

# Lessons Tips and Best Practices for Effective Course Design

## Make it easy for students to find things

- Use the **Lessons** tool as the central hub where students can find everything they need in one place.
- On the main Lessons page, create a **subpage** for each week of the class.
- On each weekly subpage, put everything your students need to know and do that week, including:
  - Due Dates
  - Overview/Learning Outcomes - *What will students learn and why is it important?*
  - Presentation of Content - *Textbook reading assignments, links to lecture notes, PowerPoints, videos, etc.*
  - Activities and Assessments - *Link to quizzes, tests, assignments, or forums*
- The [Weekly Lesson Template \(pdf\)](#) or <http://bit.ly/weekly-lesson-template> can help you plan and organize your content each week.

## Consistency matters!

- Don't rename the **Lessons** tool on the course menu. Just leave it named **Lessons!**
  - That way, students taking several courses will know exactly where to find things in each site.
- If teaching online or hybrid, choose a **consistent deadline** for each week's assignments. For example, every Tuesday at 11 pm or every Friday at 5 pm.
  - **Do not make activities due at midnight!** It's confusing for students -- and for instructors too.
  - Consider making your activities due during the week, when you may be more available to answer student questions.

## Multimedia tips

- When adding videos to your course, make sure they are accessible to all students. One way to do this is to find videos that are **closed captioned**.
- Captions can be a useful learning aid for all students, not just for the hearing impaired.
  - In a recent [study at Oregon State University](#) or <http://bit.ly/helpful-captions>, most students reported that video captions and transcripts help them focus, understand, and retain information.
- [Films on Demand](#) or <http://bit.ly/dtcc-films-on-demand> (provided by Durham Tech's library) contains more than 30,000 academic videos, most of them captioned.
  - You can also [search YouTube for captioned videos](#) or <http://bit.ly/find-YouTube-captions>

- To embed a video In Lessons, use **Add Content > Embed content on page**
  - If you embed videos, it's a good idea to provide a link to the video too, in case students have difficulty displaying the embedded video.

## Streamline your course menu

- Move important course tools to the top of the course menu. We recommend putting these tools near the top:
  - *Overview, Announcements, Syllabus, Lessons, Gradebook, and Test & Quizzes.*
- Hide tools that students don't need to see, such as *Statistics, User Activity and Site Info.*
  - To hide tools:
    - Go to Site Info > Tool Order
    - Beside a tool, click the gear icon ( ) then click "Make Tool Invisible to Students"
    - Click Save
- If you use Lessons to link to content and activities (recommended), you can hide *Resources, Forums, and Assignments.*
- It's up to you if you want to show or hide these tools: *Roster, Email, Email Archive and Calendar.*

| Important Tools:<br>Move to Top of Course Menu   | Hide these Tools  | Hide If Using Lessons<br>to link to<br>activities/documents   | You Decide:<br>Show or Hide Tools  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Overview</li> <li>•Announcements</li> <li>•Syllabus</li> <li>•Lessons</li> <li>•Gradebook</li> <li>•Tests &amp; Quizzes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•User Activity</li> <li>•Statistics</li> <li>•Site Info</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Resources</li> <li>•Forums</li> <li>•Assignments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Roster</li> <li>•Email</li> <li>•Email Archive</li> <li>•Calendar</li> </ul> |

## Lessons and Resources are interconnected

When you add content in Lessons, Sakai automatically creates a folder in the **Resources** area of your site with the title of your subpage (such as *Week 3*) and stores the content there. Therefore, it's very important that you...

- Don't delete folders (or their contents) from Resources if they match the names of your Lessons subpages, or you'll delete your Lessons content!
- And when you import (copy) your course content from one semester to the next, ALWAYS be sure to import Resources along with Lessons.