

Browser/Java Configuration

Performance – some systems are terribly slow. On campus performance is great. From most remote computers it is good to great. For some it is bad, for a few horrible.

- Great = near instantaneous screen loads or refreshes.
- Good = 1 to 3 second screen loads or refreshes.
- Bad = 8 to 10 second screen loads or refreshes.
- Horrible = loads or refreshes measured in minutes or number of time-outs.
- Horrible = getting kicked out of tests and quizzes.

Bad performance is usually caused by a less than optimal combination of browser and Java configuration. Horrible performance may be caused by:

- Using an accelerator browser on a dial-up connection.
- Having multiple anti-virus programs running at the same time.
- Out of date or expired anti-virus software.
- By a system infected with one or more viruses or other malware.

First the browser – you should be using either Internet Explorer 7 or 8, Mozilla Firefox 3.5 or 3.6 (not Safari, Opera, Google Chrome or a browser with an accelerator from your Internet Service Provider). Other browsers may work, but IE 7 & 8 and Firefox 3.5 & 3.6 are the only browsers listed by Blackboard as supported.

If you are using an earlier version of either browser I strongly recommend updating. To update:

- Internet Explorer – go to <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/internet-explorer/default.aspx>.
 - Note: I recommend that instead of simply updating Internet Explorer, that you update Windows which will include updating Internet Explorer. This will ensure that your Windows is up-to-date on its security fixes.
 - Open  Add or Remove Programs in Control Panel.
 - Click Add New Programs.
 - Click Windows Update.
 - Follow the instructions to locate and add new Windows features, system updates, and device drivers.
- Mozilla Firefox – go to <http://www.mozilla.com>.

Allow popups when working on Blackboard. Some Blackboard features are implemented as pop-ups; having pop-ups blocked will usually cause you to be kicked out of an exam. To allow pop-ups:

- For Internet Explorer:
 - Click Tools at the top of the browser window. If you don't see Tools tap the Alt key.
 - Click Pop-up Blocker.
 - Click Pop-up Blocker Settings.
 - Note: if the pop-up blocker is turned off skip the next 2 steps.
 - Type `http://*.mckendree.edu*` in the Address of website to allow textbox. (this allows pop-ups from all the McKendree servers).
 - Click Add
 - Click Close
- For Firefox:

- Click Tools at the top of the browser window. If you don't see Tools tap the Alt key.
- Click Options.
- Click the Content tab.
- If the Block pop-up windows box is checked:
 - Click exceptions.
 - Type *.mckendree.edu in the address of web site text box.
 - Click Allow.
 - Click Close
- Click OK

If you are using Internet Explorer 8 or later compatibility mode should be on for Blackboard. To set compatibility mode on:

- Open Internet Explorer.
- Click Tools at the top of the browser window. If you don't see Tools click the Alt key.
- Click Compatibility View Settings
- Type mckendree.edu in the Add this website textbox.
- Click Add
- Click Close

I also recommend making McKendree a trusted site in Internet Explorer. This will stop the browser from asking permission to download some add-ins and pop-ups. To make McKendree a trusted site:

- Open Internet Explorer.
- Click Tools at the top of the browser window. If you don't see Tools click the Alt key.
- Click Internet Options.
- Click the Security tab.
- Click the green checkmark.
- Click Sites.
- Uncheck the Require server verification checkbox.
- Type http://*.mckendree.edu in the Add this website to the trusted zone textbox.
- Click Add.
- Click Close.
- Click OK.

Now Java –Java serves the small programs (called Applets) that Blackboard runs to provide things like the textboxes in discussion boards, assignments and for essay type questions on tests. If Java is not present these can load and execute very slowly. If Java is out of date they can run erratically. Either way, Blackboard will not perform well. You should be running Java 6 with a recent update. The current update is 29. I have seen systems perform well with versions as old as 18. Note – when the Java is updated older updates are not removed. These should be removed either before or after the update. It is a good idea to check for updates and remove old versions from time to time. To check your Java version:

- Open the Control Panel.
- Click Add or Remove Programs.
- Look for the list of Java Updates:
 - If you do not see any Java Updates listed skip to Install Java:
- Remove old Java updates if any:
 - Click the Java update you wish to remove.

- Click Remove.
- Click Yes.
- The installer will ask if you wish to restart your computer now, click Restart Later and restart after the Java installation is complete.
- Install Java:
 - Go to <http://www.java.com>.
 - Download Java (it's free).
 - Install Java.

A couple of recommendations when taking an exam, test or quiz on Blackboard – Taking an exam is stressful enough by itself. It is doubly bad if you are kicked out. When taking an exam:

- Never click the refresh or back key.
- Never listen to iTunes. (Several things, including changing playlist can cause you to be kicked out).
- Never click the Backspace key except when the cursor is in a text box.
- I strongly recommend that when you are taking a Blackboard test or quiz that Blackboard is the only program running on your computer.

If you have any questions or need assistance, call or e-mail me.

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