Chapter II

Content Areas:
Syllabus, Notes,
Lesson Plans, and Documents

Content areas refer to those spaces online where instructors host materials for their courses or students. In an LMS, content areas include folders for items such as the class syllabus, lesson plans, weekly assignments, course documents and handouts, teacher contact information, and subject-area content. Online content is presented in many formats, but most instructors use html or cut and paste from Word™ documents. If you are using a Web site, wiki, blog, or other mechanism for hosting content, the principles of this chapter still apply, although blogs and wikis provide students the additional ability to add to the content. The major strength of content areas is the ability to organize and share information between the students and the teacher.

Organization of information is critical to creating an online class where students are successful. A well-organized course can actually provide students a visual schema for thinking about the organization of course and content. This visual schema can assist the student with the integration and long-term retention of knowledge.
In Figure 2.1, we can see how students can quickly glance at these assignment folders to get an overview and sequence of main course topics, thus providing a schema for thinking about the topic under study. Time in a well-organized course is spent on learning instead of deciphering how the course works. Conversely, a poorly organized course can cause confusion and anxiety for the learner. Disorganized information, duplication of documents, or unclear directions about where to locate or post assignments leads to students who are frustrated, have a difficult time learning, or who experience cognitive overload. Students in poorly organized courses often have difficulty finding the information they need, not understanding how to work through the sequence of the course, and may choose to quit the course out of frustration.