



Preparing files – formats and tips

General guide for designers

For Blackboard Vista 4.x

Following are some hints and tips on preparing files for use in your online course. Time spent on quality preparation will help to reduce problems for students, such as slow downloads, incompatible software, and printing issues.

Recommended formats (and software requirements)

Note: Only centrally-supported software is described here.

Format	Development software required	Notes
HTML	Options for developers are (depending on developer's skill and required outcomes):	Most users will select the Microsoft Word option. There are some issues with this choice that are covered below.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Basic level - A text editor (for constructing HTML code from scratch), or ❑ Intermediate - Microsoft Word for creating basic documents (then converting to HTML), or ❑ Advanced - web development software such as Dreamweaver. Suitable for complex layouts. 	Short HTML documents can be created directly in Blackboard Vista, without the need for further software (see the online tutorial Creating HTML files).
PDF	Adobe Acrobat (full version)	PowerPoint and Word files can be easily converted to PDF.
JPEG & GIF	Macromedia Fireworks	Most graphics packages (including Fireworks) will convert any graphic format into a .GIF or .JPG file.

Tips for using Microsoft Word files

1. Saving Word documents as HTML files is acceptable, however the HTML file should be "cleaned up" before uploading to your online course – see 'Converting Word files to HTML' below.
2. There are some things to avoid when formatting Word files and methods that will ensure smooth conversion to HTML – see below.
3. Conversion into colour PDF files is not recommended.

Formatting Word documents for web conversion

Follow these basic formatting guidelines:

1. Use the Heading styles to format headings (available as a pull-down menu on the *Word* toolbar). Don't reformat these headings (e.g. change font size or style).
2. Use 'normal' font style (12 Pt Times New Roman) for all other text. Other than bold, keep clear of all other text formatting features, in particular avoid underlining, italics and using all capitals as these all reduce on-screen readability.

3. Avoid indents, spaces and tabs to separate text – if you need to structure the page, use tables.
4. If you need lists, use the ‘Bullets and Numbering’ facility under the *Format* menu, so that they are real lists (not just dashes or paragraphs).
5. Use line breaks or ‘soft returns’ (Shift + Enter) instead of paragraph breaks (hard returns) wherever you want to force text to appear in separate lines.
6. Turn off ‘smart quotes’:
 - Select **Tools >>AutoCorrect Options**, then click the tab **Auto Format As You Type**.
 - Under **Replace as you type**, de-select the check mark alongside “*Straight quotes’ with “smart quotes”*”, then click **OK**.

Converting Word files to HTML

It is very easy to convert a Word document into a web (html) document. Word has this function built-in. However, the html code that is produced is often clumsy, inefficient and excessive. This can cause severe difficulties when end-users are viewing or printing the document (as a web page) in their browsers, and in **MyLO**. It is therefore necessary to "clean up" the html code that Word produces.

Saving your Word document as an html file

To save your document as an html file:

1. Go to **File >> Save as Web Page**.
2. Next to **Save as type**, select basic html format from the drop-down list (avoid the default Single File Format *.mht or *.mhtml formats)
3. Browse to a folder that you can readily locate to save the document in.
4. Click **Save**.

‘Cleaning up’ the converted html file

You will need **Adobe Dreamweaver** with the ‘Clean Up Word HTML ...’ extension installed.

1. In **Dreamweaver**, open the html document you just saved.
2. From the **Commands** menu, select **Clean Up Word HTML**, choose either a basic or detailed clean up, then click **OK**.
3. Once run, click **OK** again at the prompt.

The document is now ready for uploading to your online course.

Tips for producing Adobe Acrobat documents

1. When creating a PDF file from a Microsoft application, use the print settings to reduce the quality (and therefore file size) of the document.
2. If you use PDF writer or PDF distiller software, adjust the compression settings to minimise the file size.
3. The later versions of Acrobat allow you to reduce the file size – choose **Document >> Reduce File Size** and follow the instructions.
4. Avoid the use of colour in PDF files.

Recommendations on the use of Microsoft PowerPoint files

1. The placement of .PPT files directly into your online course is possible but not recommended.
2. Conversion into colour PDF files is not recommended.
3. Conversion into black & white PDF files is recommended - using the layout of 2, 3 or 6 slides per page (from within **PowerPoint**). This makes it easy for students to print out the presentation.
4. If you have access to **Impatica** for **PowerPoint**, use this software to convert your **PowerPoint** files to **Impatica** files, and upload these to **MyLO**. **Impatica** files will run in a web browser without the need for a plug-in, are of relatively small file size, and will preserve most of your **PowerPoint** show features.
5. If you don't have access to **Impatica**, consider using the .PPS format (**PowerPoint Show**) or html format. These formats can easily be produced from within **PowerPoint**. [However, be aware that when you convert the .ppt file to html, both an html index page and associated folder are created. These need to be placed together in a new folder then zipped and uploaded to your course (using the 'Automatically unzip' option.). Check that both the index page and folder are together in the File Manager. To allow students to view the show, create a link to the html index page].

Recommendations on file sizes

1. Avoid uploading large files to your online course—especially large PowerPoint or PDF files. A limit of 1 megabyte per file is specified in the quality assurance standards.
2. Where necessary, break up large files into smaller ones, or use a different format.
3. Very large files (including most multimedia) are best provided on CD or streamed through a server.
4. Avoid extensive use of graphics and images. Use the recommended .GIF and .JPG graphic formats. Other formats (such as .BMP) can cause massive increases in file size.

Keeping an eye on file names and extensions

Files will not work properly if they are named incorrectly or lack the appropriate extension. Follow these conventions closely:

File names

- Keep all in lowercase
- Avoid spaces or non-standard characters – use hyphens or underscore to separate words (e.g. unit_outline; module-5)
- Keep names to fewer than 25 characters.

Extensions

Make sure to add the correct extension to the end of the file name – e.g. .doc; .html; .gif.

Where to get help

- For direct, personal assistance with preparing files contact your local educational technology/information technology support staff.
- Basic training is available in the **Teaching Online Essentials** course, or through accessing the module **Introduction to preparing and presenting content online** (on request – online at the TLO web site).