Best Practices
Using Blackboard Basic Communication Skills
Session Outcomes

By the end of this session, participants will be prepared to:

● Use basic Bb tools to communicate effectively with students
● Create a class communication plan
● Protect student privacy online
Overview

- What is effective written (email) communication? How well do we perceive its effectiveness?
- What are the benefits of effective online communication?
- What are some best practices for using Bb communication tools?
Effective Email Communication

What is it? Hard to define, but…

Tubbs and Moss (2006), state, “communication is effective when the stimulus as initiated and intended by the sender, or source, corresponds closely to the stimulus as it is perceived and responded to by the receiver” (p. 24).

How good are we at perceiving its effectiveness?

In five studies, Kruger et al. (2005) examined the difficulty of conveying emotion and tone via email without the “benefit of paralinguistic cues” (p. 1) and indicated that participants who sent emails overestimated their ability to communicate by email. Receivers also overestimated their ability to accurately interpret the email they received.
Benefits

- Increased student engagement and retention
- Online community (social presence)
- Model effective communication for students

“Frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and students has repeatedly been shown to be an independent predictor of student persistence” (p. 2). Additional research by Chickering and Gamson (1987) reveals that knowing faculty and faculty concern assist students with getting through challenging times and enhance a student’s intellectual commitment.” - Batte.

“Data revealed that 12% of the students who opted to leave/withdraw based their decision on their experience with the online instructor citing poor communication.“ - Batte

“Making communications with your students personal means that you should communicate with your students in such a way that they know that you feel that they are a real person and that you respect and you value your communications with them.” - Kilgore
How can we be effective?

- **Reflect** on our current written communication style
- **Choose** the appropriate tool for our communication goal
- **Provide** a class communication plan
- **Use** best practices for writing email messages
Affordances:
Use primarily for an initial welcome / get started announcement and for communicating with individual students when necessary

Consider other channels for Q/A (e.g. General Q/A discussion forum)

Best Practices:
- Create a communication plan
- Encouraging tone
- Personalize your message (use students’ names)
- More text/fewer images
- Headings/bullets/numbered lists
- Clear and concise
- Don’t share info shared with you via email with the class unless you’ve asked for permission first (observe FERPA)
- Use KCC email and Blackboard exclusively with students and have them use their KCC email exclusively. Students can verify their email address - see resources for the student guide you can share.

Additional Resources:
- Step by step guide to sending a Bb email
- Student guide for verifying student email addresses
- Information about email distribution lists
- CUNY guide to creating accessible emails
Introduction Letter – Online Course Section  
English 101 – Fall 2020  

Welcome English 101 students. I invite you to enjoy a new learning experience as we journey through this online course. Our focus will be on language – how to use it, read, it, analyze it, write it, and hopefully, come to a greater understanding of its power and influence in all that we do.

To start, you will want to know the structure of the class:

1. The class is entirely online – there are no required on-campus meetings.
2. The class will begin October 10th within Blackboard.
3. To keep up with the class and important announcements and discussions, you will need to log on daily and check for emails from me every Tuesday.
4. An online class can be both challenging and exciting. You need to make the time to complete all the assignments, participate in discussions, and be open to learning. You also need to be self-motivated and self-disciplined to succeed. If you want to determine if an online class is really for you, take the KCC Are You Ready quiz.

Next, here’s what you need for an online class:

1. Make sure that you have reliable internet access.
2. Check to make sure that your computer system is adequate.
3. Have a backup computer to use (at a library or elsewhere)
4. Check your KCC email daily.
5. Log on at least once before October 10th and complete the three tasks there for you (read the syllabus, sign the class communication plan, and post your personal introduction to the discussion forum).

My hope is that you learn from this course, enjoy the experience, and have fun in the process!

See you online!

Professor Jane Doe
Basic Tools: Announcements

Affordances:

Use for reminders about exams, due dates, important corrections, and perhaps a weekly announcement that includes: a list of tasks for the week, due dates, learning objectives, and an expression of enthusiasm and encouragement

Best Practices and Tips:

- Schedule for announcements
- Supportive tone, encouragement
- More text/fewer images
- Headings/bullets/numbered lists
- Clear information - due dates, list of tasks for the week, learning objectives covered

Additional Resources:

Step by step guide to sending an announcement through Blackboard
How can I get started?

Create a class communication plan to share with students and include:

- Your name, title, dept., email, phone, and a link to your virtual office meeting space
- Where to send questions
- How quickly you’ll respond
- How to reach you with urgent Q’s
- What kinds of regular communications you will send out, how, and when they’ll go out (make a consistent schedule for messages)
- Other plans you have to be available for support
- Etiquette or professional conduct expectations
Dear Students,

Below is our class communication plan for the semester. Please read, sign, and submit this plan/form by Tuesday, March 2nd.

**General Questions Q&A Forum:** Please post general questions about our course or course technology within the Q&A Discussion forum in Blackboard so that everyone can benefit from the answers. Reserve email for questions of a more personal nature. I will reply to emails and questions in the Q&A forum within 48 hours, usually sooner. Note that I will not be available to answer questions on Sundays.

**Assignment Feedback:** Feedback on graded work will be returned to you within Blackboard within five days of the assignment submission. If I need to deviate from this schedule, I will send out an announcement in Blackboard.

**Weekly Announcements:** I will be sending weekly Announcements every Tuesday between 10 am - 12 noon (remember that our class work week begins on Tuesdays and ends on the following Wednesday when the week’s assignments are due). Please look for my Tuesday announcements in your campus email inbox and in the Blackboard Announcements area at this time. Ask any related questions within the Q&A forum.

**Virtual Office Hours:** You will have opportunities to meet with me to go over assignments, discuss your progress, and ask questions during my virtual office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 2-3 pm, or by appointment. Click on/select the virtual office hour link within our Blackboard course to enter the virtual meeting space during these times.

**Professional Conduct Expectations (part of class participation):** Email is a professional means of communication in our class. Use proper sentence structure and punctuation, avoid all CAPS and be respectful. Include the course name in your subject line and your name in the email. Check your email daily. Use your KCC email address and not a personal email address. You can verify which email is listed for you in our Blackboard course by following these steps.
Knowledge Sharing and QA Period
References and Resources

- Minnesota State Instructor’s Guide to Course Design and Facilitation
- ASCD Inservice: The Who, What, Why of Email Communication
- Communication in Distance Learning Courses by Kristen Battes
- Cornell University Guide to Announcements and Email in Online Courses
- Inside Higher Ed: So You Want to Temporarily Teach Online?
- Humanizing Online Teaching and Learning by Whitney Kilgore
Thank you!