

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #15 — Digitizing for Distance Education

Migrating information from paper to electronic form—and being able to access those items in their electronic forms—is a regular concern for both instructor and student in any web-enhanced or web-delivered course.

Finding the Right Tools

- *Office Software.* The first and most obvious method is to use an appropriate piece of software, such as a word processor, to create the material and post or send it. Don't overlook less commonly used features such as drawing tools, equation editors, organization and charting tools, etc.
- *Screen Capture.* A screen capture program allows you to take a quick snap of any image or application on your computer and save that to a file. Free and low-cost programs are available for every platform.
- *Scanner.* A desktop scanner can be used to quickly convert hand-written or hand-drawn notes and diagrams into an electronic image format suitable for viewing across platforms. Adequate desktop scanners are available for less than \$60 online or at discount warehouses.
- *Digital Camera.* Digital cameras are becoming a common household accessory, but their potential for workaday applications is often overlooked. A quick picture of a drawing, graph, or whiteboard notes—just to name a few—can make digital transfer a snap.
- *Digitizing Tablet.* For many applications from math equations to artistic applications, a small digitizing tablet, such as those made by Wacom or Aiptek, together with the application of your choice, can simplify the task of capturing hand-drawn materials. These tablets, available for \$50-\$90 come with applications that allow one to mark-up office applications and PDF documents as well.
- *Mimio and SmartBoard.* If you have access to a Mimio electronic whiteboard or a SmartBoard device located at CRA campuses, these can be used to capture notes, drawings, and screens for redistribution.
- *Fax/Email.* Even venerable fax technology has been affected by new technology. A very useful class of application is the Fax-Email Gateway, such as E-Fax, which accepts fax transmissions and automatically converts them to a digital format ready for reading, markup, or optical character recognition.

Formats and Sizes

Whether sharing or receiving digital files, some preparation and guidelines are necessary to avoid common problems. The most frequently encountered issue is format incompatibility. The recipient must have either the appropriate software or a viewer that can open the file! See this Tip's resource page for more information.

File size is another important consideration. Unlike their streamlined office document counterparts, scans and digital photos can be extremely large, while mechanisms to reduce their size can demand more sophistication than the end-user might possess. This makes transmission time slower, particularly with slower internet connections, and may result in jammed and over-filled mailboxes! In these cases, the Blackboard Digital Drop-Box may be a better alternative.

More Resources

Find more information on digitizing, including links to software and other products, check out the resources page on our website: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/resources/tt/digitize/>

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at:
<http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>