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# Blackboard Course Design and Layout Guidelines

## How to Structure Your Course

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### Introduction

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To increase student satisfaction in your online course, ensure students can access course materials quickly and intuitively. Decide your course design and layout before you add materials to your course.

### OAI's Gold Template in Blackboard

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While individual faculty may find using these practices as helpful, consider working with your peers to create templates for your programs and departments. Students will appreciate the ease of a consistent layout and structure.

All of the guidelines here are incorporated into the OAI Gold Template in Blackboard. This template features [Quality Matters](#) (QM) standards-informed practices that you can easily customize depending on your own course needs. We acknowledge that every course is unique in terms of its subject topic, learning activities and assessment methods. Great courses, however, often share some common design features that enhance the student learning experience.

The OAI template can be accessed in Blackboard through the self-enroll Community, titled "OAI Online Teaching Resource Center." You can access this template at any time and import it into a blank course site.

### Guidelines

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The following simple techniques were used in the design of the OAI Template and can help you effectively organize your content for students.

1. Choose a meaningful organization scheme.

If your course is arranged into parts of equal duration (e.g., each week in a self-contained unit), consider grouping your content by week.

If not, consider grouping content by topic or by item type (e.g. readings, assignments).

2. Use specific and accurate language to label menus, items and files.

Blackboard menus are customizable. Rename menu items to reflect their contents (e.g. Grades, Discussions).

When choosing a name for a menu, an item, or a file, ensure your choice is distinct from other items, unambiguous, and comprised of commonly-used terms. It should be descriptive enough so that students can predict the item's contents by reading the name only. For example, instead of identifying a menu item as "Week 1" only, make that title more meaningful by also including the weekly topic (e.g., "Week 4: Muscles of Head, Neck & Trunk"). Avoid ambiguous menu names such as "Information," "Documents," or "Folders."

To reduce the time needed to update your course prior to each new semester, avoid using dates to identify items.

3. Be consistent.

Regardless of the organization model you choose, keep your course structure consistent and predictable week after week.

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Choose names carefully for assignments, tools, etc. Ensure that you refer to the same item with the identical term in all areas of the course.

4. Provide direct access to frequently used items.

For example, since all students are concerned with grades, consider adding a Grades item to your course menu.

5. Limit the levels of navigation to three.

It is good practice to make sure that students will view any resource within three mouse clicks; otherwise, students may get lost among course contents.

6. Use visual cues.

Use headings, dividers, bullets, and white space to help students identify important information quickly.

7. Provide a starting point.

Help students get oriented when they first enter your course. Consider adding an initial course announcement and creating a menu item that directs students to start from there (e.g., add a "Read Me First" menu item).

8. Get input from others on your course structure.

It can be difficult to review your own work objectively. Consider asking for feedback on your course design from students, a colleague, or an OAI instructional designer.