

# LEARNING TO TEACH ONLINE



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## CASE STUDY

# Creating eBooks for distance education

Featuring: Terese Bird, University of Leicester

- Context** - Two groups totalling 28 students in the disciplines of Occupational Psychology and Education, studying at a distance online
- Description**
- All students are off-campus and never meet each other or the teacher face-to-face
  - Students used eBooks in conjunction with a fully online class in a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - often referred to as a Learning Management System (LMS)
  - Rather than shipping hard copies of readings, students were sent eReaders and electronic documents
- Technology** - eBook conversion software [Calibre](#), and eBook readers (such as Kindle, tablets and smart phones)

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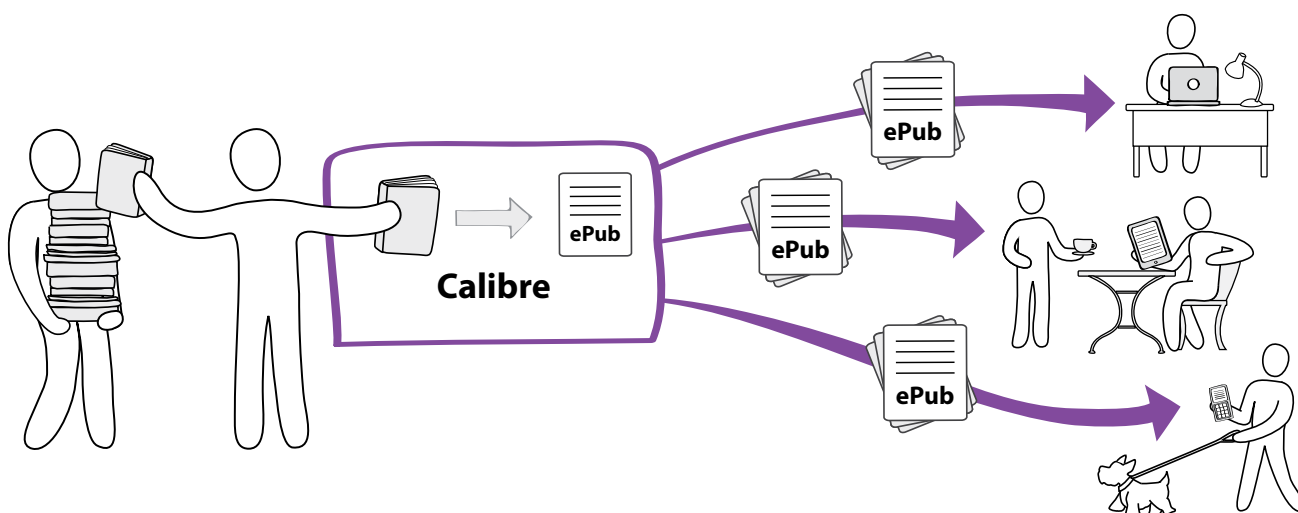
## Aims and overview

This case study examines the use of [eBooks](#) and [eReaders](#) as an extension of the usual Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS). This initiative was undertaken as part of the [DUCKLING research project](#) (Delivering University Curricula: Knowledge, Learning and Innovation Gains) conducted by the Beyond Distance Research Alliance at the University of Leicester in the UK. While the context of this study involves distance students, using electronic books can have applications in any discipline where students are required to undertake a significant amount of reading. This case study discusses some advantages of using eBooks, and outlines the process involved in creating and uploading them to an eReader device.

## What is an eBook?

EBook is a term that means 'electronic book'. It is a digital document that can be downloaded to, and read on dedicated eReaders (such as [Kindle](#), [Reader](#), or [Nook](#)), or multifunction devices such as laptops, [smartphones](#) or [tablet computers](#). Many eBooks are available on the Internet, and can be purchased or downloaded for free. Many traditional books are now being translated into the eBook format. In addition, an increasing number of books, newspapers, magazines and articles are being created specifically for eReaders.

Teachers can easily create their own eBooks from word documents or PDFs using special software such as [Calibre](#). Such software reformats the documents into a special eReader friendly format called [EPUB](#), which can reflow text to fit a variety of different sized eReader screens, making the format customisable by the user and easier to read (for more information, please see the video component of this case study).



Using the EPUB format, learning materials can easily be distributed to students via the Internet, and read on a wide range of eReaders. Many textbooks are also available for purchase online. Students can carry many books in one small device, offering them more flexibility in when and where they choose to study.

## **Case study outcomes quick summary**

### **Key benefits**

- *eReaders can store hundreds of eBooks*
- *Teachers and students can easily create and distribute their own eBook content*
- *The university saved substantial amounts of money and time by not printing, collating and shipping heavy paper-based readings to students*
- *The ability to carry all of the class' required readings in one small device meant students could study anywhere without having to carry bulky books*
- *Class readings were more easily and instantly accessible for students*
- *The ability of eReaders to bookmark the reader's place in each book meant that students could quickly make use of short periods of free time where ever they happened to be. Because of this students reported a positive impact upon the frequency and efficiency of study*
- *eReaders are not dependent upon the Internet once the EPUB files have been downloaded, meaning reading can continue without an Internet connection*
- *Many eReaders have advanced features, such as built in dictionaries, the ability to highlight passages, add notes on pages, and the ability to search text for specific phrases and words*
- *eBooks are often cheaper than their paper-based counterpart, meaning students can save money on textbook purchases*

### **Key issues to consider**

- *If a teacher is producing their own eBook material, care must be taken to respect copyright ownership if using other authors' material*
- *If EPUB documents are distributed electronically to students, they may need technical support to be able to competently upload the eBooks to their own eReaders*
- *Some eReaders can only display pure black and white. If images or diagrams are going to be a part of an EPUB document this should be considered*
- *Not all eReaders have the advanced functions such as the ability to annotate as described above. In this case study, the devices supplied to students were quickly found to be out of date*
- *If students are to supply their own eReader, the cost of purchase may be a consideration*

## **Motivation for adopting eBooks**

The [Beyond Distance Research Alliance](#) at the University of Leicester implemented the use of eBooks within their Occupational Psychology, Psychology of Work, and TESOL (*Teaching English As A Second Language*) and Applied Linguistics Masters programs, as part of the [DUCKLING project](#). The project investigated the use of advanced delivery technologies and pedagogy for distance students. The main motivations for adopting the use of eBooks in these distance programs included:

- *The students were time poor, often reporting that they could not dedicate large uninterrupted blocks of time to sit at a computer and study due to work and personal commitments*
- *The university was spending approximately £600 per student to print and post large volumes of paper-based class reading material*
- *The use of eBooks could make studying online more flexible, as readings could be accessed instantly with or without an Internet connection, rather than having to log into the class learning management system*

## **Planning**

There was not a radical shift in the pedagogy used for the delivery of the online class. Rather eBooks were intended to add an increased level of flexibility for students. The majority of planning for the update to eBooks related to the technical aspects of file conversion and distribution:

- *Technical support for students was deemed to be of critical importance during the introduction of the new technology. The Duckling project had a learning technologist available to provide online support and assistance for students in their respective class blackboard systems*
- *An effective process for the translation of the many documents from the classes into EPUB format was devised, and support documentation made available*
- *Instructions for making EPUB documents for eReaders may be accessed on the Beyond Distance research Alliance website <http://bit.ly/e8HiPh>*

## **Teaching**

The eReaders were used in conjunction with the different class' individual Blackboard websites. The structure and teaching of the different online classes did not change significantly with the introduction of eReaders. The readers were intended as a more flexible alternative to only having access to resources and readings through the class websites. The following were important points of consideration for supporting the use of eReaders:

- *As before the inclusion of eReaders, assessments and other class activities were facilitated through the different programs' own online learning environments*
- *For the initial introduction of eBooks, the students were given an eReader pre-loaded with content for free. They were also able to keep the device after the class had concluded. This greatly simplified the process as students did not have to find or download files themselves. However it was determined that in future, EPUB documents would be provided online for students to download to their own eReaders due to the cost of providing the devices*
- *Each class website had a discussion thread dedicated to technical support in case students experienced any difficulties with their eReaders. These threads were monitored by a learning technologist who could answer questions quickly, and revise any support documentation based on student feedback*
- *In addition to personal technical support, students were also provided with the same [instructions](#) for how to create their own content, and how to upload new class content onto their eReaders as it became available.*

## Conclusion

EBooks can offer great improvements for students in accessing readings or textbooks, and increased flexibility in where and when they can study. It is important to remember however, that creating eBooks does not necessarily improve the quality of student learning. Careful attention needs to be paid to the creation of pedagogically sound resources in the first instance. For further help with making your own eBook documents, please refer to the University of Leicester guide to creating and formatting documents for e-readers using EPUB <http://bit.ly/e8HiPh>.

## Additional information

Apple iBooks

<https://www.apple.com/au/ibooks>

Lighting Essentials iBook for iPad - example resource

<http://bit.ly/P0be6y>

Calibre eBook Management software

<http://calibre-eBook.com>

University of Leicester Duckling project

[www2.le.ac.uk/departments/beyond-distance-research-alliance/projects/duckling](http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/beyond-distance-research-alliance/projects/duckling)

University of Leicester video recording of a discussion session about e-books and e-readers with postgraduates via the Graduate School Media Zoo

<http://bit.ly/hvXXM8>

University of Leicester Case Study: E-book readers in Occupational Psychology

<http://bit.ly/hoiqOv>

University of Leicester Case Study: E-book readers in Education

<http://bit.ly/htpPpm>

## Additional reading\*

Carliner, S. (2010). [Possible Impacts of the New Popularity of e-Books on Higher Education](#). Paper presented at the INTED2010 (International Technology, Education and Development Conference), Valencia, Spain.

Lam, P., Lam, S. L., Lam, J., & McNaught, C. (2009). [Usability and usefulness of eBooks on PPCs: How students' opinions vary over time](#). *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 25(1), 30-44.

Nie, M., Witthaus, G., Armellini, A., Salmon, G., & Mukherjee, J. (2010). [DUCKLING Final Report](#): University of Leicester.

*\*Note: Some readings are held in subscription only databases. In most cases accessing the link from your institution's network will enable access.*

## **Acknowledgements**

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**Dr Alejandro Armellini**

*Senior Learning Designer, Beyond Distance Research Alliance*

## For more Learning to Teach Online, visit the COFA Online Gateway



To find out more about the Learning to Teach Online project, or to view the video component of this episode, please visit the COFA Online Gateway.

[www.online.cofa.unsw.edu.au](http://www.online.cofa.unsw.edu.au)

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### About the project

The [Learning to Teach Online](#) project is a free professional development resource designed to help teachers from any discipline, whether experienced in online teaching or not, to gain a working understanding of successful online teaching pedagogies that they can apply in their own unique teaching situations. It hopes to encourage dialogue, discussion and the sharing of ideas about online learning and teaching across disciplines and between institutions around the world.

### About COFA Online

COFA Online is an academic unit at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia. It has been innovating online pedagogy, academic professional development and effective online learning strategies since 2003.

### About The University of New South Wales

UNSW has an enrolment of approximately 40,000 students, and is the leading international university in Australia with over 10,000 international enrolments from over 130 nations. UNSW was also ranked as the top university in 2009 in the Australian Government Learning and Teaching Performance Fund for the quality of its teaching.

### Australian Learning and Teaching Council



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