

Syllabus Plus Users Information Update – May 2004 Edition 1

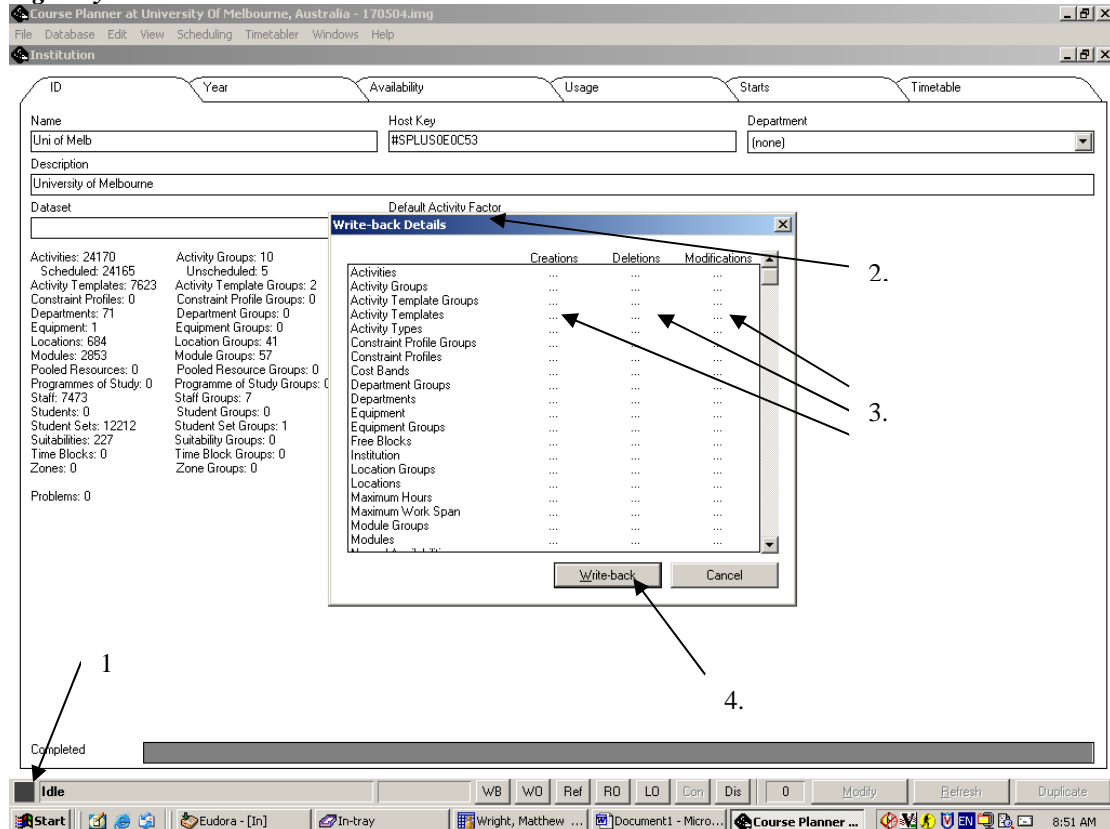
Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of this monthly information sheet. This update is being sent to all users of Syllabus Plus Course Planner across the University of Melbourne. The aim of this sheet is to give you information on what is going on in the world of Syllabus Plus, and to provide you with hints and tips in your everyday usage of the program.

Current Syllabus Plus Issues

Unfortunately, the Write-Back Error appears to be raising its ugly head again. Once it appears, this problem prevents affected users from writing-back their changes to the Syllabus Plus database. The only way out of this is to download a fresh image off the server, which as you would be aware, is a frustrating and time-consuming process.

Fig 1. Syllabus Plus Write-Back Details



How do I know if I have the Write-Back problem?

Under normal circumstances, if you have a black box (1.) down the bottom of your screen, it means that you have made some sort of a change in Syllabus Plus (e.g. created, altered or deleted a booking), and that this change needs to be sent through to the server.

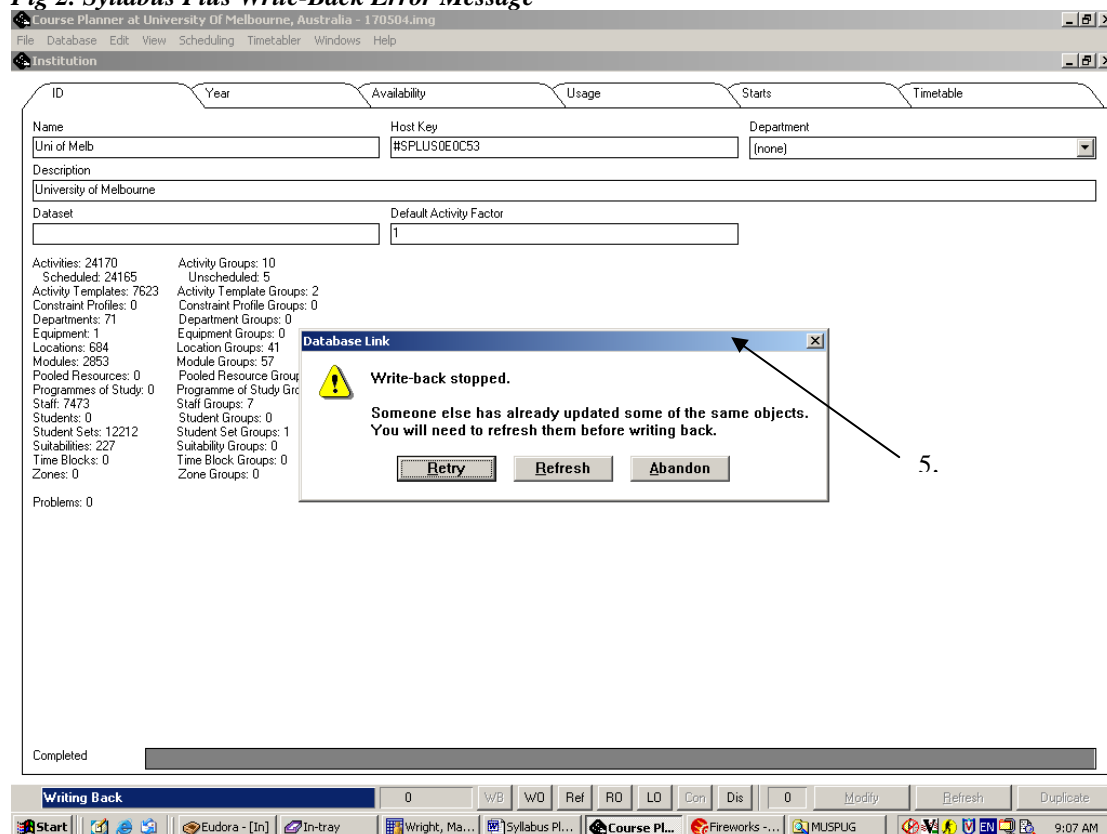
You can do this by clicking on the black box (Please note that bookings and changes made through the 'Location Booking' screen are generally sent (written back) to the Syllabus Plus server automatically).

This will bring up a summary of the information to be sent to the server(2.).

In the case of the Write-Back problem, the black box can appear even if you have made no alterations. In this situation the summary screen will show that you have no changes to write-back(3.). Effectively, the program is asking you to write-back changes, even though you have no changes to write-back.

If you then click on the Write-Back button (4.) to continue, you'll come up with the following error message (5.).

Fig 2. Syllabus Plus Write-Back Error Message



What can I do if this happens then?

The only thing that you can do in this situation is abandon the image and shut down Syllabus Plus (Click on 'No' when asked if you would like to Write-Back your image (you can't) and select 'Discard' when asked if you would like to save it)

The error message above can also appear even when you have legitimate changes to Write-back. In this situation, all that you can do is abandon the Write-Back and exit from Syllabus Plus as described above. Any work that you have not written-back to the server will need to be redone, and subsequently written back.

In order to avoid significant inconvenience should this problem strike, we recommend that you regularly write-back changes to the database.

What do I do if I identify that I have the Write-Back error?

Unfortunately, in this situation, you will generally be forced to download a fresh image from the server (Please contact our office if you are unsure of how to do this). We recognise that this takes a significant period of time, but at present, there is no other way around the problem.

So what's causing this problem?

If I can get a little bit technical, the problem occurs in the following scenario.

1. Alice & Bob are Syllabus Plus users
2. Bob makes a couple of changes and writes them back to the server.
3. At the same time, Alice is receiving information from the server.
4. The system 'trips up', and Alice does not receive all of the information that Bob has sent to the server
5. Alice's machine is now 'out of sync'. As the information on her machine is different to that on the server, Syllabus Plus makes the assumption that she has a change to make. The Write-Back button therefore appears on screen, even though Alice has nothing to write back.

What is the timetable office doing to fix this problem?

There is not a lot that the timetable office can do to rectify this problem - It is caused by a bug in the Syllabus Plus software. The bug has been fixed in later versions of the software (which the timetabling office is currently in the process of implementing – See below for more info). For the time being, all we can do is try and identify the items in Syllabus Plus that are causing the problems, and repair them as necessary.

I have Read-Only Access. Is this an Issue for me?

If you have read-only access, you will be unable to make changes, and so therefore do not need to Write-Back changes. The Write back error still can occur on your system however. Although you will still be able to effectively use the program for your purposes with the error in place, we would prefer it if you downloaded a fresh, untainted image from the server.

I still have questions. Who can I contact?

See the end of the Update for information on how to contact us.

Syllabus Plus Developments

The University is currently using Syllabus Plus Version 3.1.2 on an Ingres based server. We are now in the process of upgrading to Syllabus Plus Version 3.3.2 on an Oracle based server. At this stage we are expecting that the 2005 database will be constructed and run on this new version of the program. Some of the advantages of the update will be:

- Ability to run Syllabus Plus on Windows XP
- Eradication of the Write-Back problem
- Timetable office will be able to use COMS to automatically extract from, and import information into, Syllabus Plus. This will subsequently give us the ability to streamline Syllabus Plus related systems for University wide use.
- Repeat bookings can be made for bookings at the same time but on different days during the week (see screen shot below)

Fig3. Syllabus Plus Version 3.3.2 Screenshot

The screenshot displays the Syllabus Plus software interface. The main window is titled "Course Planner at University of Melbourne - 2004Mckrnd.img". The interface is divided into several sections:

- Activities List (Left Panel):** A scrollable list of activities, including dates and course identifiers such as "110547~2-S9/01 31st August", "110548~2-S1/01 7th September", and "110552~2-S1/01".
- Main Form (Center):** A form for editing a course. Fields include:
 - Name:** 110552~2-S1/01
 - Host Key:** 110552~2-S1/01
 - Department:** 110
 - Module:** 110552~2
 - Description:** (Empty)
 - Type:** Teaching
 - Total Cost:** \$ 0.00
 - Factor:** 1
- Teaching Week Pattern:** A grid showing weeks from 1 to 50. The pattern is "6 weeks from 33 (16/8/04) to 40 (10/10/04)".
- Duration:** 2:00 Hours
- Suggested Days:** A list of days with checkboxes. Wednesday is checked.
- Suggested time:** 13:30

The bottom status bar indicates "Total: 21873 Activities" and "Scheduled?" with a checkmark. The taskbar at the bottom shows various system icons and the time "2:33 PM".

More information on the implementation of Version 3.3.2 will be released over the next couple of months.

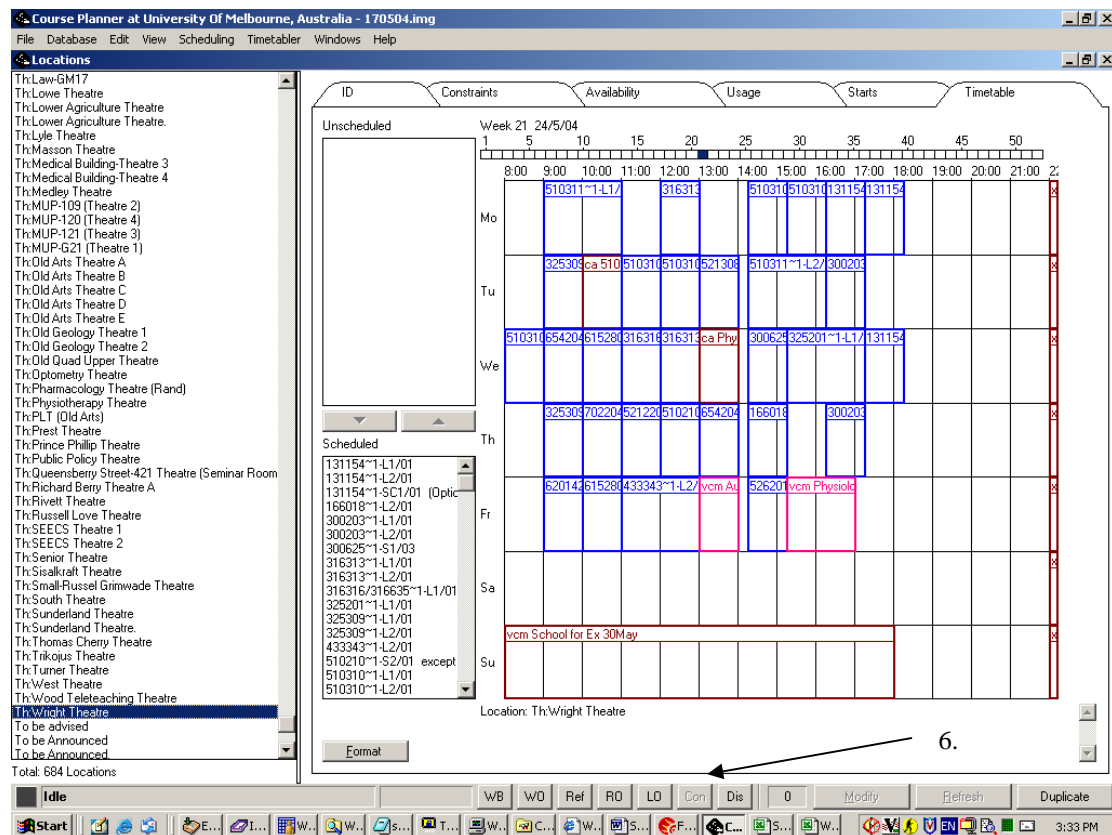
Handy Tip – Am I Connected?

In each edition, we will aim to include a Handy Tip to assist you in your day to day usage of the Syllabus Plus program.

Sometimes your connection to the Syllabus Plus server will drop out. In these cases you will need to reconnect to the server in order to receive and send information to the server.

But how can I tell if I'm connected or not?

At the base of the Syllabus Plus screen, there is a list of buttons (see 6. below). The 'Con' (connect) button gives your connection status. If it is greyed out, you are connected. If it is active, you can use this button to connect to the server.



So it's that straightforward?

Not quite. Sometimes when the connection drops out, the 'Con' button remains greyed out. If you think that you might have been disconnected, there are a couple of ways of checking. One is to hit the 'Dis' (disconnect) button, and then hit the 'Con' button to reconnect. If Syllabus Plus doesn't refresh, you're not connected.

What is a refresh?

A refresh occurs when the version of Syllabus Plus on your PC checks the server for updates. Whilst the machine is refreshing, the word 'Refreshing' will appear in the bottom left corner of the program, and some numbers (that normally decrease in value) will appear to the right of this. When the refresh is finished, the word 'Refreshing' will be replaced by 'Idle'. You can also force the computer to refresh at any stage by hitting the 'Ref' button.

There's all these other buttons at the base of the screen. What do they do?

These buttons perform a multitude of functions. We don't generally make use of these, but if you're interested:

- WB – Writes Back changes without checking. We strongly recommend that you do not use this function. Click on the grey box in the bottom left corner to write-back instead. This will give you details of what you are sending to the server before you do so.
- WO – Can alter the how changes are written back. We strongly recommend that you do not alter the default settings.
- RO – Indicates how frequently the system will automatically refresh.
- LO – Manages settings for a log file.

Contact Us

If you have any questions, or would like to give us some feedback, please feel free to get in touch with us. You can email us at sa-timetable@unimelb.edu.au or give us a call:

Sandi Robertson – Timetable Coordinator x49689

Matt Wright - Timetabling Systems Support x43690

Chris Adamidis - Timetable Officer x47699

Chris Thornton – Manager, Timetabling, Venue & Conference Management x48858