

Best Practices for Effective Course Design

Below are recommendations for designing a student-friendly course.

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 \(pdf\)](#) 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.

Streamline your course menu

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 These Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview• Announcements• Syllabus• Lessons• Gradebook• Tests & Quizzes• Meetings (if using it)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site Info• Warpwire (if using it)• Statistics – “locked” and hidden by default	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assignments• Discussions• Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roster• Email• Email Archive• Calendar

- Move important course tools to the top of the course menu. We recommend putting these tools near the top:
 - *Overview, Announcements, Syllabus, Lessons, Gradebook, Test & Quizzes, and Meetings (if you're using it).*

- Hide tools that students don't need to see, such as *Site Info* and *Warpwire* (if you're using it). Statistics is "locked" and hidden by default.
 - To hide tools:
 - Go to Site Info > Tool Order
 - Click the tool's gear icon and select "Make Tool Invisible to Students"
 - Click Save
- If you use Lessons to link to content and activities (recommended), you can hide *Assignments*, *Discussions*, and *Resources*.
- It's up to you if you want to show or hide these tools: *Roster*, *Email*, *Email Archive* and *Calendar*.

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 are a useful learning aid for all students, not just for the hearing impaired.

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.