

## QuickSheet: Collecting assignments electronically

Collecting assignments electronically has a number of benefits. The instructor has a complete record of the students' work throughout the semester; there is no paper to lose or tear; and assignments have an electronic timestamp on them indicating exactly when they were turned in. You may even want to archive an entire semester of students' work at the end, or grade papers online and return them electronically as well.

There are a number of ways to collect assignments electronically from your students at Hofstra University. As always, members of Faculty Computing Services are available to consult with you individually if it's not clear which method would be best for you. But this sheet lists the most popular options.

### Email

If you have a class with 20 students or fewer, probably the easiest way to collect documents electronically is by email. If you use this method for graded assignments, you can be sure students understand how to send you their assignments – usually as attachments – by devoting part of one class session to reviewing the way to do this. If you'd prefer, an FCS staffer can visit your class and demonstrate this to students just to be sure there is no confusion.

A few recommendations if you will be collecting assignments via email:

- Students often like to receive notification that their assignment has been received. A quick boilerplate answer can be kept on file and sent to each student as an acknowledgement without you having to type each response individually. If students label their work properly, you can even use the Rules feature of Groupwise to send an acknowledgement automatically (instructing Groupwise to send an automatic acknowledgement to every message that arrives with the subject line "Essay 3", for instance).
- If you require students to use their Hofstra Pride account, you will not have to deal with students' complaints that their Yahoo account was full, etc. The Help Desk is available 24 hours a day to help students with their Hofstra accounts; it is reasonable to expect students to learn how to use this account. This responsibility can be indicated in the syllabus.
- You may also want to indicate in the syllabus what students' reasonable expectations may be regarding email. Just because it's there 24 hours a day doesn't mean you'll be responding 24 hours a day. Just as you list your office hours, you may want to indicate what is a reasonable timeframe for your response to email and remind students not to leave questions or problems till the last minute.

# Collecting Assignments Electronically

## Blackboard discussion board

Some faculty prefer to collect assignments as attachments to the discussion board in Blackboard. This has the advantage that the assignments do not clutter up faculty's email accounts, and can remain there throughout the semester. Please be aware that if you use this method, students will be able to see each others' work. This can be a plus in classes where you expect students to collaborate, or a minus in other classes.

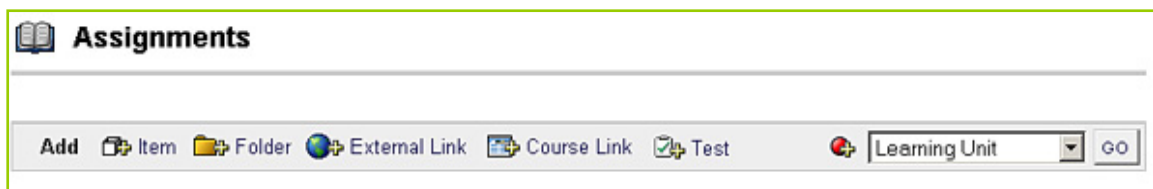
As with email, if you'd like, an FCS staffer can visit your class and demonstrate to your students exactly how to submit their assignments as attachments in a Blackboard discussion board, eliminating any confusion on their parts as to how to do this.

## Blackboard Assignments tool

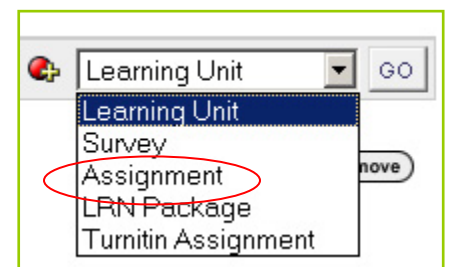
The Assignment tool within Blackboard allows you to collect assignments through Blackboard, which many students are already familiar with. It has some advantages over simply having students post their assignments as attachments to a discussion board message. If you use the Assignment tool, students will not be able to see each others' work. Also, you can download assignments all together in an archive, a single zipped file. This is useful if you have a large class. And, if you wish to take advantage of it, the Assignment tool creates an associated grade column in Blackboard's Gradebook, which can help you keep track of grades or even return grades to the students.

1. To use the Assignments tool to collect assignments, first the assignment must be created in Blackboard. **Click on the Control Panel** on the left in your Blackboard course.
2. **Choose the Content Area** in which you want the assignment to appear. (Course Documents and Assignments are two of the default content areas.)

The same gray "Add" bar appears across the top of every content area. In the Assignments content area it would look like this:



3. **Click on the drop down list** at the right and **choose Assignment.**
4. **Click Go.**
5. Fill in the blanks to **give the Assignment a name.** If you wish you may also fill in points, instructions, and dates of availability.
6. Then **click Submit.**



In the content area where you created the Assignment, the students will see the Assignment's name, your instructions, and a link that says "View/Complete Assignment: Assignment's Name".

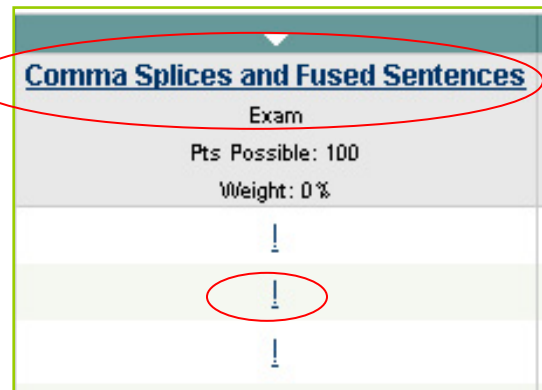
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To turn in their assignment, they will click on that link, and they will see the following screen (in this example, the Assignment's name is Essay #3):

As you can see, they have the opportunity here to enter a comment, then they will need to browse to their file and attach it. They have the chance to save this assignment, if they would like to come back and continue working on it later, or submitting it.

FCS staff are available to demonstrate this to your students.

When you create the Assignment, you automatically create a column in the Gradebook, which you will find in the Course Control Panel. As the students submit their work, you will see an exclamation point listed in the Gradebook for each student's file. The exclamation point is a link to the student's file; you can **click that link to view and grade the assignment**. Or, for more instructor's options, you can click the Assignment Name at the top of the column which is also a link.



- ▶ **Item Grade List**  
View and modify users' grades
- ▶ **Item Detail**  
View detailed statistics for this item
- ▶ **Item Information**  
Modify the properties of this item
- ▶ **Item Download**  
Download files submitted by students for this item
- ▶ **Item File Clean Up**  
Delete files submitted by students for this item

Clicking on the Assignment Name at the top of the column in the gradebook takes you to the menu shown at the left, giving you many options as to what to do with the Assignment. The **Item Download** command allows you to **download all of the files that have been submitted as a single Zip file**.

# Collecting Assignments Electronically

## Drop folder on a shared network drive

If assignments are too large to be handled conveniently via email or Blackboard, or consist of many parts, you may want to collect them in a drop folder on a network drive. For this, you need simply to contact FCS and indicate to us your name, the name of the class, and the students whom you want to give access to the folder. We will create the folder on a shared network drive according to your instructions.

If you prefer, we can create such a folder with write-only access for the students. Write-only access means students can place their work in the folder, but they cannot delete it, or even read the contents of it. This prevents students from seeing or deleting each others' work, accidentally or maliciously.

Students would be able to access this drive anywhere on campus or, through the My Hofstra portal on the web, anywhere in the world. However, managing files through the myfiles tool in the portal will require some explanation. If you require students to turn in their assignments this way, FCS recommends that we provide an in-class demonstration and/or written instructions they can use to eliminate any confusion about how to upload files to the class' shared drive space.