
Introduction to Blackboard Vista

Section 1

An Introduction to Blackboard Vista and the Internet

Introduction

These notes have been prepared for those of you with little or no experience with learning online.

We have provided a brief introduction to Blackboard Vista and why we have chosen this particular software. The graphic interface you will see online is explained. We remind you how to log on and what to do once you enter the Blackboard Vista environment.

Some tips for communicating online have also been listed, as well as some background on the Internet and viruses.

What is Blackboard Vista?



Blackboard Vista is a Web based set of course tools designed to create an online teaching and learning environment. It can be accessed using any PC compatible or Macintosh computer. Blackboard Vista stores all the information on users and courses on a central server (computer). Students, Instructors and Administrators can access that server from anywhere on the World Wide Web using a standard Web browser such as Netscape Communicator or Microsoft Internet Explorer. Internet Explorer is the preferred browser as it performs much more reliably than Netscape. Specific browser versions that work with Blackboard Vista are found at the Blackboard website:

http://www.webct.com/tuneup/viewpage?name=tuneup_browser_tuneup_information#browsers


http://cr1a-app.elearning.unsw.edu.au - WebCT Browser Checker - Microsoft Internet Expl... WebCT Vista® Version: 3.0.2.29

[Close this window](#)


Browser Check Results

This browser check will ensure your browser is configured so the complete functionality of this application is available to you. For each area checked, mandatory or recommended changes are indicated.

For more information, see the [Browser Tune-up Page](#).


 **Browser Check**

This browser is validated for use with WebCT Vista.
It appears that you are using **Microsoft® Internet Explorer 6.0** browser.

 **Cookies Check**


Cookies are enabled

Vista uses a cookie to keep track of your current session. You must have cookies enabled so we can maintain your current state as you navigate through the application.

 **Javascript Check**


Javascript is enabled

Almost every part of Vista relies on Javascript for the ability to generate interactive web pages. You must have Javascript enabled to do anything in Vista.

 **Pop-up Window Check**

Pop-up Windows are enabled

Vista takes advantage of pop-up windows as a powerful way to deliver content in an organized fashion. You must have pop-up windows enabled or certain parts of the product may not function properly.

 **Java™ Check**

Java is enabled

Vista uses Java to provide rich user-interfaces and to enable a better user experience. Without Java, certain tools in Vista will not function correctly.

Other Resources

You may also want to review the other browser resources available on www.webct.com

- [Step-by-step instructions to properly configure your browser](#)
- [List of supported browsers](#)
- [Troubleshooting browser problems](#)
- [Check your system for plug-ins that may be required to view course content](#)

Done Internet

You can use Vista to check your browser to see if it is compliant by clicking on the “Check Browser” text on either the “Login” or “My eLearning” pages. You should then see the following screen. Follow the embedded instructions if you don’t.

Compliant Web browsers can be downloaded for free directly from the relevant companies’ Web sites (as it can take a long time via a modem we recommend this be done between 1am and 6am):

Mozilla Firefox

<http://www.mozilla.com/>

Microsoft Internet Explorer

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/default.msp>

If you have any problems obtaining the versions of browser you need, please contact myself, Karsten Sommer on:

E-mail: k.sommer@unsw.edu.au

Telephone (business hours): +61 (2) 9385 3200

Why have we chosen Blackboard Vista?

Blackboard Vista is one of many Web based classroom management tools designed to facilitate learning online by replicating the dynamics of a classroom. Its strength lies in the level of interaction it supports, allowing instructors and students to interact in a virtual classroom in much the same way as they might in any classroom.

We have chosen to use this particular software as it provides:

- ease of use - the graphic interface is highly intuitive
- reliability, it is now very widely used throughout the world and offers technical support and regular updates
- a number of different tools and features allowing you to access text, and Web pages
- an interactive bulletin board where topics are posted for both formal and informal discussions
- ease of access, all you need is a Web browser - although this needs to be the right version as already stated above to correctly activate the navigation controls.

Logging On

To begin a Blackboard Vista session, you must first log on. This is done by opening your Web browser (Netscape Communicator or Internet Explorer) and entering the Blackboard Vista Web Address:

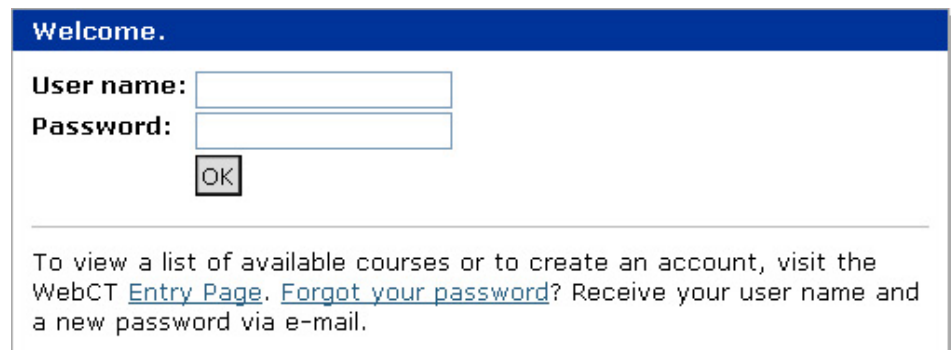
<http://vista.elearning.unsw.edu.au/>

It is probably a good idea at this point to make the Blackboard Vista Web address a bookmark (Netscape) or favourite (Internet Explorer). When you have typed in the Web address, you will see a screen with "UNSW" in blue text - click on this. Then click on the "Log-In" button. When you click on this you will be prompted for your Blackboard Vista User name and Password.

Your Blackboard Vista User name is: z(+ your student ID number) (i.e. z9790142)

Your Blackboard Vista Password is: your UNIPASS

It is also case sensitive so make sure *Caps Lock* isn't turned on.



Welcome.

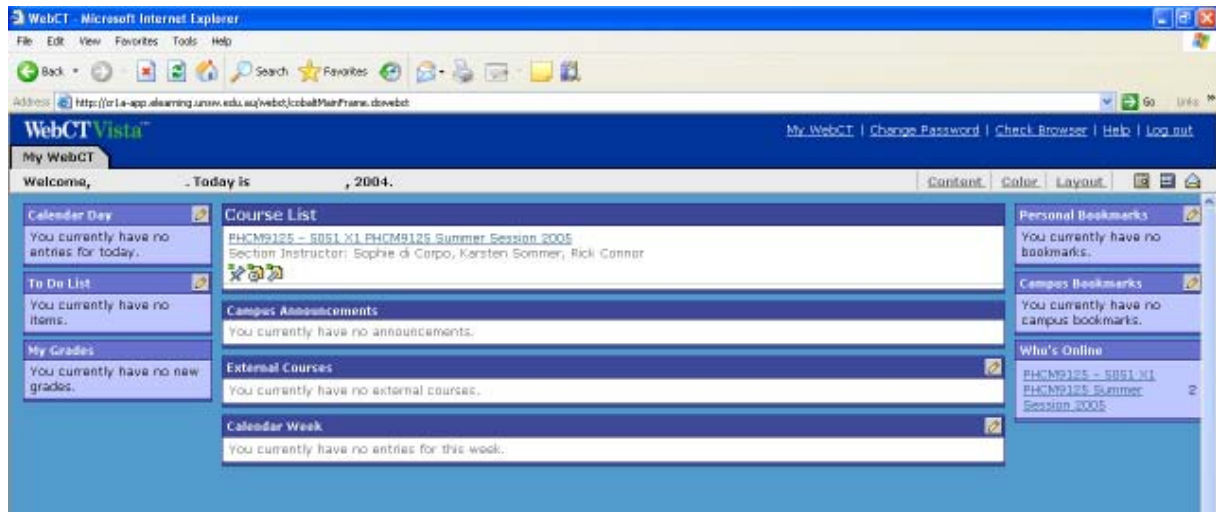
User name:

Password:

To view a list of available courses or to create an account, visit the WebCT [Entry Page](#). [Forgot your password?](#) Receive your user name and a new password via e-mail.

Using Blackboard Vista

Once you've logged on successfully, you will see the "My eLearning" page containing a list of Blackboard Vista courses that you are enrolled in.



To enter the course, click on the course title for example "PHCM9012 - 2007S1_PHCM9012". You will then see the course Home Page. This Home Page, with the Blackboard Vista banner and the title of your course, shows a number of icons which take you to the different parts of the course. The Home Page is the starting point for access to the course and you should return to it any time you feel disorientated - you can do this by clicking either on the 'Home Page' icon under the Course Title in the top left hand corner of your screen or using the 'Home Page' link on the "Bread Crumbs" across the top of your screen, just under the title of your course.

One important point to remember once you are in the Blackboard Vista environment is to always use the navigation buttons within Blackboard Vista, rather than the back button of your browser.

On the Home Page you have the following icons (and possibly some others):



Start
Here



Course
Resources



Submit
Assignments



Online
Evaluation

You can click on any of these icons to navigate through the course, although we suggest you begin with the Start Here.



Start
Here

Start Here

Everything you need to know before you begin is included here. It also includes all you have to do once you have started, with details of each of the Etivites and discussion areas.

A warning: when in the discussion area, you cannot delete messages once you have sent them. We recommend you use the 'Preview' button to check your messages before you post them.



Course
Resources

Resources

Resources included here are the Library Subject Guide for Course Planning, a self-directed Information Skills Tutorial, Tips for Working in a Group and Blackboard's Information on Using Vista.



CATEI Evaluation

This form provides you with the mechanism to give us feedback on the online component of the course. As this is the first course to be run using Blackboard Vista, we are particularly interested in your experiences.

Blackboard Vista Problems

If you have any technical support questions (i.e. adding a discussion contribution or submitting an assignment) please feel free to contact myself and remember to include the following:

- **your name & email address**
- **Blackboard Vista username & password**

You can contact me, Karsten Sommer on:

E-mail: k.sommer@unsw.edu.au

Telephone (business hours): +61 (2) 9385 3200

Communicating Online

The interactivity of WebCT makes it a great tool for learners. You have the chance to discuss issues with others, ask questions and receive feedback on your ideas. These are features you will be making much use of in this course, through the structured Activities.

Most, if not all your online interactions will be asynchronous – that is the interaction does not take place instantaneously as in a face-to-face conversation.

Communicating with others via computers is a different sort of experience to talking in person or over the phone. As you cannot hear or see the other person (unless you have the right software) you cannot use tone of voice or body language to help convey your meaning.

A special set of conventions has evolved to ensure your computer-based interaction runs smoothly.

Before you start interacting with your fellow students, read the general advice below on what is referred to as 'Netiquette' and communicating online.

1. Keep it informal but use normal capitalisation and blank spaces to make your message inviting to read.
2. Don't rely on the ability of your readers to be able to know when you are serious, using sarcasm or being satirical – remember you cannot rely on tone of voice etc. The use of the following letter icons can help get your message across:

:) happy, joke

:(sad

;) winking, joke

3. Contribute as often as you like – there is no restriction on the number of responses and in some cases you will need to contribute a minimum number of times to complete your assessment.

4. Make sure you do contribute especially if your a member of a group – even if it is not part of your assessment as it is of benefit

to yourself and others.

5. Try to log in regularly to check for new postings so you do not feel overloaded by the number of new messages.

Further reading viewable at:

<http://www.learnthenet.com/english/html/09netiq.htm>

Other points to note when sending a message online are:

1. Before you send an e-mail message, you should ask yourself, "Would I say this to the person's face?".
2. Wait until you are calm before responding to an offensive message. Remember once you send an e-mail message, you are committed to it.
3. Read your message twice before you send it and check to make sure you haven't written anything that might be misinterpreted.
4. Don't use abusive or obscene language.
5. Don't assume every outrageous message is a "flame".
6. Avoid flaming in public forums. If you disagree, respond to the originator of a message directly. Others often do not appreciate or want to participate in your debate.
7. Indicate to the recipient that you are knowingly blowing off steam when you flame by constructing your message as follows: Flame on, message text Flame off.

Also remember the whole point of communicating and using other web resources is to become an active rather than a passive learner. Use its power to help you solve problems, see issues from multiple perspectives, search out answers and formulate the right question.

Take the opportunity to collaborate with your fellow course participants through the Discussion areas.

What is the internet?

The internet can be described as a vast digital highway system that links millions of computers connected to thousands of networks around the world. Its colourful past is rooted in the cold war era of the late 1960s to early 1970s. Initially developed through funding by the U.S. government, the predecessor of the Internet was specifically designed to sustain communications between government sites in the event that part of the network was destroyed by nuclear attack.

Over 35 million users in 96 countries currently have access to the Internet 24 hours a day. As more and more people frequent the Internet to communicate and gather information, companies are discovering its many business advantages.

The Internet is a public network, accessible by anyone with a modem and/or a computer with TCP/IP installed. Entry to the Internet is obtained from an Internet Service Provider via a permanent network connection or dial-up link.

Transmission Control Protocol/Internetwork Protocol (TCP/IP) was the communications protocol developed to enable computers of all kinds to share services and communicate directly, as if part of one seamless computer network. This global "network of networks" consists of thousands of university, government and corporate networks connected through high-speed private and public networks, and incorporates links from popular online services such as America Online*, CompuServe* and Prodigy*.

Searching the internet

There are three sorts of tools that help you find what you want on the World Wide Web.

The most powerful and also the most time consuming tools are the search engines. There are five or six major search engines with different strengths and weaknesses. These tools use a software “robot” to scan pages on the Web. They collect some or all of the text on a page and then pour it into a huge database.

Examples

Alta Vista	http://www.altavista.com/
HotBot	http://www.hotbot.com
Google	http://www.google.com/

This database is then made available through a Web page interface. Most search engines present the user with an empty field area and a “search” button. Simply type a word or phrase into the field and click on the search button. The search engine will then return a list of URLs for pages that contain the word or phrase that was entered. Obviously with any search you need to make it wide enough to find the material but not so wide that it is hard to find the useful references amongst the useless ones. Searches can be refined by using Boolean operators (discussed below) or by restricting the search in other ways.

Boolean commands let you combine words or phrases in particular combinations to reduce your search criteria. So, for example you can search for all web site that mention Frank Sinatra and don't mention the Mafia i.e. “Frank Sinatra” - Mafia.

Then there are the subject trees, the true indexes of the Web. These are created in much the same way as a traditional library index. People look at Web pages and classify them by their content. They are placed in subject trees which are then indexed. Again, a web-based interface allows people to search these trees to find the links to the relevant pages of the subject they are researching.

Example:

Yahoo	http://www.yahoo.com
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Viruses and how to avoid them

Everyone has heard about computer viruses, but there is a lot of misinformation out there. They are not going to go away, but with a little care you can avoid having your computer infected, and even if you do, it is not the end of the world. In this tutorial we will explain how you can avoid viruses and if you do get one, what you can do about it.

A computer virus is a program that hides within other software.

A virus will usually attempt to spread itself as widely as possible and then do something you would rather it didn't. You need to take some simple precautions to void viruses, but even if they do attack your computer, it is often possible to rectify the damage.

How Do Viruses Work?

The most important thing to know about viruses is that they need to access your computer's microprocessor to do anything at all. There is no such thing as a virus that lives in a data file. Data files never get access to the parts of your microprocessor that control anything and so cannot do any damage.

Data File and Program Files

There are two sorts of files on your computer. Data files and program files. A program file stores software or a program of some sort. These files are the ones you load to do things on your computer. For example, a word processor is a program. A data file by contrast stores data in the form of text, pictures, or sound. A data file is what a program acts upon. For example, a document file is a data file.

However, you do need to be aware that some data files are not as innocent as they seem because some files contain macros. These macros are actually small programs in their own right. They won't operate outside the program that created them, but they can contain viruses that activate when they are run.

The most common sorts of macros are those for word processors and spreadsheets. because macros have only limited capabilities, these viruses are usually relatively harmless and easy to find and eliminate.

How To Avoid Viruses

So what can you do to avoid infecting your computer with a virus? There is no completely effective way to avoid viruses, except to leave your computer turned off.

Responsible and reputable suppliers of software go to considerable lengths to ensure their programs don't get infected, so using software from these sources is one way to avoid infecting your system. If you only install commercial software that you have personally opened on your computer, then you can be pretty sure you won't get a virus.

You must balance up the risks against the benefits. For example, if your computer is an absolutely key part of your life, then you may decide that the risks associated with downloading software are too great. However, if you use your computer as most people do: for a mixture of ordinary work and entertainment, then you will find that some simple precautions will reduce the risks of virus infection to an acceptable level.

Minimising Risk

There are three things you can do to minimise the risk of your computer catching a virus.

First of all, backup your computer files on a regular bases. You should do this anyway to ensure that you protect your data should your hard disk fail. If you have a recent backup, even if the worst happens, and all your data is wiped from your hard disk, then you can recover it. Your backup will often depend on what you do with your computer. A good guide is that your backup procedures should never cost more than it would to recreate what you might lose.

Secondly, make sure you always get your software from a reputable source. So if you download a new version of Netscape Navigator, make sure you get it from a site recommended or endorsed by Netscape.

Thirdly, use a good anti-virus program. The best ones check for viruses every time you start your PC.

If you do get any software or data files containing macros from a source that you are not sure about, check them with an anti-virus

program before you use them. For example, if someone gives you a disk with software on it, check that disk before putting the software onto your computer.

Here is one final tip. Make sure that you never start your computer with a floppy disk in the disk drive unless you are absolutely sure that the disk is virus free. A particularly nasty sort of virus lives on the boot sector of disks (the boot sector is the part the computer first looks at to start its operations). If you start your computer with a disk in the drive and that disk has a boot sector virus on it, that virus will infect your computer immediately.

One last thing. Make sure you always have a floppy disk & CD-Rom that you can boot your computer from. Keep the floppy in a safe place and set the 'write protect' tab on it. (One 3.5 inch floppies, the write protect tab is the little slider in the top right hand corner. If it is open, the floppy disk drive will not write anything onto the floppy, no matter what happens).

Viruses And The Web

Can you get a virus from the Web? There is no way even the cleverest virus writer could ever write a virus in HTML, so you are perfectly safe in downloading ordinary Web pages. However, when you get to pages that incorporate elements like Java and ActiveX, things are not so clear. Java, JavaScript and ActiveX have all been designed to be virus proof. So far, no one has managed to write a virus that works in any of these languages, although because of their complexity, it is remotely possible that someone could produce a virus in one of them.

Cleaning Up Viruses

If you do get a virus infection you should do the following:

1. Don't panic;
2. Close down your computer;
3. Boot your computer from your clean floppy disk or CD-Rom;
4. Use a reputable anti-virus program to clean up the computer;
5. Test your computer again;

6. Track down the source of the virus and let that person or organisation know they have a virus problem;
7. Restore any lost data from your backups;
8. Don't use any disks or software or files containing macros from that person or organisation until they can convince you they have an effective anti-virus program in place.