

Edge Hill University

# Good Practice in Building and Teaching your Course in Learning Edge

Learning  
Technology  
Development

## Introduction

---

Edge Hill University's virtual learning environment enables you to provide online resources and activities that support your students' learning.

This document offers advice about simple, practical steps you can take to enhance its educational value and improve your students' experience. It draws upon existing good practice within Edge Hill and from across the sector as well as feedback obtained from the annual EHU Student eLearning Survey.

## Recommended Practices and Resources

---

- Exemplar Area
  - Follow the advice in the '2020 Learning Design Exemplar' Blackboard area.
- Learning Technologists
  - If you have not yet given consideration to the role of Learning Edge and its related technologies within your programme or module, you may find it helpful to consult with the [Learning Technologist](#) who works with your Faculty or Department. They can offer comprehensive advice, guidance and training.
- Baseline
  - [A minimum level of Blackboard provision \(i.e. the Baseline\)](#) has been introduced across the University as an aid to assuring and enhancing the quality of the student e-learning experience on all programmes of study. It is strongly advised that a range of practices and resources should therefore be present in all modules.
- Lecture support materials
  - Provide copies of lecture support materials such as lecture notes and PowerPoint slides. These should be organised in folders so that they are easy to locate, for example by week or topic. Again, feedback from the annual EHU student eLearning Survey tells us that students value (and expect) these materials provided in Learning Edge not simply within single modules but consistently across programmes of study.
- Student Expectations
  - Manage student expectations by clearly stating that you will (for example) "reply to emails within two working days, so an email sent on Friday will get a reply by 5pm Tuesday. Please look at the Frequently Asked Questions before you email me".

## Organising Course Resources

---

When EHU students were asked for feedback on the VLE their principle complaint was about inconsistent practices and poorly organised courses where resources were difficult to find. Here are some guidelines on making your course easier to use:

- It is a good idea to plan the structure of your resources before you start adding them. You can add folders to a content area to organise your resources according to your organising principle. This might be a numbered series of lectures or seminars (e.g. “Week 3: labelling theory”) or a set of themes (e.g. “Infection control”).
- Avoid having folders within folders unless it is helpful.
- Give each folder a clear title plus a brief description that summarises the contents e.g. topic of the lecture or the theme. Also add a short description for each item e.g. “Week 3 PowerPoint slides – labelling theory” and instructions on how the item should/might be used.
- Be consistent; use the same names, fonts and locations across modules.
- If you have folders that are empty because you have not yet created the resources to go in them, hide those folders by making them unavailable to students. When you have added the resources, remember to make the folder available.

## An Incremental Approach to Blended Learning

---

While students appreciate (and even expect) online access to resources, these don't, as a rule, make any difference to how the module is taught. The next step is to introduce blended learning by using Learning Edge to deliver some online learning activities that complement or replace face-to-face activities. Here are a few examples of how it is possible to support, extend or enhance your students' learning at a pace that is right for you and them:

- Providing students with short video guides that allow them to study techniques and procedures before they try them for real, or providing short video interviews with 'experts' in the field.
- Creating short weekly self-test quizzes which allow students to check that they have grasped the key points from a lecture and provides them with formative feedback. Their results can be recorded in the Grade Centre and provide you and them with feedback on their progress.
- Using a discussion forum to facilitate a collaborative exercise for groups of students. You could set up a scenario with supporting documents, and then get each group to research other relevant information and agree a solution by a deadline.
- Set up a journal for each student to record their thoughts about the readings you have provided as preparation for a debate in a seminar session.
- Create a self-study learning resource to replace some face-to-face teaching. This could be an audio podcast, a narrated slideshow, a short video or a screencast<sup>1</sup>.

In an online environment, with few interpersonal clues, it is even more important to provide clear instructions to help your students make effective use of the resources and activities. These instructions can be included in the description of the relevant item or provided as a printable Word or PDF file:

---

<sup>1</sup> A screencast is a digital recording of computer screen output, also known as a video screen capture, often containing audio narration

- What is the student expected to do? Alone or in collaboration with others?
- Roughly how long should they spend on it? Is there a deadline?
- What are the outputs? How are these submitted or shared?
- Is this work checked or assessed? How does it link with face-to-face sessions?

## Accessibility

---

All tutors have a legal duty to make sure online content can be accessed using common accessibility software such as screenreaders, and to make reasonable adjustments to meet students' requirements.

In many cases, reasonable adjustments benefit all students:

- Many dyslexic students find it helpful to review the lecture notes and slides in advance of the lecture. All you need to do is make sure they are uploaded to Learning Edge a few days in advance rather than a few days after the lecture.
- Use a clear folder structure to organise online learning resources into coherent groups rather than dumping them all in a single 'lecture materials' area. Students with dyslexia or visual disabilities find long lists of resources awkward to navigate.
- Text resources should use a file format that can be understood by text-to-speech software; for example PowerPoint slides are a series of text boxes that are not picked up by text-to-speech software. Exporting the PowerPoint text and any notes to a Word document or saving as a PDF are helpful alternatives.
- Web links should include a brief description of the website and why your students might find it useful to visit.
- Visual or audio resources embedded into documents should have a brief *Alternative text* (Alt text) summary of their content so that a screen reader would be able to describe what the non-text item represented, for example, "*Edge Hill logo.*" Take care that any images you use have a purpose and that this purpose can be conveyed using Alt text. If creating content using Flash, it is important to note that unless text in Flash objects has been specifically coded for accessibility it is likely to prove difficult for text to speech software and screen readers to access

## Copyright

---

Students are expected to obey the University's academic integrity regulations and avoid plagiarism by respecting other people's intellectual property rights. In adhering to legal requirements you are also modelling best practice when uploading material to eShare<sup>2</sup> (the learning and teaching content repository) for use in Learning Edge:

- Do not upload journal articles (for example PDF files) that you have downloaded from EHU library subscriptions. Provide your students with a direct link (using the persistent URL in the library catalogue record) or make them practice their information literacy skills by simply giving the article's bibliographic details.
- Linking to web pages needs careful consideration. Be cautious about *deep linking* to a page within a web site as this could be interpreted as you trying to pass that content off as your own work. If using deep links, have the web page open in a separate Tab or browser window. Deep linking is not necessarily copyright infringement, but it can create legal difficulties, particularly if the home page has disclaimer notices, adverts or click through licenses which get by-passed by someone going straight into a deep linked page
- Audiovisual materials contain many copyright and intellectual property rights challenges. Performers' rights issues may arise in any type of performance (theatrical, musical, oral, dance or even simply a lecture). In these cases, it is important that permission from individuals is sought if a performance is reproduced in whole or in part in an application such as a podcast or video. Keep records of the permissions given (alongside the resources where possible).
- Be cautious about using images found on the web unless you are certain that you have permission to use them. A *Google Images* advanced search will allow you to restrict your search to images *labelled for reuse*. There

---

<sup>2</sup> eShare <http://www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/>

are many other sources of images that can be used freely in education e.g. the *Education Image gallery* which can be accessed from the EHU library catalogue.

- If in any doubt about whether you are likely to contravene copyright, exercise caution – in the first instance consult an online guide<sup>3</sup> and seek further advice if necessary.

---

<sup>3</sup> eShare; Staying Legal [http://www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/886/2/Staying\\_Legal\\_guidelines\\_29\\_Sep\\_2011.pdf](http://www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/886/2/Staying_Legal_guidelines_29_Sep_2011.pdf)