



Tips for Instructors to Avoid Potential “Lockout” Problems for Students



For your information: At ECU, our Learning Management System is Blackboard 9. Firefox (latest version) is still the browser of choice for Blackboard. **GENERAL BROWSER INFO:** If you (or your students) are not viewing a document properly, or images do not display, switch browsers to see if that makes a difference. The latest version of Firefox works well at this time. Google Chrome works is also working well. Internet Explorer has many popup boxes and permissions issues, plus display issues and grading from Internet Explorer is slow. ****Taking exams on a phone or mobile device is not recommended!****

NOTE: If you require that your quizzes be taken with LockDown Browser, please see the Blackboard Blog for more information and documentation: <http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/blackboard/?p=1666> or click the Blackboard Support tab once you log into Blackboard. You can copy the URL for LDB from that page to provide to your students.

Some Basic Troubleshooting We Recommend:

PC users: for general computer housekeeping (students and/or instructors), download the latest version of Java: <http://www.java.com>

Clear java cache: http://www.java.com/en/download/help/plugin_cache.xml

For Windows systems and MAC systems with additional security software, we suggest relaxing any security settings to “medium,” add <https://blackboard.ecu.edu/> as a “trusted site” in any security software.

For general maintenance, clear your browser’s cache. Follow the instructions for your browser(s): <http://www.wikihow.com/Clear-Your-Browser%27s-Cache>

If you ever add video or audio clips to test questions (or a content area), you will want to make sure the student knows to install/update *QuickTime player* (for Windows or Mac): <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/>

“Help! I got kicked out of my test...”

Symptom: The student is kicked out of an assessment when the submit button is pressed.

Cause: The java session has been terminated due to inactivity, so the submission is unsuccessful. Almost always this issue occurs with randomized tests or where certain questions are randomized.

Resolution/Workaround for Instructors to Avoid the Problem:

There are a number of different ways to combat this problem.

1. Give the exam one question at a time. This ensures that the user's java session is continuously updated, and the likelihood of a user not hitting the system to persist his/her session is reduced.
2. Turn off the "force completion" option. Doing this allows the user to re-enter the exam and continue. In case of any issues with the session timing out, the user will be able to re-enter the exam from the last point he/she saved, allowing them to submit the exam with minimal data loss. In addition, the save button will also function the same as the solution #1 above, allowing the java session to persist for a longer period of time. Note: the timer **continues** to run; the student does **not** get to re-enter that quiz with the original time limit.
3. Not using randomized tests (only for use if the previous two workarounds are unusable). While this is most likely an unusable workaround, the reason randomization is a problem is that each version of the exam in a randomized test is created in java memory only. So, a randomized test, should the java session for the user die, will not persist anywhere and will be unrecoverable. Removing randomization will use a version of the test from the database, so at least the user would get the same test with the same order the next time he/she took the test.

1/4/2013 - Additional Information - Please see information below that we received from Blackboard, Inc.

Issue Description: In some cases Blackboard assessments (aka tests, quizzes, surveys) may time out the user due to inactivity. This can lead to unsuccessful submissions and loss of work.

Symptoms:

Blackboard Learning System users may randomly appear to get kicked out of the system while taking Assessments due to session timeouts. They get "Access denied" messages, and after re-authenticating, they are unable to finish their assessment. The issue described here is specific to not having made intermediate saves for some period of time (longer than 20 minutes).

The submission failures happen particularly in the presence of randomization in the quiz (random display order or random pool question selection).

Issue Avoidance

Avoid creating large exams involving many/complex questions and presented all at once.

Blackboard recommends creating exams with 50 questions or less if at all possible.

Consider breaking them into smaller exams taken in sequence instead.

Train users to save their attempt every 5-10 minutes (but avoid too-frequent saves, which overload the application).

Avoid randomized display order for exams using question-by-question display.

When using random selection of questions from pools, keep the overall exam especially short.

The suggestions above will eliminate some of the test submission failures that are reported. Blackboard believes the most important of these suggestions is training your students to save the exam questions every 5-10 minutes to keep the session active.

Log in to <https://ithelp.ecu.edu/> to submit a Tech Support Request.