
Preface

What Is Moodle?

Moodle is an open source course management system (CMS) used by universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, businesses, and even individual instructors to add web technology to their courses. Moodle is currently used by more than 2,000 educational organizations around the world to deliver online courses and to supplement traditional face-to-face courses. Moodle is available for free on the Web (<http://www.moodle.org>), so anyone can download and install it. More on that later in this chapter.

The name Moodle has two meanings. First, it's an acronym (what isn't these days) for Modular Object Oriented Developmental Learning Environment. Moodle is also a verb meaning "to let the mind or body wander and do something creative but without particular purpose."

Moodle was created by Martin Dougiamas, a computer scientist and educator, who spent time supporting a CMS at a University in Perth, Australia. He grew frustrated with the system and learned that engineers, not educators, had built it. He realized that a system built by someone who started with the educational process, rather than an engineering process, would be infinitely better than what he had to work with. He put his graduate degrees in education and computer science to work and started developing Moodle as an alternative. He now works on Moodle full-time. A community of dedicated open source developers from around the world works with him in a collaborative effort to make Moodle the best CMS available. He still lives in Australia with his wife, daughter, and son.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is for people who want to teach a course using Moodle. You can use Moodle to teach a course fully online or to supplement a face-to-face course taught in a traditional setting. It doesn't matter if you teach at a primary school, at a secondary school, in higher education, or in a corporate setting, the tools and features available in Moodle can be used to create an effective class.

Prerequisites – What Do You Need Before You Start?

To use this book, you will need the following before you start:

- Moodle installed and configured on a server
- A computer with Internet access
- A modern browser such as Internet Explorer 6, Netscape 7, Firefox 1
- Instructor access to a course on Moodle, or administrator access to the Moodle server.

Who Is This Guy?

Since we're going to be spending some time together, I'd better introduce myself. I've been working in the field of educational technology for 10 years. I've been a school district technology administrator, developed commercial web-based training, written supplemental CDs for inclusion with textbooks, and I even did a short stint at NASA. I'm currently an administrator/trainer/developer for a CMS at San Francisco State University. We're gradually converting our courses from Blackboard to Moodle.

I've spent a lot of time working with teachers to incorporate technology into their classes. I've seen what works, what doesn't, and some of the pitfalls to avoid.

I'm really an education geek. I love living at the intersection of technology and learning. There are so many new and exciting opportunities in this area that I can see myself doing this for at least another 10 years.

How to Use This Book

This book is written for instructors learning how to use Moodle. It's not just a how-to manual, however. Every chapter includes suggestions, case studies, and best practices for using Moodle effectively. Using Moodle won't make your course better by itself. Only by applying effective educational practices can you truly leverage the power of Moodle.

The Moodle interface is customizable by instructors and the system administrator. The descriptions and screenshots are of the default interface without any customization. If you have changed the order of the blocks in your course or the system administrator has changed the look and feel of the main interface, your system will look different from the screenshots here.

Chapter 1 discusses Moodle as a CMS and surveys its tools and features. We'll compare Moodle to the big commercial systems and see how it stacks up.

Chapter 2 gets us started using Moodle. We'll sign up for an account, review the basic interface, get used to some of the conventions, and start a course.

Chapters 3 through 12 cover individual tools in the basic Moodle package. We'll discuss how and why to upload content, use forums, give quizzes, peer review papers, give assignments, write journals, develop shared glossaries, create pathed lessons, collaboratively develop documents, and record student grades. Each chapter will cover how to add the tool to your course, discuss the options available, and give you some creative ideas for effectively using it in your class.

Chapter 13 delves into the management of your course, including adding and removing users, creating user groups, and backing up your course.

Chapter 14 covers Moodle's built-in survey functions for assessing your class.

Chapter 15 pools all the disparate tools into a comprehensive whole and will show some of the creative ways teachers have used Moodle.

Chapter 16 covers how to administer an entire Moodle site. A system administrator will usually handle these function, but if you're on your own, there's a lot of power behind the curtain.

You can use this book in a couple different ways. First, you can read it cover to cover. Hopefully, you'll find it so compelling that you won't be able to put it down until you've finished it. Or you can use it like a reference manual. The beginning of each tool chapter covers the how-to's and the options. If you get lost, flip to the appropriate chapter and take it from the beginning. If you're looking for inspiration, Chapters 3 and 14 and the end of each tool chapter should fuel the creative fire. Happy Moodling!

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Any remaining errors in the book are entirely mine.

