

Introduction to Moodle: Lesson 3

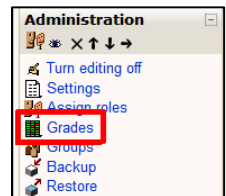
Discussions

One of the attractive options of Moodle is the possibility of engaging your students in online discussions of topics of your choice. These discussions will take place in forums that are similar to the news forum we introduced in the first lesson.

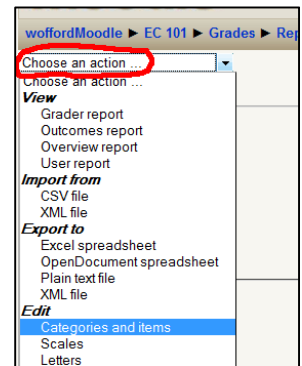
Before you add discussions to Moodle, you need to decide how you want to enter discussion grades in the Moodle gradebook. This is discussed in Appendix A. *In this lesson, we will assume that you are choosing the simplest option for grading: manually recording one grade at the end of the discussion after looking at the quality and quantity of each student's contributions.*

Adding a Discussion Category to the Moodle Gradebook

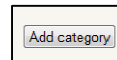
First, we need to set up a **Discussion Category** that will help organize the Moodle Gradebook. Click on **Grades** in the **Administration** menu.



In the Gradebook, click on **Choose an action** and **Categories and items**.



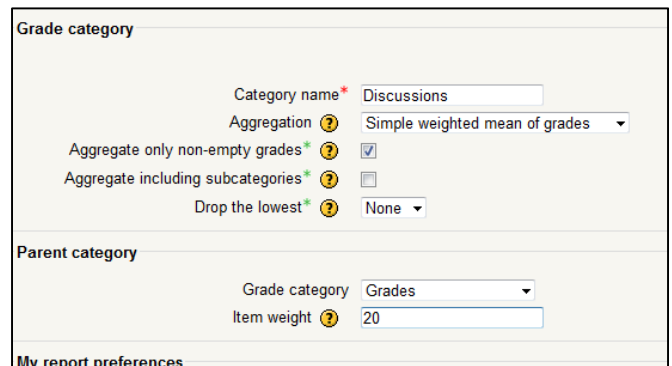
In the next screen, click on the **Add a category** button.



Name the category (I chose “Discussions”) and select **Simple weighted mean of grades** as the Aggregation method.

Use the **Grade** parent category.

I chose 20 as the item weight because we decided to let discussions count 20% of the grade in this example course.¹

A screenshot of the Moodle 'Add category' form. The form is titled 'Grade category' and contains the following fields:

- Category name*: Discussions
- Aggregation: Simple weighted mean of grades
- Aggregate only non-empty grades*:
- Aggregate including subcategories*:
- Drop the lowest*: None

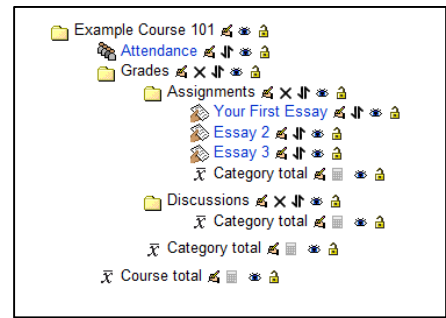
The form also has a 'Parent category' section with:

- Grade category: Grades
- Item weight: 20

At the bottom of the form, there is a link for 'My report preferences'.

¹ Remember that in this example, we are grading four types of activities: exams (40%), written assignments (30%), online discussions (20%), and online quizzes (10%).

When you **Save Changes** you will see the “Discussions” category listed under the “Grades” category.

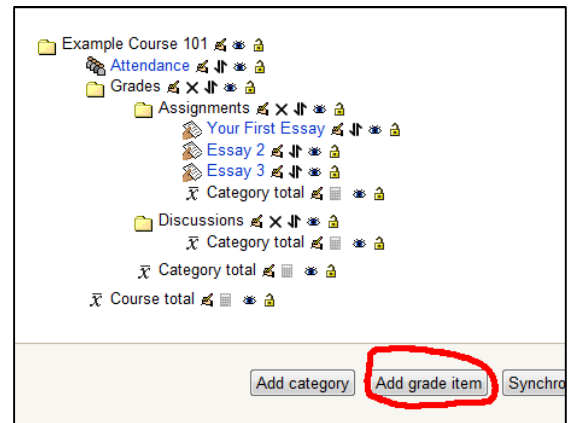


Adding a Particular Discussion to the Gradebook

Now that we have the Discussions category set up, we need to add particular discussions to the gradebook.

Let’s assume that you plan on the class participating in two online discussions during the term. For the sake of simplicity, we will call them “Discussion #1” and “Discussion #2.”

To add the first discussion to the gradebook, click on **Add grade item**.



Enter the **name** of the discussion.

Select a **Grade type** of **Value** and enter the values of the maximum and minimum grades.

Choose the **Discussions** category.

Grade item

Item name: Discussion #1

Item info* ?

ID number* ?

Grade type: Value

Scale: Use no scale

Maximum grade: 50.00

Minimum grade: 0.00

Grade to pass*: 0.00

Grade display type*: Default (Real)

Overall decimal points*: Default (2)

Hidden:

Hidden until*: 22 June 2009 18:35 Disable

Locked:

Lock after*: 6 May 2009 18:35 Disable

Parent category

Grade category: Discussions

Item weight: 0.0000

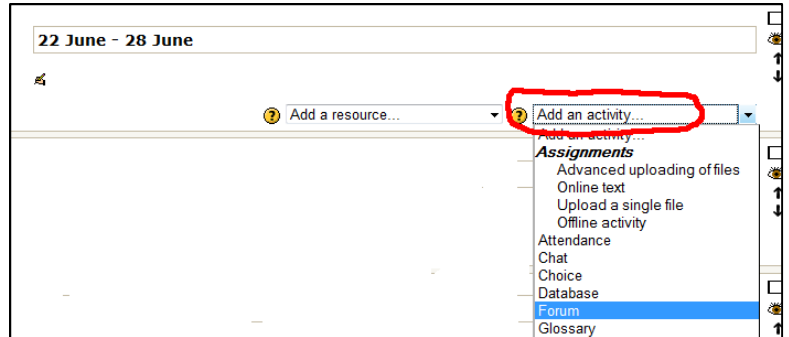
Do the same for Discussion #2.



Adding an Online Discussion

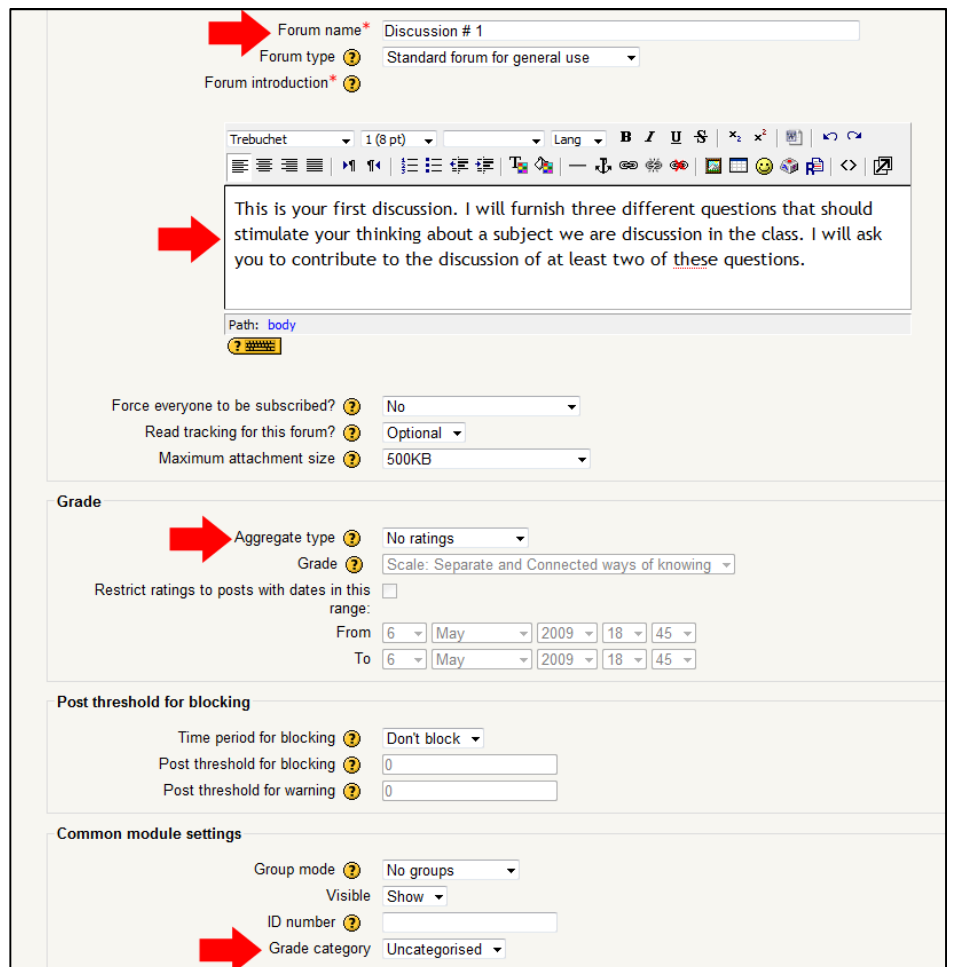
So far, we have only set the gradebook up. Now we need to add a discussion to Moodle. First we will add the name and general description of the discussion.

In one of the weeks, select **Add an activity** and **Forum**.



Enter the **name** of the forum and a **description** of its discussion.

Choose the **type of forum** you wish to use for this activity. The “Standard forum for general use” is demonstrated here, but each type of forum is useful in its own way, and you may wish to use different types for different purposes in one course. Click the yellow question mark next to “Forum type” for a good explanation of your other options.

A screenshot of the Moodle forum creation form. The form is divided into several sections. The 'Forum name' field contains 'Discussion # 1'. The 'Forum type' dropdown is set to 'Standard forum for general use'. The 'Forum introduction' field contains the text: 'This is your first discussion. I will furnish three different questions that should stimulate your thinking about a subject we are discussion in the class. I will ask you to contribute to the discussion of at least two of these questions.' The 'Grade' section has 'Aggregate type' set to 'No ratings' and 'Grade' set to 'Scale: Separate and Connected ways of knowing'. The 'Post threshold for blocking' section has 'Time period for blocking' set to 'Don't block', 'Post threshold for blocking' set to 0, and 'Post threshold for warning' set to 0. The 'Common module settings' section has 'Group mode' set to 'No groups', 'Visible' set to 'Show', 'ID number' set to an empty field, and 'Grade category' set to 'Uncategorised'. Red arrows point to the 'Forum name' field, the 'Forum introduction' text area, the 'Aggregate type' dropdown, and the 'Grade category' dropdown.

Enter **No ratings** as the Aggregate type. Leave the **Grade category** as **Uncategorized**.

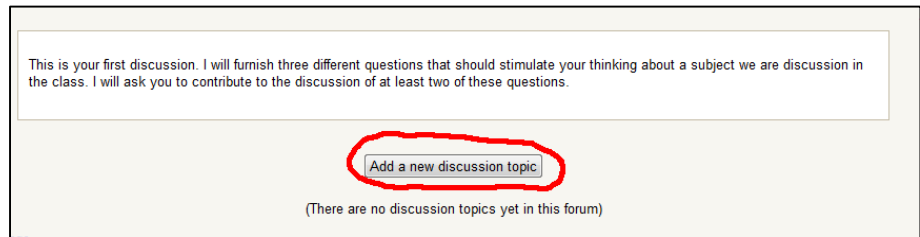
Adding Discussion Questions to a Forum

And finally, we need to enter the questions that will help prompt the discussion.

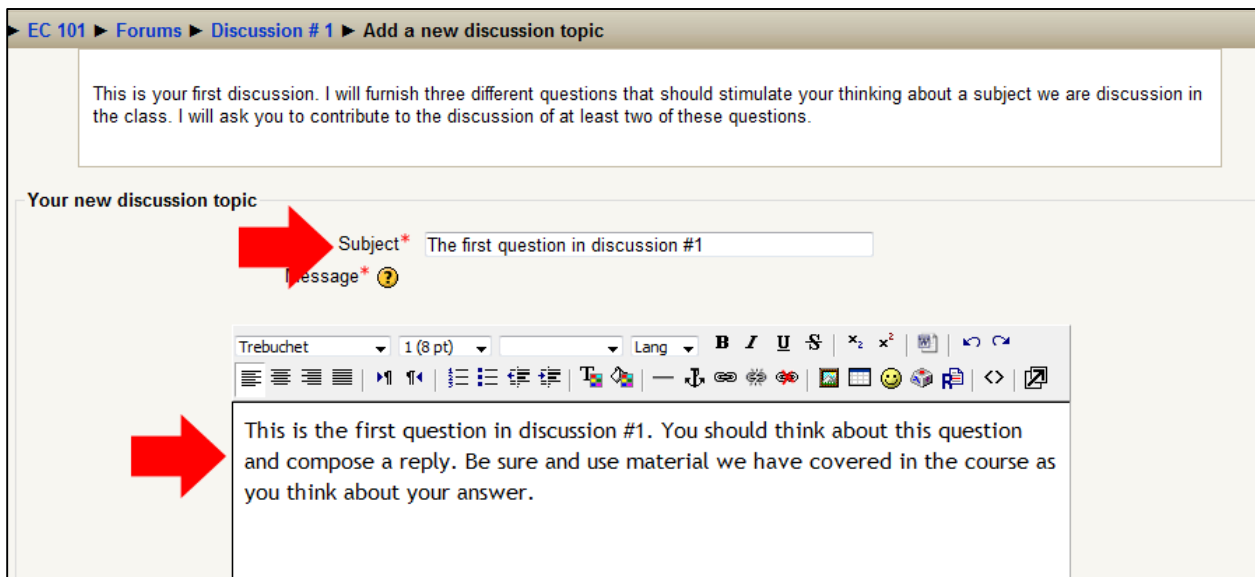
To add questions to the forum, click on the name of the forum on the course Home Page



Click on **Add a new discussion topic.**

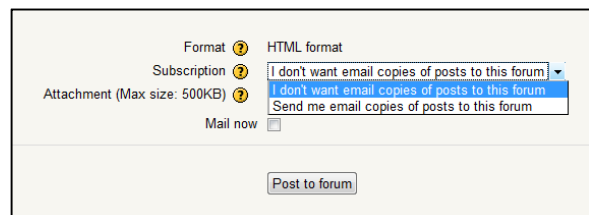


Enter the subject and description of the first discussion topic.



If you want, you can have copies of posts emailed to you. To avoid email overload, you may not want to do this.

When you are ready click on **Post to forum.**



You can post as many questions as you desire.

This is your first discussion. I will furnish three different questions that should stimulate your thinking about a subject we are discussing in the class. I will ask you to contribute to the discussion of at least two of these questions.

[Add a new discussion topic](#)

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
The third question in discussion #1	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 6 May 2009, 07:09 PM
The second question in discussion #1	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 6 May 2009, 07:09 PM
The first question in discussion #1	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 6 May 2009, 07:08 PM

Moodle Docs for this page

You are logged in as Dave Whisnant (Logout)

Participating in a Discussion

Later, when students decide to participate in one of these discussions, they will click on the title of the forum.

6 April - 12 April

Representing Information

- [Hexadecimal Numbers](#)
- [Evolution of Computer Languages](#)
- [Computers in the Modern World](#)

13 April - 19 April

They can choose the discussion they want to join.

This forum is concerned with the impact of computers, both positive and negative, on the world today.

Post a response to at least one question I ask. You also must post a response to a message posted by one of your classmates in a different thread.

[Add a new discussion topic](#)

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Star Trek: How Far Have We Come?	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 8 Apr 2009, 05:24 PM
Electronic Medical Records	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 8 Apr 2009, 05:20 PM
Google and Language-Imperialism	Dave Whisnant	0	Dave Whisnant Wed, 8 Apr 2009, 05:09 PM

They will see the question that begins the discussion. To contribute, they click on **Reply**.

moodle

woffordMoodle > CS 101P > Forums > Computers in the Modern World > Google and Language-Imperialism

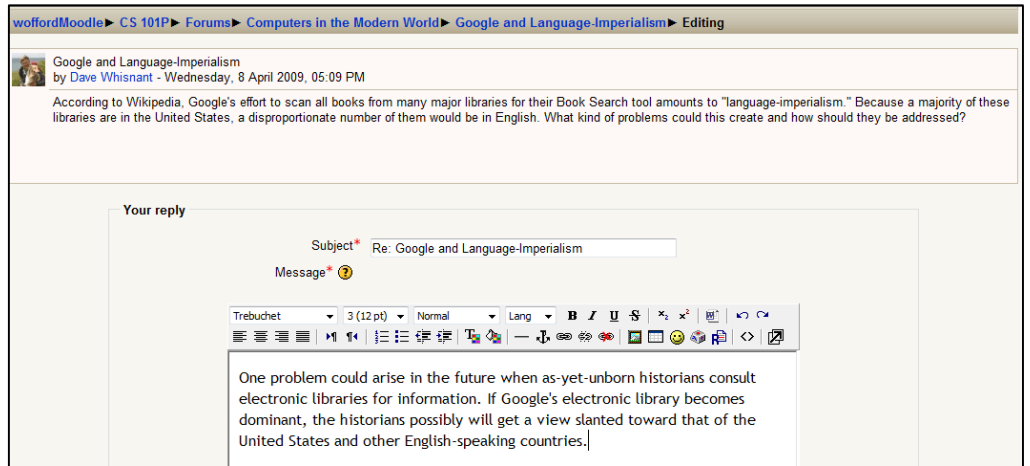
Display replies in nested form

Google and Language-Imperialism
by Dave Whisnant - Wednesday, 8 April 2009, 05:09 PM

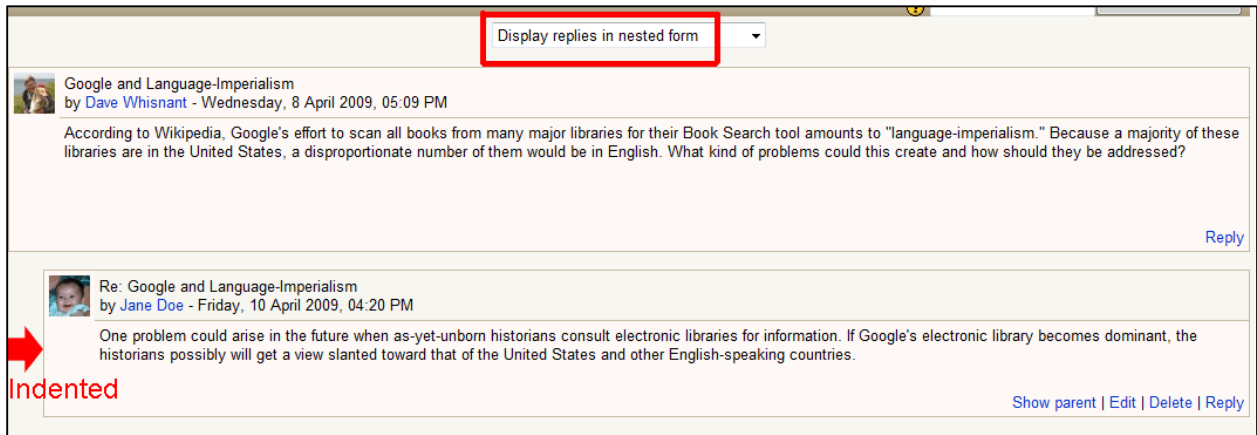
According to Wikipedia, Google's effort to scan all books from many major libraries for their Book Search tool amounts to "language-imperialism." Because a majority of these libraries are in the United States, a disproportionate number of them would be in English. What kind of problems could this create and how should they be addressed?

[Reply](#)

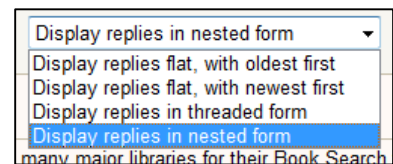
The students will see the usual text editor, which they can use to enter their reply.



The reply will be displayed below the question. If you have chosen to display the discussion in nested form, replies are indented and posted under the message to which they are replying



You can choose other ways of displaying the discussion:



Note: The ways that students can participate in discussions and you can record their grades are described in more detail in *Lesson 7: A Student's and a Professor's View*

Appendix A: Adding Discussions to the Moodle Gradebook

There are a couple of different ways to handle grading discussions and adding these grades to the Moodle gradebook.

1. When a discussion is complete, look at the quality and quantity of each student's contributions. Manually record a grade in the Moodle gradebook for their overall contribution.
2. Rate each discussion contribution individually and let the Moodle gradebook automatically combine these ratings and record the resulting grade.

Let's take a quick look at the two options.

Option 1: Manually Recording Discussion Grades

This option is fairly straightforward. Moodle furnishes reports that make it easy for you to see how many times and in what ways a student has contributed to a discussion. We will cover these reports in detail in Lesson 9. You also can look at each student's contributions, either alone or in the context of the discussion, to help you judge how meaningful their contributions have been. You can decide on each student's overall grade for the discussion and enter the grades in the Moodle gradebook yourself.

First name / Surname	Range	Category total
Bubba Doe		
Jane Doe	40.00	40.00
John Roe		
Overall average	40.00	40.00

Option 2: Letting the Moodle Gradebook Calculate and Record the Grades

This option is a little more complex. After you have initiated a discussion and students have participated by posting replies, you can look at the replies that have been posted.

You can rate each of the replies by putting a grade on the reply. When you have chosen the grades, you can send in these ratings

Discussion Topic #1
by Dave Whisnant - Sunday, 3 May 2009, 12:15 PM
This is the first discussion topic
[Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

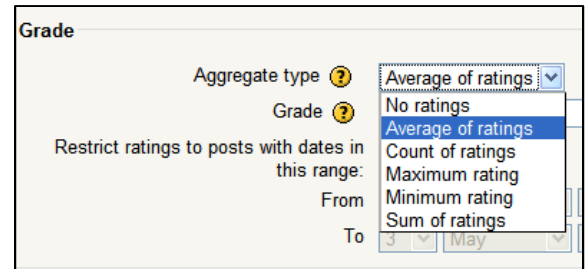
Re: Discussion Topic #1
by Jane Doe - Sunday, 3 May 2009, 12:16 PM
This is Jane Doe's reply
[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)
42 / 50

Re: Discussion Topic #1
by John Roe - Sunday, 3 May 2009, 12:18 PM
This is John's comment about Jane's reply
[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)
Rate...

[Send in my latest ratings](#)

You can specify how Moodle combines the ratings you have submitted to give a grade for the discussion. There are five options²:

- Average (default) :
 - The mean of all the ratings given to posts in that forum. This is especially useful with peer grading when there are a lot of ratings being made.
- Count
 - The number of rated posts becomes the final grade. This is useful when the number of posts is important. Note that the total cannot exceed the maximum grade allowed for the forum.
- Max
 - The highest rating is returned as the final grade. This method is useful for emphasizing the best work from participants, allowing them to post one high-quality post as well as a number of more casual responses to others.
- Min
 - The smallest rating is returned as the final grade. This method promotes a culture of high quality for all posts.
- Sum
 - All the ratings for a particular user are added together. Note that the total is not allowed to exceed the maximum grade for the forum.



Whatever choice you have made, Moodle will combine the ratings you have submitted and record the resulting grades in the Moodle gradebook.

In the spirit of simplicity, which is the general philosophy of these lessons, we will not use the second option in this lesson. Give it a try, though, if you would like.

² From Moodle Docs