

Tech Snacks: Release Conditions & Intelligent Agents

Monitoring and guiding student activity in Brightspace is a daunting task, but there are tools that can help! Release Conditions and Intelligent Agents can automate some of those tasks and provide timely feedback to encourage and motivate students.

Release Conditions

Release Conditions give you added control over how students access materials in your course. When you attach a Release Condition to something in Brightspace, students can't see that item until they satisfy the associated condition.

What can you put Conditions on?

You can attach Release Conditions to the following course elements:

- Content modules, and any item added to the Content area.
- Discussion Forums and Topics.
- Assignments, Quizzes, and Surveys.
- News Announcements.
- Grade items and categories.
- Intelligent Agent triggers.
- Awards can be issued based on Release Conditions.

What kind of Conditions can you set?

Release Conditions that you can use include:

- Viewed a specific Content item, or viewed all Content items.
- Authored a post in a Discussion Topic, or scored on a Discussion rubric.
- Submitted to an Assignment folder, received feedback, or scored on an Assignment rubric.
- Completed a Quiz attempt, or earned a particular score on a Quiz.
- Enrolled in a particular Group.
- Earned an Award.

Along with “positive” Release Conditions, there are also “negative” Release Conditions. Negative Release Conditions include *not* viewing a specific Content item, *not* completing a Quiz, etc.

Why would I want to use Release Conditions?

Release course content in stages — Some instructors will use release conditions to ensure that students are studying required content before completing assignments. For example, put a condition on a weekly discussion topic that requires students to view a video and review a Powerpoint before being able to post in the discussion.

Customize content for Groups within a course — If you facilitate group projects in your course, you can use Group enrollment as a Release Condition to provide differentiated resources or activities for each Group. For example, each Group might choose a different topic to study more deeply, and you could provide different writing assignment criteria for each Group.

Require students to complete an academic contract or plagiarism quiz — Many instructors require students to watch a video or view a presentation on academic integrity and then demonstrate their understanding by passing a Quiz or signing and submitting an academic integrity contract. You can use Release Conditions to require students to complete those activities before being able to complete any other graded activities.

Have students demonstrate technical or remedial skills — Some instructors like to ensure students know how to use all of the required tools in Brightspace before getting too far into the semester, especially for freshman-level online courses. You can use Release Conditions to have students take a practice Quiz, submit a practice Assignment, or post in a practice or introductory Discussion before advancing in the course.

Automated reminders — Create an Announcement reminding students to view the syllabus if they haven't already. A Release Condition can then trigger if they have *not* looked at the syllabus in the Content area. Students who have viewed the syllabus won't see the reminder Announcement.

Best practices for Release Conditions

Set up conditions before users access the course — If possible, it's best to set up all Release Conditions before the semester starts, to give yourself time to check for mistakes or contradictory or circular conditions. If you set up Release Conditions after students have already accessed the course, students can get confused by resources disappearing.

Make sure that students understand your conditions — If graded Assignments are hidden behind Release Conditions, a student might look in the course, not see any activities for that week, and assume there aren't any. Make sure to spell out your conditions in the syllabus, in a news Announcement, and in the Content Module description.

Avoid contradictory conditions, impossible conditions, and circular references — Be careful when using multiple Release Conditions at once. For example, the conditions "User must achieve greater than 49.9% on Grade Item 1" and "User must achieve less than 50% on Grade Item 1" are contradictory. Users could not satisfy both conditions at the same time; they would not be able to see the item associated with these conditions.

Intelligent Agents

Intelligent Agents are an automated tool in Brightspace that will send pre-formatted emails when certain conditions are triggered. An Intelligent Agent can be triggered by any Release Condition, or it can be triggered when a student hasn't logged into Brightspace or hasn't accessed the course within a set number of days. To access the Intelligent Agents tool, click on the Progress tab, then Class Progress. Then click on the link labeled "Use agents to automate feedback."

What can I do with Intelligent Agents?

Early alerts (login activity and course activity) — Early alerts are useful and can be set up to run all semester to keep reminding the students to stay engaged with a course. When a student has not logged in a set number of days, the Agent will send an email to the student and/or instructor. You can customize the email message, and include variable strings that automatically personalize the text to each student.

Automated grade checks — An Agent can be scheduled at critical times during the semester: early alert, last day to withdraw with a "W", midterm, etc. As long as you have the final calculated grade released in the Gradebook, you can set an Agent to send emails to students whose total grade drops below a set percentage.

Automated feedback — Positive or corrective feedback lets students know where they are standing in the class which can alleviate anxiety or spur them into action. Agents can be tailored to send the student a congratulatory email for a job well done, or encourage struggling students to seek tutoring help.