the following few key points:

- To accommodate diverse learning styles and devices, it is best to offer your content in different formats, which includes a combination of presentations, text, audio, graphics, videos, and forums/messaging.
- To engage students and to give them chances to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, include a range of activities such as assignments and discussion forums.
- To assess what students are learning, offer a variety of assessments.
- To reduce file-system overload on the on-premises server at McNeese, you may wish to use cloud-based sites, such as YouTube, Office 365's SharePoint, and so on, rather than uploading large files to the Moodle server.

As we get started, let's keep in mind that for convenience, we're trying to start with a simple, straightforward approach. We can always increase the complexity as we go forward.

Adding resources and activities to your course

Resources make it possible for all the students to have access to the same course material. It's also possible for you to organize the content in a way that ties well with your course objectives, which then connect to activities and assessments.

There are a number of resources to choose from; however, we will focus on the ones you're most likely to use in your course. To add a resource, follow the steps found for each.

The main difference between a Moodle resource and a Moodle activity is that a resource tends to be static while an activity involves student performance. Activities are used for communication, collaboration, practice, performance, and assessment.

The following are the steps to add activities:

1. In the Course, click on Turn editing on.
2. Go to the module where you'd like to add content and click on Add an activity or resource.
3. View the menu of activities.
4. Click on the activity you want to add.

Note: You can learn more about activities and activity settings at http://docs.moodle.org/26/en/Activities.

Adding course materials via Book

The Book resource allows you to assemble multiple pages in a single location, and to organize them with an automatically generated table of contents. The book resource is mobile friendly and easy to print. It works very well with flow-able themes. It's convenient, particularly if you're using it for the course orientation which includes the course syllabus or an e-book text. Additional steps for editing the Book activity resource are here.

In the McNeese course shell templates, student learning outcomes are added into the Course Orientation book that is located at the top of the course dashboard in Moodle. To edit the book, follow these instructions. The student learning outcomes are located on the third page in the Course Orientation.

Student learning outcomes are also included in each module of the course shell. At the top of each module in the course, you will see a book labeled "Introduction". This book introduces students to the module. The first page of the book includes sections to add your module student learning outcomes. To edit the book, follow these instructions.

Adding files

One of the easiest ways to ensure that your students are able to obtain the same content is to upload the course material via separate files. Adding files will allow your students to find the material for your course easily. Typical files include text files along with graphics, audio files, videos, and presentations. Keep in mind that not everyone will have the same software. We recommend that you convert your content into a PDF format so that you can upload, especially for students that are using mobile devices and tablets. For example, upload both a PDF file and a PowerPoint file or a text file to Moodle. This will ensure that the formatting and fonts stay the same when students read the content. If you convert the files to PDF, your students can open them with free Adobe Acrobat Reader apps. The advantage is that the formatting and fonts will not change (as your students might have different versions of presentation and word-processing software).

Adding folders

If you have a number of files that fall into a single category or topic, you may wish to group them together in a folder. The folder resource allows you to present many files in one place through one link on the course page. The main advantage of the folder is that it allows you to avoid a cluttered page, or one that requires too much scrolling.

The disadvantage of using folders is that you may require too many clicks; content can be invisible or deeply buried, and thus easy for students to overlook or miss. Recommended tip: Use sub-folders to organize the files you want to provide, but don't overdo it because they can be deeply buried and no one will notice them.

Adding pages

With the Page resource, you're able to use the built-in web editor to create a simple website that can contain links, graphics, and embedded HTML codes. You can use an embedded HTML code and make it very easy for students to access cloud-based resources, such as videos on YouTube.com, audios on SoundCloud.com, presentations on

Google Drive or Office 365 SharePoint, photos and graphics on Facebook, and so on.

Since the embedded HTML code often contains players, it's possible to stream the media rather than having to wait for the files to download. The advantages of this include ease of access and saving of time. The disadvantage is that you must be connected to the Internet to stream the video files. You may prefer to download the files to your device in order to play them when you're not connected to the Internet.

Embedding presentations

You can use embedded HTML code for presentations as well. You may wish to avoid bandwidth and problems caused due to slow download, by hosting in the cloud. So, in that case, using services such as SharePoint on Office 365 can be a lifesaver.

For another layer of safety, you can record yourself giving your presentation on BigBlueButton which is embedded in Moodle. Or, alternatively, you can make a movie using screen recording programs like MicroSoft Teams or BigBlueButton. Then, you can upload your presentation to YouTube.com or SharePoint, where it will be very difficult for anyone to copy your intellectually unique graphics. We have screen recording articles in the student accommodation section of this knowledgebase.

Assignment module

The Assignment module creates a structure that makes it convenient for both students and instructors to assign and turn in work, then for instructors to grade it and provide feedback.

You can set the Assignment module for students to perform a task, and then upload a file that you will then grade. The Assignment module is an activity, and it can also be considered an assessment because you're able to set grades and criteria, and you can specify the type of submissions that you'll accept. You can also set the grading criteria by clicking on the Grade link and specifying the number of points, the grade scale and method of grading, the grade category, and marking allocation. The number of points, the grade scale (these are the same things), and the grade category can be set either through grade book or through the Assignment settings; the method of grading (simple or advanced) can be set through the Grading method drop-down menu. Learn more about using Moodle's gradebook here.

Choice

The Choice activity is a multiple choice poll that can be used to engage students at any point during a course. It can be used as an engager, for example, in a "Did You Know?" or "Test Your Knowledge" type of single-question poll. It can also be used to quickly review facts.
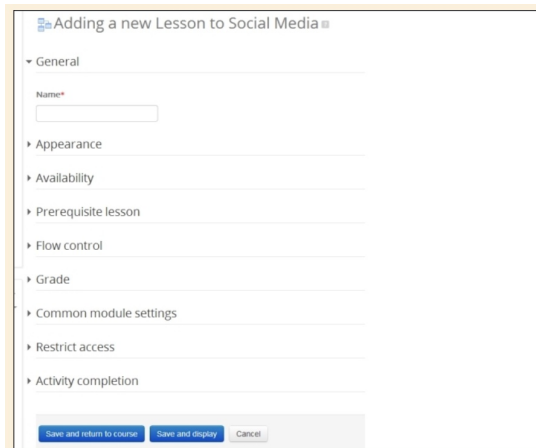
Forum

A forum is a powerful tool for communication and collaboration. It's also a great place to deliver content, because you can upload files or provide links to content within the different threads in the Forum activity.

The advantage of delivering content through a forum is that it's easy to ask students to respond to specific questions about the content and to keep the students focused. Forums are a great way to increase student engagement in your course. Additional articles with recommendations published are here.

The downside is that it's fairly labor intensive to use the Forum activity to distribute content, especially if you require the same content to go in a number of different courses. In that case, it's easier to add it in a Page resource.
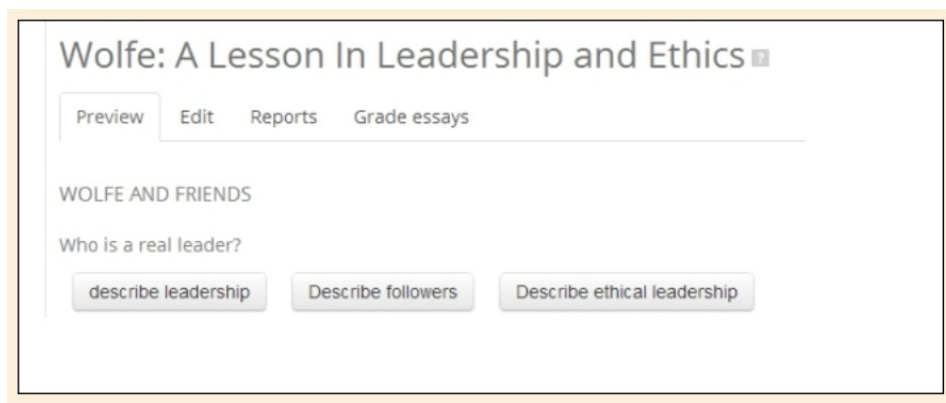
Lesson

A lesson provides both content and interaction. You can include files, links, and custom pages. The basic structure of a lesson is a series of HTML pages. You can include multiple choice questions, short answer questions, true/false questions, matching and essay type questions; when the students select an answer, they are directed to another page. Through planning, you can create adaptive lessons, which take students on a path that is individualized according to their choices. The downside of the lesson is that it requires quite a bit of time to be set up and can be quite complex. The following screenshot is the setup screen for a lesson in a topic entitled Social Media:
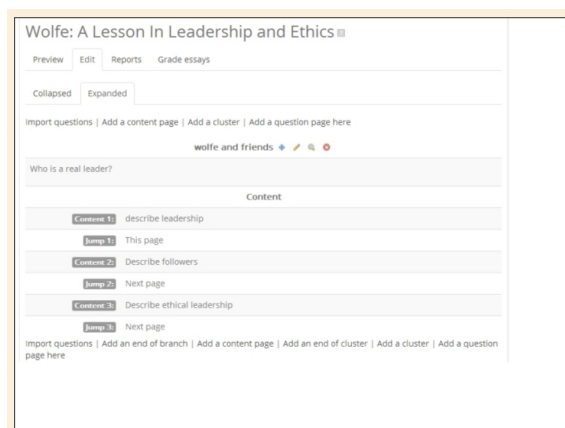

Here is a simplified approach that simply focuses on a lesson, which requires students to turn in an essay. So, instead of multiple-choice questions, it simply allows students to access materials, turn in an essay, and then receive feedback from the instructor.

1. Go to your course and click on Turn editing on. Select Lesson from the Add an activity or resource link.
2. Fill in the fields in the drop-down menus where you'd like to add content.
3. Go to your lesson and add content, and then click on Save and display. You'll have the following options listed; however, in reality, it's easier to add a content page, and then add a question page. If you do so, you'll have a very straightforward lesson with questions and a graded essay that students will turn in.
4. Import questions
5. Add a content page
6. Add a cluster
7. Add a question page
8. You may edit your instructions and provide guidance by clicking on Add a content page, which you'll include before or after the question page.

One of the advantages of using Lesson is that it allows you to put the instructions, the lesson readings and materials, the questions, grading, and grade reports together in a single location. This is very convenient for students and instructors. The following screenshot shows the preview of your lesson:

The following screenshot shows the Edit tab on a lesson's page:

As you can see, at any point, you can modify the content in a number of different ways to make your lesson very robust, yet simple to follow, since the components are contained in a single place. So, students can go to a single location to take a quiz or survey, add readings, videos, graphics, and more.

Using assessments to deliver content

Assessments are not, strictly speaking, course content, but it is possible to deliver course content in a quiz, a discussion, a forum, presentation or other type of assignment. However, some assessments can be good places to deliver content, particularly if the course requires content of maps, parts, or procedures. For example, a quiz built on matching content could involve matching illustrations to a label or a concept. In that case, the content being delivered would be the diagram or graphic material.

Quiz

The Quiz activity module includes a number of options, which include self-scoring questions, and ones that include feedback and the correct responses for each response so that the student has a chance to review the material. The Quiz module allows you to choose the types of questions from a list of options such as:

- Calculated
- Calculated multichoice
- Calculated simple
- Embedded answers (Close)
- Essay

- Matching
- Multiple choice
- Numerical
- Short answer
- True/False
- Description

After you have selected the type of questions, you will begin to develop a data bank. You'll fill in the question form, and assign grades for the correct answer. Once you've created a question, you'll add the response and feedback. Each time you add a question, you'll also be adding it to your Question Bank. Be sure to include the question and also the response/feedback. The Quiz activity module is a very convenient and flexible way to help students assess their knowledge. It's also a great way to deliver content (feedback and review) in a way that engages students. The disadvantage is that a Quiz activity can take quite a bit of time to set up. Generally, it's not easy to create questions and responses that are psycho-metrically sound.

Moodle quiz can be delivered without proctoring. However, if your quiz needs students to be proctored, McNeese has subscriptions to Respondus and ProctorU. You can read more about both of these test proctoring solutions here.

Wiki

The Wiki activity gives you the chance to deliver content and build it at the same time. In Moodle, Wiki is often used when it's considered desirable for class members to contribute to a single project, which would be a set of web pages on a certain topic or set of topics. The Wiki activity can be a collection of information on a topic or examples, or it could be a report on a single topic which contains enough complexity to allow individual students to contribute, review, and edit a section or part of an entry. The advantage of a wiki is that it's collaborative and easy to use. Read this article to learn more about wiki.

Backing up and reusing activities

Once you've built content and a delivery system, it's a good idea to reuse the course or parts of the course. You can reuse activities in a number of ways. Moodle offers you the ability to reuse your course, or part of the course within the same Moodle system or another Moodle, by using the Backup/Restore function. Additional information about coping courses and courses activities can be read here.

The following are the steps to reuse activities and parts of activities:

1. In the ADMINISTRATION block, click on Assignment administration.
2. From the options, select Backup.
3. Check the boxes next to the types of items to backup.
4. Click on Next on the screen and rename the file if desired.
5. Download the file and save it to a location where you can retrieve it easily at a later date.

To back up a single activity from your course, follow the same procedure. If you want to reuse content within the same Moodle site, you may simply restore them. If you want to use them on a different Moodle site, download them and save them locally.

Summary

In this article, we reviewed ways to deliver content, either by adding resources or activities. We also looked at the most commonly used resources and activities and discussed when and why they are used. In addition, we reviewed their advantages and disadvantages, and explained when to use them effectively in our courses. Finally, we looked

at the connections between content delivery and assessments, and we touched on course management and how to save time by backing up activities so that they can be reused later.

Next Steps? > Continue by reading the next article in this series Developing Cohort-based Courses with Teacher-Student Interaction. Or return to the previous article Organizing Your Course.

We have also included articles to help with classroom management strategies to this knowledgebase. Also, check out recommendations for transitioning your on-campus class to an online class fast.