

# Managing the Online Gradebook

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Your online grade book provides a powerful tool to capture and track all grades associated with your course. Students can use the grade book to:

- View their own grades and track their own progress as work is completed and graded.
- Read any comments provided by the instructor associated with each grade,
- Challenge grades if they feel a mistake may have been made or if they want some additional consideration.

Instructors can use the grade book to:

- Associate every course activity with a grade, for example, quizzes and exams, homework assignments, class participation, discussion, other activities
- Post grades for activities that are not automatically graded (for example a multiple choice might be automatically graded, whereas a homework submission will require grading)
- Add comments to each grade to provide students with feedback
- Modify grades as needed in response to student grade challenges
- Manage the appearance of the grade book (for example the order in which the graded items appear, and the decision to display the total grade as a running weighted total of work completed, or as a percentage of the entire course grade )
- Apply weighting to each grade so that the total grade accumulates to 100%
- Save the grade book as an Excel spreadsheet at the end of the semester for reporting purposes

## Viewing your Gradebook

To see your Gradebook, in the Control Panel, choose **Gradebook** in the **Assessment** panel. You will see table with each row containing the grade record for a single student, and each column containing a course activity that has been added to the Gradebook. The last two column will contain the **Total** (points that have been accumulated so far by each student), and the **Weighted Total** (or **Running Weighted Total**), showing the total either as a percentage of the total of all points for the entire course, or as a percentage of all points for work already graded.

Above the table you will see options to **Add Items**, **Manage Items**, **Modify Gradebook Settings**, **Weight Grades** and **Upload** and **Download Grades**.

## Adding Items to your Gradebook

Some items are automatically added to your Gradebook when they are added to your course activities. For example if you **Add a Test** to your course, this test will be automatically added to your Gradebook unless you unchecked the appropriate box when working on the **Modify Test Options** page. The number of points allocated to the test will be the sum of the points for each test question.

Similarly, if you **Add an Assignment** to your course, the assignment will be automatically added to your Gradebook. In this case you will allocate the points for the assignment when you create the assignment.

And when you create a **Discussion Forum**, you have the option to add this as a Gradebook item if you want to. If you choose to do this you can allocate points for the forum (you can also do this for individual threads).

You may add other activities to your course that are not automatically added to your Gradebook. For example you might want to add a grade for professionalism, or for participation in a field trip, or for a service learning activity. In these cases choose **Add Item**. You will be asked for an item name, a category, an optional description, the points possible for this item, and whether you want this grade to be displayed (usually yes) or included in the Gradebook calculations (usually yes). Be careful which category you choose if you use categories to weight your grades (see **Weighting your Grades** below).

**Important: if you add items to your Gradebook, be sure that your course clearly indicates the activities that the student must perform for this activity, and the rubrics that the student must meet to achieve an optimal grade.**

## Managing Items in the Gradebook

Once you have your Gradebook items listed, you may wish to change the order of appearance, or to remove items that you have added. To do this, in your Gradebook, choose **Manage Items**. You can change the order of the items by clicking the drop down lists by each item and specifying the ordering sequence for that item.

**NOTE:** Sometimes (as when you accidentally copy duplicate components between courses) Blackboard messes up the ordering and you will see multiple items with the same sequence number. For example, you might see the first three items with the sequence number 1, and the fourth item with sequence number 2. Unfortunately there is only one way to fix this: go to the **LAST** item and change the sequence number to the highest available, then go to the second-to-last item and change this to the second highest number, and so on. By the time you reach the first item, the sequence numbers will be correct.

You can also **remove** items that you have added. Note that you can only remove Gradebook items that you have added manually! Since **Tests** and **Assignments** are added **automatically** to the Gradebook when these activities are added to your course, you must remove them from the course in order for them to be removed from the Gradebook (or else exclude them from inclusion in the Gradebook).

**IMPORTANT:** Be very careful when removing Gradebook items! Removing Tests or Assignments that students have already participated in can corrupt your grades.

## Modifying your Gradebook Settings

Usually you will not need to change these settings. However you may wish to add a grade **Category** if the existing categories do not meet your needs. To do this, in the Gradebook, choose **Gradebook Settings**, then **Manage Grade Book Categories**. Click **Add Category** and provide a name for your new category.

## Weighting your Gradebook

Weighting grades is often the most confusing topic for instructors new to Blackboard. There are three basic approaches to weighting your grades:

### Option 1: Do not apply weighting

If you don't apply any weighting, the scores that you have applied for each activity will determine the weighting. As a simple example, let's say your course consists of two tests worth 50 points each, an assignment worth 100 points, and a service learning activity worth 50 points. If you do not apply your own weighting, the two tests and the service learning activity will be weighted to 20% each, and the assignment will be weighted to 40%.

This approach can work and it will be up to you to ensure that the points for each activity will generate an appropriate percentage of the overall course grade. There are some problems with this approach:

- It is often important to allocate a number of points to an activity that does not fit the overall weighting for the activity within the overall course grade. For example, although the two tests are appropriately graded out of 50 points, you may want each test to be worth 30% of the entire course. You may want to grade the assignment out of 100, but set this as 25% of the grade. And you may want to grade the service learning activity out of 50 points but set this as 15% of the course grade.
- You may also find that the percentages do not break down as the example provided here. In the example above, if the service learning activity was more appropriately graded out of 10 points, the percentages that will be allocated become much more complex. If you do not apply your own weighting, the two tests will be weighted to 23.8% each, the assignment will be weighted to 47.6%, and the service learning activity will be weighted to 4.8%. And it can become much more complicated than that.

## Option 2: Apply Weighting by Category

You may elect to weight your grades by category. Each grade item is associated with a category, for example, **Assignments, Essays, Exams, Quizzes, Attendance**. If you take this approach, you can allocate percentages of the course grade to each category and Blackboard will automatically assign weighting to individual items within each category. So, for example, let's say your course has 5 items listed as **Assignments**, 2 items listed as **Quizzes**, and one item listed as a **Final Exam**. If you allocate 60% for Assignments, 20% for Quizzes, and 20% for the Final Exam, Blackboard will weight the 5 assignments at 12% each, the 2 Quizzes at 10% each and the Final Exam at 20%.

This approach works well if all items in each category are to be weighted equally. To weight by category, first be sure that all your graded activity are in the correct category, then in the Gradebook, choose **Weight Grades**. Click the **Weight by Category** button if this is not checked. Now assign percentages to each category that is included in your course grading system and ensure that the total adds to 100%. Press **Submit** and when you return to the Gradebook you will see that all the percentages allocated by the Gradebook are based on the category weighting.

## Option 3: Apply Weighting by Item

You can also simply provide a weight for each grade item directly. To do this, in the Gradebook, choose **Weight Grades**. Click the **Weight by Item** button if this is not checked. Now assign percentages to each grade book item individually and ensure that the total adds to 100%. Press **Submit** and when you return to the Gradebook you will see that all the Gradebook allocated percentages based on the percentages that you provided. **IMPORTANT: Always Check your Grade Points and Weighting.** Check the column headings in your Gradebook to ensure that you have allocated the correct points for each item, and that the weighting is what you expect. This will help you catch any errors, and ensure that your final grades will be accurate.

## Weighted Total or Running Weighted Total?

The last column of the grade book shows the student's overall score weighted as a percentage. This can be used to show progress and to determine the final course grade. There are two ways that this important calculation can be displayed, as a **Weighted Total** or as a **Running Weighted Total**. It is important to understand the difference and to ensure that the students understand what they are seeing in this column.

A **Weighted Total** shows how the student is currently doing based on the entire course grade. So if the student has completed 50% of the course and done everything perfectly they will see 50%. In other words, the weighted total tells the student how much they have accomplished towards their final grade.

A **Running Weighted Total** shows you and your students how the student is currently doing based on work that has already been submitted and graded. So if the student has completed 50% of the course

and done everything perfectly they will see 100%. In other words, the running weighted total tells the student how well their work so far is measuring up.

If you set this column to display a **Running Weighted Total**, be sure that your students clearly understand what they are seeing. Student may challenge their actual final grade by declaring that they assumed that this column was showing their final grade when in fact it was showing the Running Weighted Total. So a student might see 82% and think that they had already achieved this as a final grade and stop working on the course as a result, when in fact the 82% only indicated the quality of their work so far in the course. This has resulted in confusion a number of times.

To change this column between displaying a **Weighted Total** and a **Running Weighted Total**:

- In the Control Panel, choose **Gradebook**, Under **Assessment**
- At the far right you will see that the last column heading is either **Weighted Total** or **Running Weighted Total**.
- Click this heading to go to the **Item Options** page
- Click **Item Information** on the **Item Options** page
- Click either **Yes** or **No** following the prompt: **Exempt items that have not been graded**

If you choose **Yes**, you and your students will see the **Total** as a Running Weighted **Total**, which reflects only work already submitted. So if the students has completed 50% of the course and done everything perfectly they will see 100%

If you choose **No**, you and your student will see the **Total** as a **Weighted Total**, which is a percentage of the entire course grade. So if the students has completed 50% of the course and done everything perfectly they will see 50%

## Using the Gradebook

Once you have set up your Gradebook, you and your students can use it to track progress through the course. The way that you work with each Gradebook item depends on the type of activity being graded.

### Grading Tests

Some test questions can be automatically graded by Blackboard (for example **True/False** or **Multiple Choice**), while others must be reviewed and graded by the instructor (for example **Essay** or **File Upload**). Once a student submits a test, you will see either a score for that student in the appropriate Gradebook column, an exclamation mark, or a padlock.

A **score** indicates the score that Blackboard has assigned because the entire test consisted of questions that could be graded automatically. However, if the test was timed and the student went over the limit,

you will see an exclamation mark (see below). If you click the score, you can view the student's answers and see the points allocated by Blackboard. If you need to modify a score you can do that.

An **exclamation mark** indicates that the student has submitted the test but you must examine the student's work to complete the grade. This will mean either that the test contains questions that must be graded manually or that the student went over the time limit and you may want to apply some penalty. Either way, click the exclamation mark and then choose **View** to view the student's submission. If the student went over the time limit, you will find information about that at the top of the test. If some questions must be manually graded, scroll down to each question and apply the appropriate grade. When you submit the grade it will now show in the Gradebook.

A **padlock** indicates that either the student is currently engaged in taking the test, or that the student experienced a problem while taking the test and the test is hung up (the student will usually contact you in this case and may request that the test be cleared so they can try again). Click the padlock and first check the date/time that the student submitted –this may indicate that the student is currently working on the test in which case you will want to simply allow them to continue and submit. Otherwise view the test to see if the student's answers were submitted or whether the test contains no answers. You will need to use your own judgment to determine whether or not to clear the test. If you clear the test, the student will be able to take the test again.

## Grading Assignments

When assignments are submitted, you will see an exclamation mark or a padlock in the appropriate row/column for that student/assignment.

An **exclamation mark** indicates that the student has submitted the assignment. Click the exclamation mark to view the student's submission. Now choose the **View** option to see a link to the document that the student submitted, as well as boxes to provide the score and feedback. Review the student's work and assign a grade along with any comments. Note that you can also attach a document to send back to the student if appropriate (for example you may want to mark up the student's submission and return it).

A **padlock** indicates that either the student is currently submitting the assignment or that the student experienced a problem while submitting (the student will usually contact you in this case). To allow the student to resubmit their assignment, click the padlock and then click the **Clear Attempt** button. The student can resubmit once the submission has been cleared.

## Grading other Items

If you manually added items to your Gradebook, you can enter grades for these manually. Simply click the appropriate row/column and manually enter the student grade.

## Downloading the Gradebook

At the end of the semester you should download your grade book for archival and reporting purposes.

To download your grades into an Excel spreadsheet, in the Gradebook, choose **Download Grades**. Ensure that the **Delimiter Type** is “**Tab**” and **submit**. The file will be downloaded in a format that can be opened directly in Excel. You will probably want to adjust column widths, etc., for readability.

Be sure to apply an appropriate file name to your downloaded grade book for long term reference. The best approach is to use the complete, unique, course ID, for example **2009su-CIS-110-01.xls**

### **Don't want to use the Gradebook?**

If you don't want to use the Gradebook in your course, you should hide it from the students to avoid any confusion. In the Control Panel, choose **Manage Course Menu**, then choose **Modify Student Tools** area, and then click off the "**Available**" button next to **My Grades**.