

Start-of-Term Guide

Please use this guide to prepare your courses before the start of the term. Following these steps in advance will help ease your work throughout the semester and better ensure a good learning experience for students. You should also refer to the [Online Course Checklist](#) for best practices.

Click a topic in the Table of Contents to advance to that section.

Table of Contents

<i>Merge Sections</i>	2
<i>Framework Courses</i>	2
<i>Copy Your Course</i>	2
<i>Date Management in Blackboard</i>	3
<i>Check Due Dates</i>	3
<i>Syllabus</i>	3
<i>Your Instructor</i>	4
<i>Announcement</i>	4
<i>Content</i>	4
<i>Gradebook</i>	5
<i>ADA Reminders</i>	5
<i>Need Help?</i>	6

Merge Sections

If you teach more than one section of the same course, you may want to merge them into one course in Blackboard. This can save you time posting announcements, making changes, adding resources, etc. Your sections would need to have the same due dates, though.

Fill out the [Course Merge Request Form](#) and request the merge prior to copying/adding content into your course shells and prior to student enrollments. A new, empty course shell will be created for the merge, and you will not be able to access the original individual sections.

After your courses are merged, you can use our [Smart Views guide](#) to filter the section enrollments in the Grade Center.

Framework Courses

We have a **Virtual Course Framework** to help you and your students get started in a Real-Time Virtual course. It contains a Collaborate link in Course Content, getting started tips and tutorials for students, links to student support services, and instructor resources.

We also have a **Signature Course Framework** that is designed to be used with any new course development, whether it's face-to-face, blended, or online. It contains development tips, a sample activity list, sample grading rubrics, and course evaluation surveys.

Both framework courses contain a welcome announcement template, Your Instructor template, and Grade Center columns to meet DMACC's [Blackboard Gradebook Expectations](#). It's best to have the framework copied into your course before any other course materials, but it can be copied in after you've already copied your course (you'll just need to rearrange some things).

Contact an [instructional designer](#) to have one of the frameworks copied into your course shell.

Copy Your Course

You can use our [Course Copy guide](#) to quickly copy your course from one term to the next. Remember to copy only one course at a time and wait for the confirmation email before copying another course. It takes time to complete the request and attempting to copy more than one course could result in errors.

Course copies always happen in addition to whatever is already in the destination course and never replace it. If you receive an error or copied the course more than once, do not attempt to copy it again. Contact an [instructional designer](#) for assistance.

Date Management in Blackboard

If you copied content from a previous semester, use the Date Management tool under “Course Tools” to quickly move your availability start/end dates and due dates forward for the next semester. Visit the [Date Management guide](#) for detailed instructions.

Check Due Dates

You should always check every due date for accuracy to ensure students are informed and to help them succeed in the course. *All graded activities should have the due date specified in the settings*, because this enables students to take advantage of the tools in Blackboard as well as notifications. The due date will be listed in My Grades, Grades, Calendar, and the Activity Stream.

The quickest way to view all due dates in a course is to go to the **Full Grade Center**, click the **Manage** drop-down at the top, and select **Column Organization**. You will see a “Due Date” column and should make sure they’re organized sequentially by due date. If any due dates are missing or need to be changed, the easiest way to edit them is to go to the Full Grade Center, click the drop-down menu to the right of the column title, and choose **Edit Column Information**. You can also use the Date Management “List all dates for review” option to view and/or edit existing dates.

Syllabus

The DMACC Syllabus template is updated regularly. Please make sure you are using the latest version, which you can find in the [Teacher’s Toolbox](#) after logging in. The template includes a table to add the course schedule on the last page. Please make sure the schedule lists all the activities and due dates, not just the general topics that will be covered.

The [Syllabus Template Online Course Components](#) document contains some basic online information you can copy-and-paste into your syllabus, such as discussion board requirements, netiquette information, sample schedules, etc.

If you have already uploaded your syllabus to your course but then had to make changes to it, rather than deleting the old one and uploading the new, you should overwrite the existing file. To do so, go to the **Syllabus** area in your course, click the drop-down arrow next to the attached document title, and select **Overwrite File**. Click **Browse Local Files** or drag-and-drop your new file to the dashed box to attach it.

Your Instructor

Check the Your Instructor area for accuracy. The information from the Syllabus Template should be included, along with at least one photo of yourself so your students can “see” you (it humanizes you and helps them connect).

We have a template we can add to your course if you’d like (see the [Framework Courses](#) section above). It contains placeholders for information such as email, phone, office hours, etc. Contact an [instructional designer](#) to have that added.

Announcement

Make sure you have a welcome announcement that informs students how to get started (i.e., where and when). If you are meeting virtually, provide clear instructions on accessing the course room, including the date, time (noting time zone), and location.

We strongly encourage you to post housekeeping/update announcements each week.

Content

Ideally, your entire course should be set up and ready to go prior to the start of the semester. The entire course does not need to be available to students, but the content should be there and set to become available as needed. At the very least, make sure your “Getting Started” folder and the first week/unit/lesson are ready to go and available to students.

- Make sure all due dates and availability dates are updated for the new semester (see the [Date Management in Blackboard](#) section above).
- If your folder titles include the dates, make sure you update those.
- Check for broken links to external websites and videos.
- Create or update your welcome video.
- If you have a General Questions & Answers discussion board, don’t forget to subscribe.
- Refer to the [Online Course Checklist](#) for best practices.

Course Tools to Check After Copying a Previous Course:

- If you use Turnitin, recycle the assignments to ensure they work properly in the new course. Go to **Course Tools, Turnitin Direct Tools**, and click the **Recycle Turnitin Direct Assignments** link.
- If you use Respondus LockDown Browser, check the dashboard to make sure there aren’t any test errors. Go to **Course Tools** and select **Respondus LockDown Browser**.
- If you use one of the textbook publisher integrations, don't forget to link your new Blackboard course with your new publisher course.

Gradebook

Please review the [Blackboard Gradebook Expectations](#) with help guides included. You will need separate total columns for each of the types of display (percentage, letter grade, and points) because the “Secondary Display” is only visible to instructors.

Tips

- Make sure the [grading schema](#) you are using for the letter grade total column matches the grading scale in your syllabus (don't adjust it to “round up”).
- If you copied in a course, delete any extra or duplicate total columns.
- We recommend setting the total column that's displaying Percentage as the “External Grade” because this will be the overall grade students see in their "Grades" area outside the course and in the mobile app. Click the drop-down menu for that column and choose **Set as External Grade**.
- If you use weighted grades, go to **Manage > Column Organization** in the Full Grade Center to make sure all the columns are in the correct category.
- If you use weighted grades, check your weighted total column(s) to make sure it is set up properly with either equal or proportional weight. Equal weighting on a category means an average grade will be used, so the individual point values of the activities do not matter. Proportional weighting on a category means the individual point values do matter (e.g., a 50-point assignment is worth twice as much as a 25-point assignment) and the total is calculated as the points earned divided into the points possible.
- To always see a total column when you scroll, go to **Manage > Column Organization**, drag the desired column above the grey frozen column bar (directly below First Name) and click **Submit**.

ADA Reminders

We are required by law to make sure all learning materials are accessible (i.e., remove barriers to learning), but more importantly, we should *want* to make sure that all students have an equitable opportunity to learn. This starts with the material and information we provide to students.

- Ally is a built-in tool to check accessibility and provide alternative formats to students.
 - Check Ally dials that appear on individual course materials for ADA compliance. You can click on them to learn about issues and how to fix them.
 - You can run an accessibility report on your course(s) by expanding the **Course Tools** menu and selecting **Accessibility Report**.
 - Visit our [Ally in Blackboard](#) page or [Blackboard's Ally for LMS Help](#) for more information.

- Do not change the course menu in Blackboard. If you have extra menu areas, please contact an [instructional designer](#) for help removing them so we can remain in ADA compliance.
- When you paste in text from other sources, make sure you click the “Remove Formatting” button to get rid of the excess HTML formatting that isn’t needed and can cause issues (such as background colors, font format, font sizes, etc.). Basic formatting, such as headings, bullets, and bold/italics will remain.
- Do not change default font colors and types. Changing the font can hinder readability.
- Check the captions on your Kaltura videos to make sure they’re accurate. Instructions can be found in the **Online Instructional Resources** course in Blackboard > **Course Content** > **Helpful Tools** > **Kaltura**.

DMACC’s [Digital & Web Based Content Accessibility Resources for Faculty](#) website contains policy information and resources to help make your content accessible so all students can utilize it and to ensure compliance with Federal law.

Additional resources and tools can be found in the **Online Instructional Resources** course in Blackboard > **Course Content** > **ADA Compliance**.

Need Help?

If you have any questions or need help with your courses, please reach out to the [instructional designers](#) in Distance Learning. They can help with Blackboard issues, course design improvements, and using educational technology such as Kaltura for lectures, Collaborate Ultra for synchronous online meetings, and other tools.

The **Online Instructional Resources** course in Blackboard contains a lot of guides and information to help you build and improve your course.

Distance Learning offers a variety of online training sessions on a regular basis. Recordings are available in the “Teaching and Learning” Community (now housed in Organizations) in the “Online Teaching & Learning” area. Visit the [Training Sessions Calendar](#) for a list of upcoming events.

As the term draws to an end, please refer to the [End-of-Term Guide](#) (PDF) to help close out your course and submit final grades.