

File formats for the web

Quick Guide for designers

For Blackboard Vista 4.x

Blackboard Vista can handle almost any type of file that would normally run in a web browser. However the choice of format is very important as it directly affects your development time and the skills/software required. Format choices also have a significant bearing on content useability and accessibility for students.

Below is a summary of formats that can be used. Recommended baseline formats are indicated with a * symbol.

Formats for delivering content

Format	Notes	Advantages	Disadvantages
HTML*	The language of the web. Browsers are primarily designed to display HTML files	Only format that links with many of Blackboard Vista's tools (e.g. search, glossary) Fast display, printing	May require some knowledge of HTML May require some competency with development and html editing software tools (e.g. Dreamweaver)
PDF	Adobe's Portable Document Format	Can display almost any form of document. Accurately displays complex layouts & graphics Widely used	Potentially slow to download, display and print. Large file size (however files can be optimised for web viewing) Requires special software to create and view documents Not recommended for accessibility unless created using appropriate tags (see www.webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/ for more information)
DOC	Microsoft Word documents	Widely compatible for most users Good for complex/long text layouts	Documents are not fully secure May not display or print as intended Software or plug-in is required to view Slower than HTML to display and print Large file size
PPT or PPS	Microsoft PowerPoint documents	Widely compatible for most users Complex graphic layouts and basic animation	Large file size – can be huge when background images are used Software or plug-in is required to view Slow to download Printing difficulties Browser incompatibilities Note: You can eliminate most of these disadvantages by using software such as using Impatica for PowerPoint that optimise presentations for web viewing. 'Impaticising' your presentation can also make it a much richer learning experience e.g. by adding narration than a plain slide presentation - see www.utas.edu.au/itr/emedialimpatica.html for more information.

Formats for graphics

Format	Notes	Advantages	Disadvantages
JPG * or JPEG	"JPEG" format - for low-medium quality graphics and images	Efficient display of colour and complex images Good file compression	Images not usually suitable for high quality use (e.g. printing)
GIF *	For low quality images and simple graphics such as icons, charts, diagrams	Efficient display of graphics Excellent file compression Can display transparency & animation	Images not suitable for high quality use (e.g. printing) Not suitable for complex images
BMP, PNG, PSP, PSD, AI etc.	Complex formats used by graphic development software	High quality output for display and printing	Large file size Slow to download, display and print Not recommended for browser use

Need more information?

For more information, see the companion guide: [Preparing files – formats & tips](#).

Also see the module: [Introduction to preparing and presenting content online](#).

References:

Designer and Instructor Reference: Application Pack 2 for Blackboard Learning System – Vista Enterprise License (Release 4) 2006 Blackboard Inc.

Vista 4.2 Online Help (Blackboard Inc.)

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