Ancient Languages and the New Blackboard Content Editor

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INTRODUCTION

For instructors who work with ancient languages (such as Coptic, Greek, or Hebrew), we have some good news. Blackboard has made it easier to display those languages in your Blackboard courses. Blackboard 9.1 Service Pack 10 introduced a new (and vastly improved) Content Editor. This editor allows you to work with languages such as ancient Greek and Hebrew with more flexibility than you had in the past.

Here are examples of how you can integrate ancient languages into your Blackboard courses. You can...

- Upload documents (such as Microsoft Word or PDF documents) that contain the ancient language text.
- Create image files that contain ancient words and phrases and then insert them into Blackboard.
- Type the ancient languages directly into your Blackboard pages using the new Content Editor.
- Copy and paste the ancient languages from various sources directly into Blackboard using the new Content Editor.

This document will walk you through the steps using ancient Greek and Hebrew as illustrations. The steps should work with many other ancient languages, however.
1: UPLOAD DOCUMENTS THAT CONTAIN THE ANCIENT TEXT

Uploading documents that contain ancient Greek and Hebrew is the easiest and most straightforward method of integrating these ancient languages into a Blackboard course.

The most common types of documents that instructors upload are Microsoft Word and PDF. Both types of documents can be used to integrate ancient languages into your Blackboard course. In this section, we will look at how to upload these files to a course content area. (You can also upload files into such items as course blogs and discussion forums.)

On a Blackboard content page, click the Build Content tab. A drop-down window provides two options that allow you to insert a file: Item and File.
The *Item* option allows you to add content *and* a file to a Blackboard page. The *File* option allows you to insert files only. Both options allow you to search your computer or your course for the file that you want to insert:

![Browse My Computer and Browse Course buttons]

The *Item* option gives you a second way to insert a file. You can create a link to a file using the new Content Editor. This is a good option if you want to integrate the link to the file within your page content (it is also the method you would use to insert a document into a blog or discussion post):

![Content Editor menu]

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**Tip**

Here’s a quick tip for displaying the full Content Editor menu. When you first see the editor, the menu may be collapsed into just one row:
To expand the menu, click the down arrows (as pictured below):

This will open the full menu:
The large number of options can be quite overwhelming. To learn more about each option, click the help button:

Again, uploading documents is the easiest and most straightforward method to integrate ancient languages into your Blackboard course. However, there may be times when you may want to use another method. For example, you may want to interweave ancient Greek or Hebrew phrases into your content on a course page. Or you may want to display these phrases as part of a test question. The next three chapters will show you possible ways to do this.
Inserting *images of ancient Greek and Hebrew text constitutes* another way to integrate ancient languages into a Blackboard course.

There are three steps:

1. Create a screenshot of the text.
2. Convert the screenshot into an image.
3. Upload and insert the image into your Blackboard course.

This method provides the following benefits:

- Students do not need a special font installed on their system to see the Greek and Hebrew text.
- Images work in any browser compatible with Blackboard. Students can see the images using Firefox, Internet Explorer, or Chrome (or Safari on Macs).
- Images retain the integrity of the formatting. For example, if you create something complex like a Greek verb paradigm, the format will be retained when it is uploaded as an image.

There one downside:

- The method is more time-consuming than other methods.

**Here’s an example of how to insert images of ancient Greek text into exam questions:**

Open up Microsoft Word. The first thing we need to do is disable *Spell Checking* and *Grammar Checking*. We need to do this so that Microsoft Word does not flag the Greek text as misspelled.

Click the File tab and then click *Options*. 
In the *Word Options* window, click *Proofing* (see image below). Uncheck “Check spelling as you type” and “Mark grammar errors as you type.” This will prevent the red squiggly lines (i.e., the indicators of potential spelling and grammatical errors) from displaying under your Greek text. Click the *OK* button.
In Microsoft Word, begin to type using your Greek font. In the example pictured below, the instructor has chosen the *BibleWorks* Greek font.
Now create a screenshot of the word, phrase, or sentence using a product like Microsoft OneNote or SnagIt (not pictured here). Save the image in PNG format.
Be sure to create an organized system for creating your images. I found it helpful to create a separate folder for each multiple choice question. This made finding images after I had saved them a lot easier.

Now log into Blackboard and either create a new test or open a test for editing. Before you can upload your images, you will need to toggle some exam settings. Click the exam’s Question Settings button (see image below).

On the Test Questions Settings page, enable the two options pictured below by clicking the checkboxes. Don’t forget to click the page’s Submit button.

You can now upload images to your test.

For test questions, there are two options for adding images:

1. You can do this using the new Content Editor.
2. You opt to use the file attachment feature.

As an example, let’s integrate images into a multiple choice question. You can add an image to the question portion by using the Insert Image option within the new Content Editor (see image below).
This opens a window that allows you to search for your image and insert it.

For the test answers, you have an additional option. You can use the file attachment feature to integrate an image into each answer. For each answer option, perform the following steps: (1) Click the Choose File button (pictured below) to browse for and select your image and (2) choose the “Display image within the page” option. You can ignore the ‘Web Link’ and ‘Link Name’ options in this scenario.
Tip

When creating the screenshot for a test question. You need to leave as little space above the text as possible:

This is so it lines up evenly with the radio button in a Blackboard exam (see image below).

Also, before submitting a multiple choice question page, check all answers. Did you add an image to each answer AND configure each to display within the page?

Here is an example of how your test questions and answers will appear to students. Each Greek work is a separate image except for the Greek paradigm, which constitutes a single image.
Notice how all the answers display within the page and line up with their respective radio button. Also notice how the image of the paradigm retains the paradigm’s formatting. Sometimes this is difficult to achieve when typing the words directly into Blackboard.

*Note:* Many thanks to Dr. David Hutchison, Assistant Professor for New Testament, Harvard School for Theological Studies, for granting permission to make screenshots of the above test question from one of his New Testament Greek exams.
3: TYPE THE ANCIENT TEXT

You can type ancient language text directly into the Blackboard Content Editor. This method provides the following benefits:

- The method is less time-consuming than creating images (a methodology explored in the previous chapter).
- Some fonts will require students to download and install them on their systems. However, this process is not terribly difficult (especially if you provide instructions). And there is a wide array of ancient fonts freely available on the Internet.

One challenge should be noted:

- In some cases, it may be better to make an image of the text (following the steps in the previous chapter) and upload it to Blackboard. This is especially true if your text is heavily formatted (e.g., a verb paradigm). Experiment to see what works best for you.

The new Blackboard Content Editor has a font menu that can be customized. For example, if instructors at your institution need to integrate Coptic into Blackboard Learn, Coptic font options can be added to the menu. This customization has to be done on the server by the Blackboard Administrator. Directions for customizing the font menu can be found in Appendix One.

At SWBTS, the institution where I administrate Blackboard, an assortment of ancient Greek and Hebrew font options have been added (see image below).
These languages can serve to help illustrate various aspects (and challenges) of working with ancient languages in the Blackboard Learn environment:

**No Need for a Customized Language Pack**

First, some good news: Using the special font options (like the ones pictured above) no longer requires that instructors and students select a separate language pack. In the previous version of Blackboard, you had to choose a separate language pack (that had been customized by the Blackboard Administrator) in order to see any added font options:

You can now use the default language packs that come with Blackboard. So you should be able to navigate to the Content Editor and see any added fonts without having to make any changes in your Blackboard environment.
Installing Fonts

Working with special fonts requires instructors and students to first download and install the fonts onto their computer. The fonts that we added to the Content Editor at SWBTS are freely available on the Internet.

Fonts that Use Standard Keyboards

Some fonts (such as those highlighted below) allow you to type ancient Greek using a standard keyboard. For example, all three options allow you to press the “b” key in order to create the Greek letter beta. This is because the Greek keyboard is mapped over the standard keyboard. Of course, you will need to study the special keyboard diagrams supplied with each font. The diagrams show you what key (or combinations of keys) to press in order to produce a particular Greek letter, accent, or breathing mark.

To insert Greek into your Blackboard content area, just choose a language option and begin typing. In the example below, the instructor has chosen the BibleWorks Greek font option and typed the Greek word logon.
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Technical Note

If you look at the HTML that underlies the above example, you will see the Roman characters ‘λόγον’.
These Roman characters correspond with the keys that were pressed on a standard keyboard. They will be converted by the font software and displayed by the computer as a combination of Greek letters and diacritical marks (as pictured below).

![Greek Vocabulary](image)

**Fonts that Require Special Keyboard Software**

Now let’s look at a different type of font. Some fonts, such as the *SBL* fonts highlighted below, *do not* allow you to generate Greek and Hebrew characters (and diacritical marks) by using the keys on a standard keyboard. If you select the *SBL Greek* option and press the “b” key, then the English letter “b” will appear – not the Greek letter *beta*. Since the fonts do not map to a standard keyboard, you will need to use special keyboard software to generate these fonts.
There are several keyboard applications to choose from. *Logos Bible Software* offers free Greek and Hebrew keyboards at:

http://www.logos.com/support/windows/L3/keyboards

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**Technical Note**

As indicated above, the SBL fonts do not convert Roman characters into Greek (or Hebrew) characters like the BibleWorks and Teknia fonts. Instead, the SBL fonts work in combination with (and display) encoded Greek and Hebrew characters. This means that you need to install and use a special keyboard application (like those provided freely online at the Logos Bible Software website) that generates these encoded characters. For example, a Greek keyboard application generates the encoded ‘Unicode’ characters that all computers understand as Greek – no need for a specialized font to convert a Roman character into something that it isn’t.

If you look at the underlying HTML of the SBL Greek text, you will see Greek language characters (and any accompanying diacritical marks) – not Roman characters as with *BibleWorks* and *Teknia* fonts:

```html
<p><span style="font-family: 'SBL Greek'; font-size: large;">Ἐν ὀρχὴ ἦν δό Λόγος</span></p>
```
A user’s computer will display these characters using the SBL Greek font:

![Greek]

For more information about how this works, see the SBL Fonts FAQ page at:

http://www.sbl-site.org/educational/BiblicalFonts_FAQ.aspx

**Note:** The fact that all computers recognize the encoded characters produced by a Greek or Hebrew keyboard has a nice benefit. If a student does not have the SBL font installed on his or her computer, the computer will recognize the encoded characters and substitute an apposite font. As a result, students do not need to download the SBL font to see the text. *In some cases, though, instructors may still want to make installing the SBL font a requirement so that they and their students are working with (and dialoguing about) a common font within the course.*

**Typing Hebrew**

A note about typing Hebrew is in order. In the image below, the instructor has chosen the BibleWorks Hebrew font. Also, the instructor has clicked the *Direction Right to Left* option, which allows right-to-left typing.
Typing Hebrew in this manner is very cumbersome. To type a Hebrew word, you have to type a character and then reposition the cursor to the left of the character before you resume typing. For Hebrew, it is best to use a special keyboard application like the ones described above. Again, Logos Bible Software offers a free Hebrew keyboard at:

http://www.logos.com/support/windows/L3/keyboards

The keyboard software will facilitate typing Hebrew from right to left in Blackboard.

Using Keyboard Software

Whether you are typing Greek or Hebrew, follow these steps after installing the keyboard:

1. In the Blackboard Content Editor, choose one of the SBL options. *It may be helpful to also increase the font size from the default level of 3 to 5 or 6 to make the font more readable.*
2. After choosing your font option, switch to the appropriate Greek or Hebrew keyboard on your computer and begin typing in the Content Editor. In the image below, the instructor is about to switch to the Greek keyboard.

For those of you that work with Hebrew fonts, remember that the Content Editor lets you type Hebrew from the right margin (if you desire this option):
Finally, if you want to use one of the common fonts instead of a special font, try this option:

1. In the Blackboard Content Editor, choose either one of the common fonts such as *Tahoma* (as in the image below). Choosing a common font option will display the ancient language using the ancient language characters from that font set.

![Common Fonts Selection](image)

2. After choosing your font option in the Content Editor, switch to the appropriate Greek or Hebrew keyboard on your computer and begin typing in the Content Editor.
Why use one of the common fonts? Some of the common fonts support classical Greek (and some even support Hebrew). Tahoma is an example of a font that supports polytonic Greek. These fonts are found on all Windows systems – so students do not need to download and install them. Should you decide not to use a special font (like one of the SBL fonts), you can use the common font option to control which font a user’s computer will use. However, the common fonts are not specially designed to support classical Greek and Hebrew and many find them unappealing.

**NOTE:** Students using Macs will be able to see the Greek font because the underlying code ensures that the Greek will be displayed using a font available on Mac systems.

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**Tip**

The Logos Bible Software web site provides lots of guidance on how to use their keyboards, including a very good video tutorial.
Copying and pasting Greek and Hebrew text constitutes another means to integrate ancient languages into your Blackboard course.

In the following example, an instructor uses Tahoma, one of the common fonts:

An instructor decides that he wants to display a section of the Greek New Testament in a course content area. He wants to display it using the Tahoma font (so that students will not need to install a specialized Greek font). He performs the following steps:

He highlights and copies a section of the Greek text from Logos Bible Software:
He chooses the *Tahoma* font option in the Blackboard Content Editor:
He then copies the Greek text into the Blackboard Content Editor. The Greek is displayed in the Tahoma Greek font. Students will not need a specialized font to see this since Tahoma is already installed on most student systems.

**NOTE**: Students using Macs will be able to see the Greek font because the underlying code ensures that the Greek will be displayed using a font available on Mac systems.

This is a great way for an instructor to grab a large chunk of Greek or Hebrew and paste it into Blackboard. This might be useful for (1) test questions that ask students to interpret a passage or (2) a Greek course that focuses on the interpretation of a the book of the NT.

**Tip**

When copying and pasting, I had more success using Chrome and Firefox than I did with Internet Explorer.
Now instructors can copy text from Microsoft Word, since the new Content Editor does a very good job of cleaning up the ‘garbage’ code. (We couldn’t copy and paste directly from Microsoft Word using the old Blackboard editor.) It only gets tricky when you start using complex formatting (such as creating paradigms of tense forms). In those cases, you might want to follow the steps for creating an image of your text and inserting it into your Blackboard course.

Tip

Copying and pasting text into the Content Editor may require a particular combination of keys on your keyboard. This depends on the web browser that you are using. Click the Paste button...

If an information window opens then you will need to use a combination of keys to paste your text into the Content Editor. The information window displays the key combination (‘keyboard shortcut’) that you need to use:
If you are working in a Windows environment, the keyboard shortcut for pasting text is **Control + V**. If you are working in a Mac environment, the keyboard shortcut is **Command + V**. *The keyboard shortcut is the only means to paste content into the editor.*

**NOTE:** When copying and pasting, I had more success using Chrome and Firefox than I did with Internet Explorer.
APPENDIX ONE: ADDING ANCIENT FONT OPTIONS

IMPORTANT: This section is for Blackboard Administrators who have access to the Blackboard Learn server(s). Please use this section as a guide at your own risk! I am assuming that you are an experienced Blackboard Administrator and that you always test any customizations to Blackboard on a test system first. (Please excuse me for stating the obvious.)

The new Blackboard Content Editor comes with a default set of font options. But you are not stuck with this default set. Like the old VTBE (Visual Textbox Editor), the new Content Editor is customizable — you can add (or substitute) any fonts your instructors may need. And Blackboard made customizing the editor a very easy process. Just follow these steps:

1. You will need to make these changes on the Blackboard app server. On the server, navigate to your blackboard folder and drill down to the plugins folder. Here are possible paths (depending on whether or not your version of Blackboard is using legacy database names):
   
   `<blackboard folder>\content\vi\bb_bb60\plugins`
   `<blackboard folder>\content\vi\BBLEARN\plugins`

2. Look for the bb-vtbe-tinymce plugin folder and drill down to the bundles subfolder:

   `bb-vtbe-tinymce -> webapp -> WEB-INF -> bundles`

3. Find the manifest file that you need to customize and open it for editing. For example, if you are using Blackboard in the US, then the `bb-manifest-en_US.properties` file is most likely the file you will need to customize.
4. Scroll down to the comments on the `font.addition` and `font.override` options and read them.
   a. Notice that the `font.addition` option allows you to add fonts to the default set.
   b. The `font.override` option allows you to override the default set. According to Blackboard, some clients may prefer this method so that they can list all fonts (including the ones that are being added) alphabetically. However, at SWBTS we chose the `font.override` option so we could exclude some of the default fonts. We were adding several new fonts and didn’t want to overcrowd the Content Editor’s font menu.

5. Notice that Blackboard has included an example for both options. Use these as templates for your customization. Here is what our customization at SWBTS looks like:

   ```
   font.override=Andale Mono=andale mono, times; Arial=arial, helvetica, sans-serif; Arial Black=arial black, avant garde; Book Antiqua=book antiqua, palatino; Calibri=calibri; Comic Sans MS=comic sans, comic sans ms, sans-serif; Courier New=courier new, courier; Georgia=georgia, palatino; Helvetica=helvetica; Tahoma=tahoma, arial, helvetica, sans-serif; Times New Roman=times new roman, times; Verdana=verdana, geneva; Webdings=webdings; BibleWorks Greek=bwgrkl; BibleWorks Greek Italic=bwgrki; BibleWorks Hebrew=bwhebb; Teknia Greek=TekniaGreek; SBL Greek=SBL Greek; SBL Hebrew=SBL Hebrew
   ``

   Notice that we included the following Greek and Hebrew font options to the end of the list (and excluded several default font options so the list would not become overcrowded):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Display Font Name</th>
<th>Underlying Client System Font Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BibleWorks Greek</td>
<td>bwgrkl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibleWorks Greek Italic</td>
<td>bwgrki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibleWorks Hebrew</td>
<td>bwhebb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teknia Greek</td>
<td>TekniaGreek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBL Greek</td>
<td>SBL Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBL Hebrew</td>
<td>SBL Hebrew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Each option is separated by a semi-colon. The options are inserted in the following format: `<display font name>=<underlying client system font name>`.

6. Save the manifest file.
7. Wait for the changes to synchronize (or run pushconfigupdates to push the changes right away).

8. Check the Content Editor to see if the font options were added.