

---

# 7

## Assignments and Exercises

### Assignments

After looking at the complex and powerful workshop and quiz modules, assignments will be a refreshingly simple method for collecting student work. Assignments are a simple and flexible catch-all for things you want to grade, but don't fall into any of the other tool types.

The assignment module gives you an easy way to allow students to upload any digital content for grading. You can ask them to submit essays, spreadsheets, presentations, photographs, or small audio or video clips. Anything they can store on their hard drives can be submitted in response to an assignment.

Assignments don't need to require uploads. You can create offline assignments to remind students of real-world assignments they need to complete. Currently, these "offline"

assignments are used to record grades online for activities that don't have an online component.

Assignments are a simple, useful tool you can use in creative ways to collect more authentic responses from your students than is possible with the quiz engine.

## How to Create an Assignment

Compared to some of the other tools we've looked at, assignments are easy to create. Basically, you create a description of the assignment and a place for students to upload their responses. There is no special processing or a lot of options.

To create an assignment:

1. Click Turn Editing Mode On.
2. Select Assignment from the Add menu.
3. On the Editing Assignment page, shown in Figure 7-1, give your assignment a meaningful name.

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Adding a new Assignment". The form contains the following elements:

- Assignment name:** A text input field containing "Meaningful Assignment Name".
- Description:** A rich text editor with a toolbar (font face: Times New Roman, size: 3 (12 pt), style: Normal, bold, italic, underline, strikethrough, link, unlink, list, indent, outdent, text color, background color, undo, redo) and a large text area. To the left of the text area are three help links: "Write carefully", "Ask good questions", and "About the HTML editor".
- Path:** A dropdown menu set to "body".
- Assignment type:** A dropdown menu set to "Offline activity".
- Allow resubmitting:** A dropdown menu set to "No".
- Grade:** A dropdown menu set to "100".
- Maximum size:** A dropdown menu set to "8Mb".
- Due date:** A date picker set to "18 August 2004 - 22 15".

Figure 7-1. Add an assignment

4. In the Description area, carefully describe your assignment. It's a good idea to be very detailed here, even if you've already detailed the requirements in your syllabus. In fact, you might want to copy and paste from your syllabus to avoid confusion.

5. Choose the assignment type: offline or an uploaded file. Offline assignments are descriptions and a column in the grades module. Uploaded assignments require students to submit an electronic file for grading.
6. If you want students to be able to upload multiple revisions of an assignment, set Allow Resubmitting to Yes. Otherwise, leave it on No.
7. Choose the grade scale you want to use for the assignment.
8. Set the maximum size for a file upload. The top of the scale is set by your system administrator.
9. Set the due date and time for your assignment.
10. Click Save Changes to make your assignment available.

Your assignment will appear in your course's main page. It will also be added to your course calendar and will appear in the Upcoming Events block to remind students when it's due.

Later, we'll take a look at how to combine these options in creative ways to help your students engage in some interesting tasks. But for now, let's look at how to manage the responses to the assignment.

## Managing Assignment Submissions

When your students are ready to submit an assignment, they can access the form through the link in the appropriate section in your course. They will see the assignment name, due date, and details. At the bottom of the screen are a text field and two buttons. They will use the Browse... button to find their assignment on their computer. Then they will use the Upload this File button to submit the assignment.

Once they've submitted their assignment, Moodle will show them a block with the date they uploaded the file and the name of the file they uploaded. If you've enabled multiple submissions, they can upload another file, replacing the old one. Each student can submit only one file for each assignment, as shown in Figure 7-2.

---

---

*Warning: Be sure to remind students that if they upload a second file it will delete the file they've already submitted!*

---

---

To view your students' submissions, click on the assignment name in the sections list. You'll see the assignment name and details and a link in the upper righthand corner of the page telling you how many assignments have been submitted.

Each assignment will have its own block. The top of the block lists the student's name and the date he last submitted the assignment. Below the student's name is a link to download the assignment. You will need to download the assignment and open it in another application, unless it's in HTML. So if your student submits a Word document, you'll need to save it to your desktop and open it in Word.

Below the download link is your feedback area (see Figure 7-3). Once you've reviewed the student's assignment, pick the grade for the assignment from the dropdown list. You set the scale when you created the assignment. Below the grade scale, you can type feedback regarding his work. When you're done, click "Save all my feedback" at the top or bottom of the screen.

**Meaningful Assignment Name**

**Due date:** Friday, 20 August 2004, 05:00 PM (1 day 17 hours)  
**Maximum grade:** 100

Detailed description of assignment.

**Your submission:**

**Last modified:** Wednesday, 18 August 2004, 11:15 PM

 Assignment\_Submission.doc

Warning: uploading again will REPLACE your current submission

**Submit your assignment using this form:**

Figure 7-2. Assignment submission

**Submissions feedback updated for 1 people**

Order: Given name    Surname    Last modified ↑    Grade

	<p>Student1 Demo    Last modified: Wednesday, 18 August 2004, 11:15 PM (1 day 17 hours early)</p> <p> Assignment_Submission.doc</p>
	<p>Feedback: 100 / 100    Wednesday, 18 August 2004, 11:26 PM</p> <p>Excellent work!</p>
	<p>Student2 Demo</p> <p>Not submitted yet</p>

Figure 7-3. Assignment grading

If you've given an offline assignment, you can enter grades the same way. Click on the name of the assignment in the sections list. Then click "View assignment grades and feedback." You'll see a list of all your students with grade menus and feedback boxes for each.

Students can see your grade and comment in two ways. First, they can click on the assignment link again. They will see your grade and comments below the submission block. Alternatively, they can click on the grades link. They will see the score for the assignment and can then click on the assignment name to get the written feedback.

## Effective Assignment Practices

The two basic assignment types, offline and upload, are so generic you may find it difficult to use them effectively at first. I find it useful to think about them as two separate modules sharing a common interface.

Offline assignments are useful for recording grades for real-world activities. Currently, they are a sort of hack that allows the creation of manual columns in the grades module. If you look at the grades module (which we'll cover in Chapter 12), you'll notice there is no way to add a column so you can add grades not automatically generated by a quiz or other tool. The offline assignment gives you a way around this limitation by adding a column in which you can record any grade at all. Hopefully, the community will address the limitations in the grades area soon.

The offline assignment is more than just a hack, however. You can use this tool to record scores or feedback for student presentations, class participation, performances, sculptures, or any other nondigital performance. You can create a scale to give nonnumeric feedback if you don't want to give a numeric score to a creative performance. Again, I'll cover creating scales in more detail in Chapter 12.

Uploaded assignments are probably what most people expect when they think about assignments. Remember, you can use these assignment types for any sort of digital content. Most instructors use assignments to collect essays and other word-processing assignments. You can also use them to collect other types of student work. Students could upload PowerPoint slides prior to a presentation. You could assign a what-if scenario using a spreadsheet and ask students to submit it. Students could take a digital photograph of a sculpture or mechanical project and submit it for evaluation.

As long as the file is smaller than the upload maximum, you can create assignments for any sort of digital content. Consider the types of work products you want your students to produce during your course. How many of them could be digital files submitted using an assignment?

### Creative assignments

Simple, flexible tools can lend themselves to creative problem solving. The uses for the assignment module are limited only by your imagination. Let's take a look at case studies, an advanced use of assignments, to get the creative process started.

Case studies are important learning tools in a number of professional fields. Medical schools, business schools, and others use case studies to convey information in a narrative context and give students a chance to immediately apply their new knowledge.

Designing a good case study does take some time, but I encourage you to try an iterative approach. Start small and build up over time. Eventually, you could follow one case study across an entire semester, or build a set of cases, forming the basis for your students' practice. My wife's engineering capstone course used one case study in several parts over the course of a semester to test her students' ability to apply the engineering concepts they had learned over the previous four years. Each phase of the course introduced new challenges they had to solve using different techniques and concepts.

Case studies have a few basic parts. There's a narrative setup, background data, and a problem statement. The problem statement should be an interesting challenge linked to course goals and solvable by applying concepts and procedures learned in class. The narrative setup is important because it contextualizes the assignment, giving students a feel for the people involved in the problem. You can make the case easier or harder depending on how ambiguous your narrative and data are. In fact, you may want to create a case where there is no clear-cut answer to encourage student discussion.

Most case studies require combining assignments with resources to present the case and give students a way to submit their answers. Add your narrative and data as resources using the files and resources tools discussed in Chapter 4. Then add your problem statement as the description of an assignment.

Students should use the narrative and data to solve the problem posed by the assignment. The response should show how the resolution of the problem is supported by the data.

## Exercises

Exercises are a variation on the base assignment tool. Like assignments, students submit a document in response to an assignment prompt. In an exercise, however, they also assess their own work before they turn it in. Students' personal assessments are then compared to your assessment of their submissions. The final grade is a combination of your score and how well the students' assessments match yours.

## How to Create an Exercise

Creating an exercise is similar to creating an assignment, with the addition of a scoring guide such as the workshop module. The instructions for the exercise are uploaded as a separate file.

To create an exercise:

1. Click Turn Editing Mode On.
2. Select Exercise from the "Add an activity..." menu.

3. Give the exercise a name (see Figure 7-4).

**Adding a new Exercise to week 4** ?

**Title:**

**Description:** In an Exercise Assignment the description of the exercise or task to be done by the Students is put into a Word document or HTML file. This file is uploaded into the exercise before the assignment is opened up to the Students. It is also possible to create a set of variants on the same exercise or task, again as Word documents or HTML files, and upload these into the exercise before it is opened up to the Students.

**Grade for Student Assessment:** 100 ?

**Grade for Submission:** 100 ?

**Grading Strategy:** Accumulative ?

**Handling of Multiple Submissions:** Use Mean ?

**Number of Comments, Assessment Elements, Grade Bands, Criterion Statements or Categories in a Rubric:** 1 ?

**Comparison of Assessments:** Fair ?

**Maximum Size:** 500Kb

**Deadline:** 22 February 2005 - 10 10

**Number of Entries in League Table:** 0 ?

**Hide Names from Students:** No ?

Save changes Cancel

Figure 7-4. Add an exercise

4. Set the options for your exercise:

#### Grade for Student Assessment

The maximum number of points for the comparison of your grade for the submission and the student's self-assessment.

#### Grade for Submission

The maximum number of points for your assessment of the student's submission. You can use these two grades to create a relative weight for each component. If you want your grade to be a majority of the final grade, make the student assessment grade less than the submission grade.

#### Grading Strategy

The type of scoring guide you and your students will use to assess the submission. For a complete description of each option, see Chapter 6.

#### Assessment Elements, Grade Elements or Categories in a Rubric

The number of performance dimensions you wish to evaluate.

#### Comparison of Assessments

Determines how the student's self-assessment will be compared to yours. The higher/lower this setting, the more a student will be penalized for not matching your assessment. I encourage you to read the extensive help entry associated with this item.

**Maximum Size**

The maximum size for any of the uploaded files.

**Deadline**

The due date for the exercise.

**Number of Entries in League Table**

If you want to display the students results' in a table, set this to a value greater than 0. The top student entries will be displayed in the table.

**Hide Names from Students**

If you display a league table, this setting will determine whether the students' names are displayed with their work.

5. Click "Save changes."
6. Moodle will then display the assessment elements page. You can now enter the grading elements for this exercise. You and your students will use this scoring guide to assess the students' work. (see Figure 7-5).
7. Click "Save changes."

Editing Assessment Elements <span>?</span>	
<b>Element 1:</b>	Did you include your name?
<b>Type of Scale:</b>	2 point Yes/No scale <input type="button" value="v"/>
<b>Element Weight:</b>	1 <input type="button" value="v"/>
<b>Element 2:</b>	Did you cite all your references?
<b>Type of Scale:</b>	2 point Yes/No scale <input type="button" value="v"/>
<b>Element Weight:</b>	1 <input type="button" value="v"/>

Figure 7-5. Exercise scoring guide

## Managing Exercises

Once you've completed the scoring guide, Moodle will take you to the exercise management page (see Figure 7-6). Like the workshop module, the exercise module uses a phased approach to deployment and assessment. Phase 1 is the setup phase, where you can upload the exercise instructions and review the assessment elements. Phase 2 allows students to perform self-assessments and upload their submissions. Phase 3 handles the final grading. These three phases are accessible from the tabs in the exercise management page.

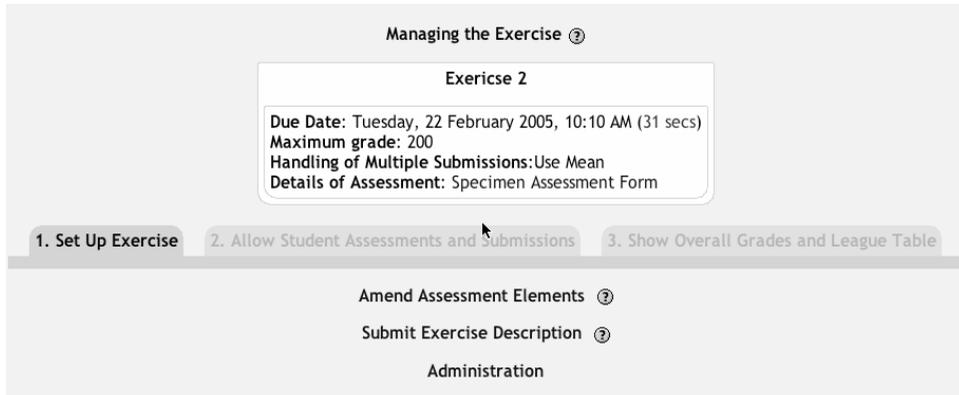


Figure 7-6. Exercise management page

### Phase 1: Setup

Once you've entered the assessment elements for the exercise, you'll see the screen for phase 1. At this point, the most important thing to do is upload the exercise description. Unlike most of the other modules, this module requires you to upload a separate document containing the exercise instructions instead of simply typing them into a description field.

---

*Warning: Moodle requires you to upload a file for the description before you can move to phase 2.*

---

To upload an exercise description:

1. From the Managing the Exercise page, click the Phase 1 tab.
2. Click the Submit Exercise Description link.
3. Give the description file a title. You must fill in this field or Moodle will reject the file.
4. Click Browse... and find the file containing the instructions for the exercise.
5. Click "Upload this file."

You can upload multiple files for the description, but I recommend sticking to one file per exercise to avoid confusion. The description file can be any electronic document smaller than the maximum upload size.

Once you've uploaded an instruction file, move to phase 2 to allow students to submit their work and perform self-assessments.

### Phase 2: Allow student assessments and submissions

Once you've moved to phase 2, students can perform self-assessments and upload their work for grading. The student interface is a little surprising, so you may want to tell your students what to expect. I know it confused my students when they first encountered it. I

think most people expect to upload their work first, and then perform the self-assessment. The exercise module requires students to perform the assessment first, then upload their file (see Figure 7-7).

Please complete this form when you have finished the instructions in the exercise shown below. ⓘ

Your Assessment	
<b>Element 1:</b>	Did you include your name? <span style="float: right;">Weight: 1.00</span>
<b>Grade:</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> No
<b>Feedback:</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
<b>Element 2:</b>	Did you cite your references? <span style="float: right;">Weight: 1.00</span>
<b>Grade:</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> No
<b>Feedback:</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
<b>Element 3:</b>	Did you say something interesting? <span style="float: right;">Weight: 1.00</span>
<b>Grade:</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> No
<b>Feedback:</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

Figure 7-7. Student self-assessment

Once students have uploaded their work, it will be available for you to grade. On the Managing the Exercise page, you'll see the link "X Student Submissions for Assessment." Once students have started to submit their exercises, you can click on this link to download their work and give them a grade. You'll use the same scoring guide the students used.

---

*Warning: Like the workshop module, the exercise module updates itself when the periodic script runs on the server. Your system administrator is responsible for setting how often this script is run. Student submissions may not be available for grading for several minutes after they are submitted.*

---

Once you've scored the students' work, Moodle compares your assessment to the students' assessment and gives a score based on how well the two scores match. This score is the grade for the students' self-assessment, which is added to your score for the submission itself.

Once all students have submitted their work, or the deadline has passed, you can move to phase 3.

### **Phase 3: Show overall grades and league table**

Once the exercise is complete, you can display the results to the students. The overall grades are calculated as weighted averages of the students' self-assessment grades and your grades for their work. The final grades, therefore, depend on the level of comparison and the relative weight of the two scores.

If you have chosen to display a league table, the top scoring submissions will be available for students to review.

## **Effective Exercise Practices**

Exercises can be a valuable tool to help students develop a critical eye for their own work. By performing self-evaluations, students reflect on their own work and practice self-criticism using the same guidelines an expert would use to evaluate their work. Reflecting on their work will help them develop the critical faculties they need to perform at a higher level in the future.

The key to this reflective practice is a good scoring guide. A specific and clear scoring guide is critical to the success of the exercise, from both a cognitive and practical perspective. If students are not clear about exactly what they are evaluating themselves on, they will be unable to gauge future performance. They will also have a difficult time matching your grade. If the scoring guide is too subjective or vague, the students' self-assessments will never match yours, resulting in poor assessment scores.

Take some time to develop your scoring guide and explain it to your students. I would even recommend sharing the performance dimensions with the students ahead of time, and ask them to discuss what each element means in a forum. This will give them a chance to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the performance and allow them to do a better job on their submissions.

## **Summary**

Assignments are an easy way to gather and track student submissions. Students can submit any type of electronic file to fulfill the requirements. Instead of collecting unwieldy stacks of paper, you can let Moodle track who has turned in a paper and when. The feedback options provide you with an easy way to send grades and/or comments back to the students about their work. Exercises give you the additional capability of requiring students to evaluate their own work as they submit their assignments.

