I didn’t know how to do things in Blackboard. After reading this guide, I realized I was really, really smart!

-I. M. Smart
Fictitious VCU Student
Introduction

Blackboard (Bb) is VCU’s online learning and content management system which allows you to connect to your classes and your information from any computer connected to the Internet. The Learning Management System (LMS) is VCU’s standard for professors to post class information, assignments and resources online. The Content Management System (CMS) gives you a central location to store your important school files online, eliminating the need for you to carry around disks and allowing you to work on files from any computer connected to the Internet. This guide will help you get started using both parts of Bb.

Chapter 1—The Learning Management System

Many of your professors will use the Learning Management System (LMS) to distribute course information, hold on-line discussions, pass out additional readings or resources, hold tests and quizzes, and post assignments and grades. Different professors will use different resources in Blackboard—in some courses you may use it a lot, in some you may use it just to get your syllabus and course schedule, and some professors won’t use it at all. The LMS has been used at VCU for years, the Content Management System has been part of the system for less time, so many people will mean the LMS when they say “Blackboard.”

First Things First: Logging On

If you go to the main LMS welcome page (http://blackboard.vcu.edu), you will see a welcome screen that looks like this:

There are a number of important announcements on this page:

- you can find help;
- you can learn if there are any system-wide announcements;
- you can plan ahead for system maintenance.

To get started using LMS, click the Login icon at the top of this page.

Power User Tip: you can also use the myVCU portal (http://my.vcu.edu) to access Blackboard. Logging on to myVCU will automatically log you into Blackboard. Using myVCU will allow you to access other VCU services, such as MailAnywhere, eServices, and the VCU Library, all from one place!
Once you click on the login icon, you’ll come to this screen.

Enter your eID (that’s the part of your VCU email address before the @) and your password (the same one you use for your email) and click on Login.

If you don’t know your eID, visit www.ts.vcu.edu/faq/accounts or call the Help Desk at (804) 828-2227.

Okay, I’m In…Now What?

Initially, LMS will display a welcome screen.

Grades

If your professors use Blackboard to track grades, you can find your grades here.

E-mailing from the LMS

Miss class last week? You can email your classmates to ask for class notes by using the E-mail function.

Announcements

Announcements from all your classes will show up here. That’s why it’s a good idea to check this page every day.

Courses

Classes you’re enrolled in will show up on this screen. Click the class title to enter the class space.

Student Organizations

If you participate in any student organizations that use Bb for communication, they will appear here. If you need more information about organizations, check out www.ts.vcu.edu/policies/Bb_studorg_policy.html.

You can help yourself stay organized by using the calendar. Manage schoolwork by assigning yourself start dates, keep track of meetings & parties, and make sure you remember to send your mom a birthday card. Simply click on more and add items to the calendar.

Power User Tip: There are a lot of powerful features in Blackboard; many more than we can possibly show you in this guide. If you want to know more, you can always use the HELP icon at the top of every page (see circle in the graphic above) to learn more.
Wait! Where’s Underwater Basketweaving 102?

If you’re enrolled in a course and you don’t see it listed, there are many possibilities:

- Your professor is not using Bb for that particular course. Not all classes use Bb; it’s up to the professor.

- If you just enrolled today or yesterday, you won’t show up yet. It can take 24-48 hours before the computers all talk to one another and get you on the LMS course database.

- The professor has not made the class available to the students yet. Some professors wait until after the first class to make the LMS class available.

- You’re not “officially” enrolled in the class. Did you have to get an override to get into the class? Did you turn it in yet? Log onto eServices (iserver.adm.vcu.edu/students) and make sure the class shows up on your Class Schedule.

If you think a class should be on your list and it’s not, check with the professor first. If your professor thinks you should be on it too, call the Help Desk at (804) 828-2227 or email help@vcu.edu for assistance.

There’s My Class: Beginning Blackboard 101!

Now that you have your list of classes, you can get to work!

Use the navigation buttons to find information in your class. Do note that navigation buttons might not necessarily be the same for every class. The professors can rename the buttons and even change the way they look. Also, some professors put different things under different buttons, so you may have to poke around a bit to find different things.

That’s okay—you won’t break anything!

Most professors will post basic contact information so you’ll know how to get in touch with them. LMS provides a template for this, so this information should look fairly similar for every class. Click on the professor’s email address to send the professor an email from LMS.
Help! I Have An Assignment and Have to Upload a Paper!

Your instructor will usually tell you where to find your assignments. If not, ask! An assignment that you have to upload will have an assignment icon:

The assignment will usually be spelled out for you on this screen, and you will usually complete your assignment in another program, such as MS Word. Once you’ve completed your assignment, click on View/Complete Assignment.

You will need to upload your paper using this screen. If you need to, you can include a note to your instructor in the Comments box, and then click on the Browse button to find your paper. Highlight the file you want, then click on Open. Once you’re ready to submit your assignment, click on Submit and you’re done! (Note that Save will only save it on your computer; it will not send it.)

Blackboard will only let you submit an assignment ONCE, so make sure you’ve completed your assignment before you upload it. You’ll get a confirmation that you’ve successfully uploaded your assignment.

There’s a Lot More You Can Do in the LMS!

There’s a lot more you can do in the LMS. That’s the basics of using the LMS. If you are supposed to do something (like chat) on Blackboard, and you can’t figure out how to use help in Bb, don’t hesitate to call the Help Desk at (804) 828-2227 and ask! We’re here to help you!

Power User Tip: The Course Map will show you everything in the course. The little + sign next to an item means there are more items in that section. Click on the + to display more content.
Chapter 2—The Content Management System

The Content Management System (CMS) allows you to store your files securely online. That means you'll be able to access that English paper from anywhere you are on the Internet. So you can work on it at your home computer, save it to the CMS, and then work on it at a library computer, on your mom's computer, or on a friend's computer—any computer connected to the Internet! You can also share it with people you specify, which makes working on group projects a breeze. Organizing your files works just like organizing files on your computer's hard drive, and uploading files is very simple.

No More Carrying Around Disks! Now You Can Store Files Online...

As long as you're logged on to Blackboard (see previous chapter for instructions), you access the CMS by clicking on the Content System tab on Blackboard. You'll get a screen that looks like this. You can organize your files just like you would if they were on your computer's hard drive, using folders. For instance, if you wanted to have a folder for each class you were in, you could simply create a folder for each class. **Step 1:** Click on Folder and you'll get this screen. Type the name of your folder. This screen will also allow you to control your storage options, but in most cases you'll find that the default settings are probably what you want. Once you've named your folder, click on Submit to save it.

**Step 2:** To put your files in the folder, double click on the name of the folder to bring up the folder contents. You can see where you are, and navigate the CMS system by using the Location notation. To upload your files, click on Item. That will bring up the Add Item page.
Here you can find your file on your local computer. You do this just like you’d open up a file on your computer in one of your programs. **Step 3**: Click on **Browse** and you’ll bring up a file menu. Find the file you want to upload, highlight the file, and click on **Open** (no, open doesn’t make sense, but there you go). The name of your file will appear in the file box in front of the **Browse** button.

**Step 4**: Click on **Submit** to upload your files to the CMS. That’s it! If you’re at another computer and want to open the files, simply navigate back to this spot the same way: Log on to Blackboard, click on **Content System**, and you’ll see a menu of your folders. Click on the folder, click on a file, and you’ll open your file.

**Okay, I’ve Worked on My Files At The Computer Lab. Now What?**

If you work on your files somewhere other than your home computer, Choose **Save As** from the **File Menu** to save those files to a temporary location (like the “desktop”). Then when you’re all done, upload the files again to the CMS, just like you did the first time. Make sure you check the box that says “**Overwrite if a file with the same name exists**” in order to save your new file onto the CMS. Make sure you delete the file from the desktop if you don’t want others to see it.

**My Lab Partner and I Are Working Together. How Do We Share Files?**

Before you can share files with someone, you need to set sharing permissions. First, find the file you want to share and click on the **Share File** icon. Then you’ll get a window that shows the permissions set for you for this file (since it’s your file, you can do everything to the file). Click on **Add Users** to share this file with other people.
If you know the eID of the person you want to share with, you can put that in the Username box and click on Submit. Otherwise, just click on Browse.

You'll get this window. Click on Modify.

Now decide what you want the person to be able to do. We suggest read and write for most students. Then click on Submit.

**How Does My Lab Partner Get The File?**

You must email a link to the person with whom you’ve shared your file. Make sure you check the file you want to send, and that Email Items shows up in the window, and click on Go.

You’ll get a familiar window that allows you to email a link to someone else at VCU. You can add your own message, and click on Submit. That person simply needs to be logged onto Blackboard and click on the link to open the file. That’s it!