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 (Read why midnight is confusing or http://www.logicnest.com/archives/106).
  - Consider making your activities due during the week, when you may be more available to answer student questions.
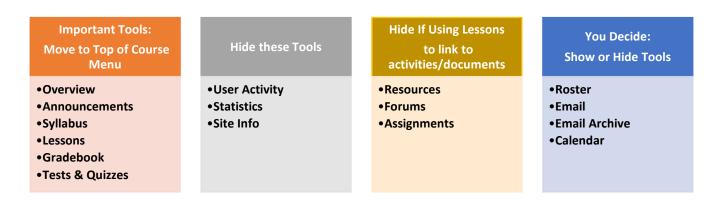
Multimedia tips

- 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: Move to Top of Course Menu	Hide these Tools	Hide If Using Lessons to link to activities/documents	You Decide: Show or Hide Tools
•Overview •Announcements •Syllabus •Lessons •Gradebook •Tests & Quizzes	•User Activity •Statistics •Site Info	•Resources •Forums •Assignments	•Roster •Email •Email Archive •Calendar

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.