Think of your Moodle course page as the homepage of a website. An effective homepage:

- introduces the subject matter,
- presents clear navigation,
- is easy to visually scan, and
- leads to more in-depth content.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to keep all of our online course offerings consistent and accessible to the Loyola community. When we talk about consistency in an online environment, we are considering not only a look and feel that is recognized as Loyola, but equally important, a site that is easy for students to navigate and understand. We want to present materials that keep our students engaged—from the top of the course page to the bottom.

The best practices outlined here provide a way to visually reinforce the strong name of Loyola University Maryland as an institution of high academic standards.

In short, these graphic standards are less about making things look pretty, and more about presenting tools to help: maintain consistency throughout Loyola’s online course offerings, ease the delivery of information to students, increase student use of online course materials and tools, and increase understanding of the materials that are presented.
BEST PRACTICES

1. Always Give an Introduction
2. Label your Content
3. Use Short, Relevant Titles
4. Be Consistent
5. Use Images, Sparingly
Header Block

Our Moodle 2 course template is more streamlined than the earlier version. It has several tools to help you effectively deliver your course content. The default setting opens your course with only the alpha-numeric course title at the top of the page. Give your students more...

**ALWAYS GIVE AN INTRODUCTION**

We strongly recommend that you place the following introductory content in the header block of the main content area:

1. Course name and description/introduction,
2. Your name, contact information, in-person or virtual office hours,
3. You can also include your course syllabus and class forum in this block.

**Beyond that, keep your header block uncluttered.**

**Header Image** Placing a relevant header banner image at the top of the page can give students visual cues as to subject matter, tone, and even hints about your personal style.

Use a graphic that is wider than it is tall; about 700 pixels (px) X 200px. Center the image and size it at 75% of the full window width. This size option means that the image size will stretch or shrink in different sized browser windows.

**HOW - TO : Place & Center your Header Image**

Choose the Insert/Edit Image > Find or Upload an Image > once located, choose Upload This File

Under the General Tab, write a brief image description *see accessibility standards*

Under the Appearance Tab: Set Alignment to “Middle”, Vertical Space and Horizontal Space to “10” > select Insert

In the Edit Summary Screen > Choose the HTML tab and locate the WIDTH and HEIGHT attributes of this image

Set the *Width to “65%” and delete the entire Height attribute* > select Update

Select all visible content (Ctrl + A or Command +A) and center the content > select Save Changes to view the results.
COURSE LAYOUT: A centered header image sized at 75% will fit the header block proportionally on different devices.

This editable header image template is available for your use from the Faculty Technology Center. You can update the text and image within the border. To get the template or have one created for your course, contact schristian@loyola.edu or dial extension: 2978.
Content Blocks

**Topic or Weekly Layout** It’s a good rule to keep the content of each block to a minimum. Students should not be forced to scroll down the page to view all resources and assignments in a section.

When using your Moodle course simply as a repository for reference materials, resources, or lists, spell it out for your students. Title the TOPIC accordingly or include one or two introductory sentences at the top of each WEEKLY block.

**LABEL YOUR CONTENT**

Use either the Topic title to name each section or include a brief introduction at the head of each content block.

**The Label Resource:**

It’s a good practice to group resources and activities either chronologically or by type. Use a label when you have three or more of the same activity or resource type.

**Naming Activities and Resources:**

When naming these links keep their titles short—under 50—characters and use the description box to elaborate on the topic or subject.

**Presentations:**

Do not embed video presentations, slideshows, or streaming media directly on the homepage of your course.

**HOW-TO: Add an Activity or Resource**

Turn Editing On > locate the block where you want to add content
Select + Add an activity or resource > and choose the appropriate item > Page
Name this Resource in 50 or fewer characters > Add a brief Description
Add your content > Type, use Paste from Word, or Paste from Plain Text
Select > Save and Return to Course

**CHALLENGE:**

Analytics show that nearly 80% of the content that internet users notice (and interact with) is situated closer to the top of their browser window and “above the fold”.

**SOLUTION:**

Keep students from having to scroll to see everything that’s inside of a single content block:

- Do not embed media on your homepage
- Use + Add and Activity or Resource to create a Page where the content can be embedded, or create a link to the original material URL
- You can also embed video media to your course blog, and allow students comment and respond to the content there
Embedded presentation previews displace any other content in the block (assignments, reference materials, blogs, etc.) and force students to scroll to see all content below the preview. Often these vary in size and give your homepage an awkward look. In the previous example, previews in the content area have displaced three resources, three assignments, and an assessment.

BE CONSISTENT

Typography:
Our current version of Moodle offers several options for type styles in your course content. You can choose from six different heading and paragraph styles.

To keep the focus on your content, rather than on the different sizes, weights, and colors of your text, stick to three type styles on your homepage:

1. The content block heading is one,
2. Introductory text is another
3. Resource/activity text is a third

When you add an activity—like a page—where you’re entering content, you have the option to experiment with the typography style options that are available.

Too many colors and type weights create confusion—not emphasis.

The goal of introducing additional colors, sizes and weights of text is to emphasize certain information. However, too many colors, weights, and sizes on a page increase the cognitive load on a student. They end up taking more time to decipher the different elements on the page, rather than absorb your content. *This course page shows seven different text styles.
Define the Style of your Subpages:

Use the Text Editor to style your page content. Because of our existing Moodle template, pages are already stylistically linked to the course homepage. So you won't need to change much.

This instructor chose to make **Heading 1** (this is the name for a main heading) underlined and bolded. Another style choice here was the size and placement of a banner image—at the top and centered.

When making stylistic choices—such as these—remember to maintain consistency in laying out all of your subpages.

*Note the inclusion of a video preview on the page. Subpages or links are the appropriate locations for embedding any streaming media or presentations, rather than the main page.*
COURSE LAYOUT

Color:
Our template includes five colors in the color palette. It’s ill-advised to introduce more colors, but if you choose to do so, stick with a single additional color for emphasis—not two or three.

USE IMAGES, SPARINGLY

Square images - Use images consistently. Maintain equal image sizes across all content blocks that fall under the header. Use small images placed to the left or right of your introductory text. Allow appropriate padding (8 to 10px) around the image. Don’t exceed 200px in width.

Horizontal images - Using a header image—in lieu of introductory text—is another option. Center a wide, but shallow graphic at the top of the page and size it like your course header to allow for different screen/device sizes. In this example, the image “Required Texts” is constrained to 95% of the window width. It will grow or shrink based on the screen size.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Get help with layout and Moodle 2 tools:

- From the Loyola Faculty Technology Center
  Email: ots@loyola.edu | Phone: X. 5555
- Video: Moodle 2.3 Tutorials on YouTube
- Tutorials and Guides: Loyola Moodle Info Page

*Accessibility and online images* - Loyola University Maryland is committed to creating courses that are as accessible as possible to all students. Our goal is for students with disabilities to perceive, understand, navigate, interact, and contribute to their online courses.

When adding graphics to Moodle, provide a meaningful description of images or illustrations used in your content. For example, explain the overall purpose of including a map in context. Be sure that you *always* fill in the “Description” field when uploading images. Screen readers read this text.

Accessibility and hyperlinks - Provide meaningful names for links, such as “Declaration of Independence”, instead of “Click Here”. Screen readers also read this text.

** Web Analytics research performed by Simone Christian, Instructional Media Developer, from 2009-2013 on multiple websites using Google Analytics.