
12

Grades and Scales

Grades are a necessary evil in modern education. They take a complex task—learning a new subject—and reduce it to a single measure. They can function as both carrot and stick in motivating students, and are the primary measure of success in a course. Tracking and calculating grades are serious and tedious tasks. Fortunately, Moodle has a tool to help.

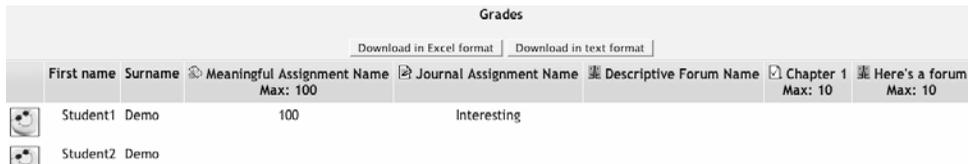
The Moodle grades area is a simple tool for tracking student scores in your course. Currently, gradebook functions as an automated tool for tracking scores in Moodle activities. It doesn't do a lot of fancy calculation, but you can download your scores to a spreadsheet or other tool for additional analysis.

Grades aren't the only way to give feedback to students. With Moodle's scales, you can create lists of non-numeric feedback options for assessing student work. Moodle comes with one scale by default, "Connected and Separate Ways of Knowing," which we'll discuss later in this chapter. You can easily create your own additional scales for feedback options that are meaningful to you and your students.

Using Grades

There isn't much to do with the current grades area. You can access the grades area by clicking the Grades link in the administration area on the left side of the main page of your course.

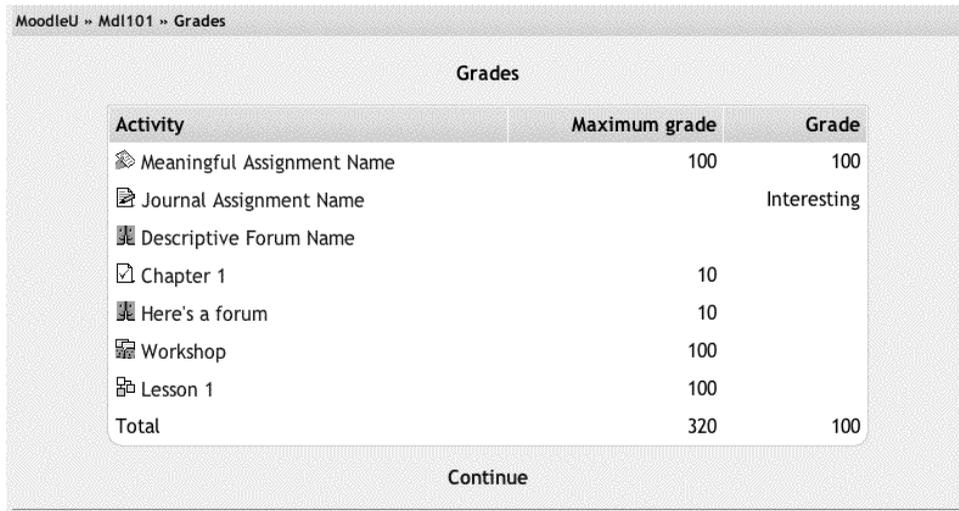
After you click the link, you will be taken to the Grades display, as shown in Figure 12-1. The students in the course are listed in the lefthand column. Across the top, you'll see all of the activities you have added to your course with the possible points for each. The far-right column records the students' total points and the total possible points.



Grades						
First name	Surname	Meaningful Assignment Name Max: 100	Journal Assignment Name	Descriptive Forum Name	Chapter 1 Max: 10	Here's a forum Max: 10
Student1	Demo	100	Interesting			
Student2	Demo					

Figure 12-1. Grades area

Once grades have been recorded in the grades area, students can check their grades by clicking on the grades link in the administration area. They can see only their own grades, not the other students', as shown in Figure 12-2.



Grades		
Activity	Maximum grade	Grade
Meaningful Assignment Name	100	100
Journal Assignment Name		Interesting
Descriptive Forum Name		
Chapter 1	10	
Here's a forum	10	
Workshop	100	
Lesson 1	100	
Total	320	100

Continue

Figure 12-2. Student grade view

Adding Manual Assignments

One of the chief complaints with the current gradebook in Moodle is the difficulty of adding a manually scored assignment. Scores for activities you've added to your course

are automatically added to the gradebook, but what if you want to record a grade for something that isn't a Moodle activity?

Currently, the only way to add a manually scored column to the gradebook is to create an offline assignment. When you add the offline assignment to your course, it will create a column in the grades area. After you enter grades for the new assignment, they will appear in the grades table.

Downloading Grades to a Spreadsheet

Most instructors want to be able to do more advanced calculations on their grades than a simple point average. Currently, the Moodle gradebook does not support curving, weighting, or dropping grades. The only way to perform these calculations is to download the gradebook to a spreadsheet and perform your calculations there.

Fortunately, it's easy to download and manipulate the grades into a spreadsheet:

1. Click on Grades in the administration area
2. From the Grades table, select "Download in Excel format."
3. Save the file to your local hard drive, as shown in Figure 12-3.

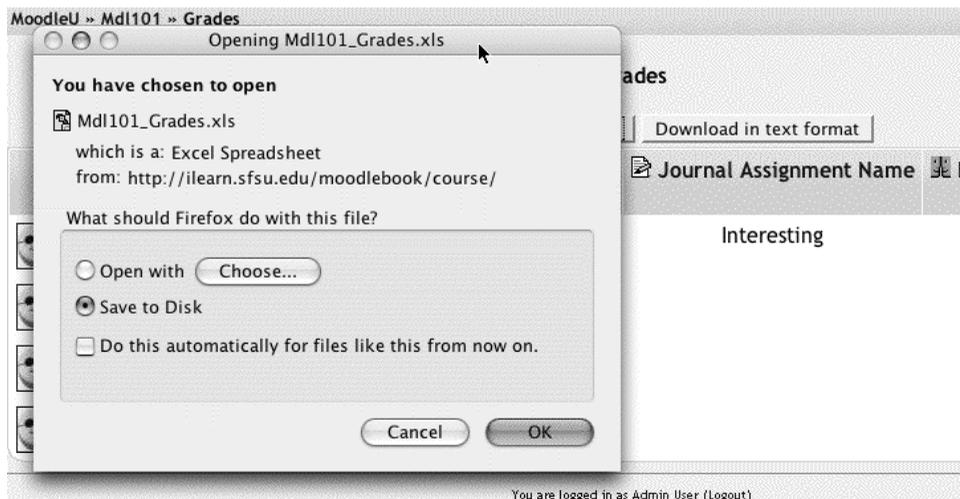


Figure 12-3. Download grades in excel format

4. Open the file you just downloaded with Excel or another spreadsheet. It will appear like the example in Figure 12-4.

1	First name	Surname	ID number	Institution	Department	Email address	Assignment: I	Journal: Journ	Forum: Desor	Quiz:
2	Student1	Demo				student_dem	100	Interesting		
3	Student2	Demo				student_dem				
4										

Figure 12-4. Moodle grades in Excel

5. Add additional columns and calculations as necessary.

Once you have manipulated the grades in Excel, you will need to communicate the new scores or final grades to students. While there is currently no way to upload a spreadsheet into Moodle, you can share the new scores with students. Simply create a new offline assignment and enter the results from the Excel spreadsheet.

Creating Scales

Scales are a non-numeric way of evaluating students' performance. Instead of giving an assignment a number from 1 to 100 as a grade, you can give the student a word or a small phrase as standard feedback.

Moodle's default scale—"Separate and Connected was of knowing"—gives you three options: Mostly Separate Knowing, Separate and Connected, and Mostly Connected Knowing. These phrases relate to a theory about how people approach the world. Separate knowers try to remain objective and avoid personalizing knowledge. They like to debate and critique new ideas. Connected knowers learn in a socially connected, empathetic way. They try to find consensus instead of confrontation.

This scale comes with Moodle as a default. Some people use it, but many create their own. You can create a scale using any rating system you choose. You can even create a different scale for each assignment.

To create a new scale:

1. Click on the Scales link in the Administration panel.
2. On the Scales page, shown in Figure 12-5, click the "Add a new scale" button.

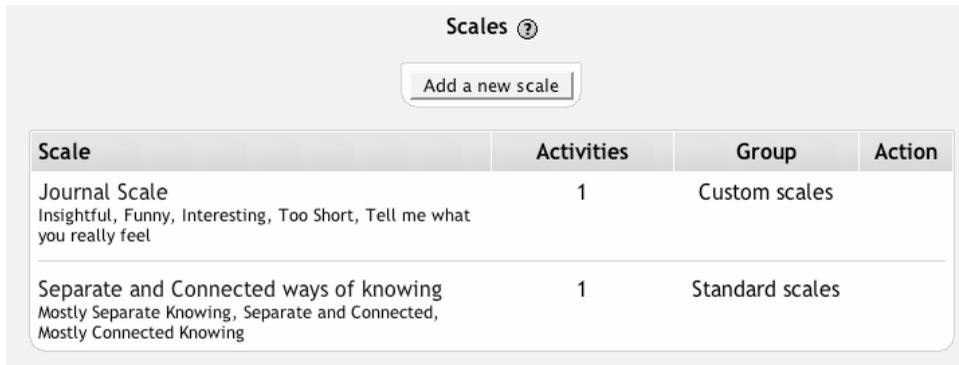


Figure 12-5. Scales page

3. On the next page, shown in Figure 12-6, give your scale a name.
4. In the Scale box, create your scale. Each item in the scale should be separated by a comma. For example, a good–bad scale would be very good, good, fair, poor, very poor.

The screenshot shows the 'Scales' form in Moodle. At the top, it says 'Scales' with a help icon. The form has three main sections: 'Name', 'Scale', and 'Description'. The 'Name' field contains 'New Scales'. The 'Scale' field contains 'Good, Bad, Ugly, A few dollars more'. The 'Description' field contains 'A generic scale'. Below the description field, it says 'Used in 0 places'. At the bottom right, there is a 'Save changes' button.

Figure 12-6. Adding a new scale

- Write a detailed description for your scale. Your students will have access to the description, and you can use this to give them additional feedback. The more details you put in the description, the more students will understand what each scale item means.

Once you've created your scale, you can use it in any activity where you would give a grade, except of quizzes. Quizzes are the only tool where you have to use a numeric grade so Moodle can compute a score.

When you give feedback using a non-numeric scale, the activity does not appear in the total grade column. Instead, the word you select for the feedback appears in the grades list, as shown in Figure 12-7.

The screenshot shows the 'Grades' area in Moodle. At the top, it says 'Grades' with a help icon. Below that, there are two buttons: 'Download in Excel format' and 'Download in text format'. The table below has the following columns: 'First name', 'Surname', 'Meaningful Assignment Name', 'Journal Assignment Name', 'Descriptive Forum Name', 'Chapter 1', and 'Here's a forum'. The table has two rows of data.

First name	Surname	Meaningful Assignment Name Max: 100	Journal Assignment Name	Descriptive Forum Name	Chapter 1 Max: 10	Here's a forum Max: 10
Student1	Demo	100	Interesting			
Student2	Demo					

Figure 12-7. Scales in the grades area

Effective Grade and Scale Practices

Grades and scales are important tools for providing feedback to your students. Using these tools effectively can help you create a more powerful learning environment.

Grade Practices

As we have seen, the grades tool is very simple. There isn't much to worry about when managing the grades area.

The most important thing to remember is to frequently download your gradebook for backup. Your system administrator should be backing up the entire server on a regular basis, but you can never be too certain. After all, your students will complain to you if they lose their grades, not to the system admin.

For regular backups, I recommend creating a folder specifically to hold your grade data files. Once you've created the folder, complete the following procedure once a week during your course:

1. Click on Grades in the administration area.
2. From the Grades table, select Download in Excel Format or Download in Text Format.
3. Save the file to your disk, somewhere other than in your grade storage folder.
4. Once the file has been saved, rename it to include the date of the download.
5. Copy the renamed file into your grades storage folder.

If you follow the backup procedure on a regular basis, you will have a record of student grades if there is a catastrophic loss of data on the server. You can always recover students' grades up to that point in the semester if you have a regular backup.

Scale Practices

Scales give you the ability to provide qualitative, instead of quantitative, feedback, but they require careful wording. When creating scales, ensure your word choices are meaningful to the students and provide information they can use to improve their performance in the future. For example, the good-bad scale I used as an example in the "Creating Scales" section is actually a poor choice. A scale that includes some indication of why the assignment was poorly done would be useful. This is a difficult task because a scale allows evaluation only along a single dimension, as opposed to the multidimensional evaluation possible with the workshop and exercise tools.