



Community Experience Distilled

Moodle 2.0

E-Learning Course Development

A complete guide to successful learning using Moodle

William Rice

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PUBLISHING community experience distilled

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BIRMINGHAM - MUMBAI

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*For Gavin Bradford. You bring curiosity, joy,
and boundless energy into our home!*

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Preface

Moodle is the leading open source learning management system. Using Moodle, teachers can easily construct richly-textured web-based courses. A course can consist of a number of lessons, with each lesson including reading materials; activities such as quizzes, tests, surveys, and projects; and social elements that encourage interaction and group work between students.

Moodle 2.0 E-Learning Course Development shows you how to use Moodle as a tool to enhance your teaching. It will help you to analyze your students' requirements, and come to an understanding of what Moodle can do for them. After that, you'll see how to use every feature of Moodle to meet your course goals. Moodle is relatively easy to install and use, but the real challenge lies in developing a learning process that leverages its power and maps effectively onto the established learning situation. This book guides you through meeting that challenge.

Whether you are the site creator or a course creator, you can use this book as you would a project plan. As you work your way through each chapter, the book provides guidance on making decisions that meet your goals for your learning site. This helps you to create the kind of learning experience that you want for your teachers (if you're the site creator) or students (if you're the teacher). You can also use this book as a traditional reference manual, but its main advantages are its step-by-step, project-oriented approach, and the guidance it gives you on creating an interactive learning experience.

Moodle is designed to be intuitive to use, and its online help is well written. It does a good job of telling you how to use each of its features. What Moodle's help files don't tell you is, when and why to use each feature, and what effect the feature will have on the students' experience. That is what this book provides.

This book shows you how to add static learning material, interactive activities, and social features to your courses, so that students can reach their full learning potential. This book is a complete guide to successful teaching using Moodle, focused on course development and delivery, and using the best educational practices.

What this book covers

Chapter 1, A Guided Tour of Moodle: In this chapter, you will learn what Moodle can do and what kind of user experiences you can create for your students and teachers. You will also learn how the Moodle philosophy shapes the user experience. This helps you to decide how to make the best use of Moodle, and to plan your learning site.

Chapter 2, Installing Moodle: This chapter guides you through the installation of Moodle on your Web server.

Chapter 3, Configuring Your Site: This chapter helps you to configure your site so that it behaves in the way that you envision, and helps to create the user experience that you want. If someone manages your Moodle site for you, you can use this chapter to learn about configuration options that will make the creation and teaching of courses easier for you and your teachers.

Chapter 4, Creating Categories and Courses: This chapter shows you how to create course categories and new courses. It covers course settings that affect the behavior of the course. It also shows you how to enroll teachers and students in a course.

Chapter 5, Adding Static Course Material: Static course materials are resources that students view or listen to, but don't interact with. This chapter shows you how to add web pages, graphics, Adobe Acrobat documents, and media to a course.

Chapter 6, Adding Interaction with Lessons and Assignments: Lessons and Assignments are Moodle activities that allow the student to interact with Moodle, and with the teacher. This chapter shows you how to create and use those activities.

Chapter 7, Evaluating Students with Quizzes, Choices, and Feedback: This chapter shows you how to evaluate your students' knowledge and attitudes to your course.

Chapter 8, Adding Social Activities to Your Course: Moodle excels at peer interaction. This chapter shows you several tools for making student-to-student interaction an integral part of your course.

Chapter 9, Blocks: Every block adds functionality to your site or your course. This chapter describes many of Moodle's blocks, helps you decide which ones will meet your goals, and tells you how to implement them.

Chapter 10, Features for Teachers: This chapter shows you how to use Moodle's gradebook and logs to track student activity.

What you need for this book

This book is designed for people who are creating and delivering courses in Moodle. To make the best use of this book, you will need to have the role of Teacher on a Moodle site. That is, you will need the ability to edit a course on a Moodle site.

This book also contains some information for the Administrator of a Moodle site. Even if you're not the Site Administrator, you can use this information to work with your Administrator to configure the site and use logs and reports.

Who this book is for

This book is for anyone who wants to make the most of Moodle's features to produce an interactive online learning experience. If you're an educator, corporate trainer, or just someone with something to teach, this book can guide you through the installation, configuration, creation, and management of a Moodle site. It is suitable for people who perform the task of creating and setting up the learning site, and for those who create and deliver courses on the site. That is, this book is for Site Administrators, Course Creators, and Teachers.

Conventions

In this book, you will find a number of styles of text that distinguish between different kinds of information. Here are some examples of these styles, and an explanation of their meaning.

Code words in text are shown as follows: "The PHP installed on your server uses a file called `php.ini` to store its settings."



A block of code is set as follows:



```
$CFG->dbtype      = 'mysql';
$CFG->dbhost       = 'localhost';
$CFG->dbname       = 'info-overload';
$CFG->dbuser       = 'info-overload';
$CFG->dbpass       = 'badpassword';
$CFG->dbpersist    = false;
$CFG->prefix       = 'mdl20_';
```

When we wish to draw your attention to a particular part of a code block, the relevant lines or items are set in bold:

```
<meta name="description" content="
Welcome to the Wilderness Skills site
title>Wilderness Skills</title>
<meta name="keywords" content="moodle, Wilderness Skills " />
```

New terms and **important words** are shown in bold. Words that you see on the screen, in menus or dialog boxes for example, appear in the text like this: "Go to the **Download Moodle** page and select the version and format that you need".

 Warnings or important notes appear in a box like this. 

 Tips and tricks appear like this. 

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1

A Guided Tour of Moodle

Moodle is a free learning management system that allows you to create powerful, flexible, and engaging online learning experiences. I use the phrase "online learning experiences" instead of "online courses" deliberately. The phrase "online course" often connotes a sequential series of web pages, some images, maybe a few animations, and a quiz, provided online. There might also be some email or bulletin board communication among the teacher and students. However, online learning can be much more engaging than that.

Moodle's name gives you insight into its approach to e-learning. From the official Moodle documentation:

*The word Moodle was originally an acronym for **Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment**, which is mostly useful to programmers and education theorists. It's also a verb that describes the process of lazily meandering through something, doing things as it occurs to you to do them, an enjoyable tinkering that often leads to insight and creativity. As such it applies both to the way Moodle was developed, and to the way a student or teacher might approach studying or teaching an online course. Anyone who uses Moodle is a **Moodler**.*

The phrase "online learning experience" connotes a more active, engaging role for the students and teachers. It connotes web pages that can be explored in any order, courses with live chats among students and teachers, forums where users can rate messages on their relevance or insight, online workshops that enable students to evaluate each other's work, impromptu polls that let the teacher evaluate what students think of a course's progress, and directories set aside for teachers to upload and share their files. All of these features create an active learning environment, full of different kinds of student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction. This is the kind of user experience that Moodle excels at, and the kind that this book will help you to create.

Step-by-step: Using each chapter

When you create a Moodle learning site, you usually follow a defined series of steps. This book is arranged to support that process. Each chapter shows you how to get the most from each step. Each step is listed below, with a brief description of the chapter that supports that step.

As you work your way through each chapter, your learning site will grow in scope and sophistication. By the time you finish this book, you should have a complete, interactive learning site. As you learn more about what Moodle can do, and see your courses taking shape, you may want to change some of the things that you did in previous chapters. Moodle offers you this flexibility. And, this book helps you to determine how those changes will cascade throughout your site.

Step 1: Learn About the Moodle experience (Chapter 1)

Every Learning Management System (LMS) has a paradigm, or approach, that shapes the user experience and encourages a certain kind of usage. An LMS might encourage very sequential learning by offering features that enforce a given order for each course. It might discourage student-to-student interaction by offering few features that support it, while encouraging solo learning by offering many opportunities for the student to interact with the course material. In this chapter, you will learn what Moodle can do and what kind of user experience your students and teachers will have when they use Moodle. You will also learn about the Moodle philosophy, and how it shapes the user experience. With this information, you'll be ready to decide how to make the best use of Moodle's many features, and to plan your online learning site.

Step 2: Install Moodle (Chapter 2)

This chapter guides you through installing Moodle on your web server. It will help you to estimate the amount of disk space, bandwidth, and memory that you will need for Moodle. This can help you to decide upon the right hosting service for your needs.

Step 3: Configure your site (Chapter 3)

Most of the decisions that you make when installing and configuring Moodle will affect the user experience. Not just students and teachers, but also course creators and site administrators are affected by these decisions. Although Moodle's online help does a good job of telling you how to install and configure the software, it doesn't tell you how the settings you choose affect the user experience. *Chapter 3* covers the implications of these decisions, and helps you to configure the site so that it behaves in the way that you envision.

Step 4: Create the framework for your learning site (Chapter 4)

In Moodle, every course belongs to a category. *Chapter 4* takes you through the creation of course categories, and the creation of courses. Just as you chose sitewide settings during installation and configuration, you choose course-wide settings when creating each course. This chapter tells you the implications of the various course settings, so that you can create the experience that you want for each course. It also shows you how to add teachers and students to courses.

Step 5: Add basic course material (Chapter 5)

In most online courses, the core material consists of web pages that the students view. These pages can contain text, graphics, movies, sound files, games, and exercises: anything that can appear on the World Wide Web can appear on a Moodle web page. *Chapter 5* covers how to add web pages to Moodle courses, and also how to add other kinds of static course material: links to other websites, media files, labels, and directories of files. This chapter also helps you to decide when to use each of these types of material.

Step 6: Make your courses interactive (Chapter 6)

In this context, "interactive" means interaction between the student and teacher, or the student and an active web page. Student-to-student interaction is covered in the next step. This chapter covers activities that involve interaction between the student and an active web page, or between the student and the teacher. Interactive course material includes lessons that guide students through a defined path based upon their answers to review questions, and assignments that are uploaded by the student and then graded by the teacher. *Chapter 6* tells you how to create these interactions, and how each of them affects the student and teacher experience.

Step 7: Create tools to evaluate your students (Chapter 7)

In *Chapter 7, Evaluating Students with Quizzes, Choices, and Feedback*, you'll learn how to evaluate students' knowledge with a Quiz. You will also learn how to evaluate their attitude towards the class by using the Feedback activity. Finally, you'll learn how to evaluate students' opinions by using the Choice activity.

Step 8: Make your course social (Chapter 8)

Social course material enables student-to-student interaction. Moodle allows you to add chats, forums, and Wikis to your courses. These types of interactions will be familiar to many students. You can also create glossaries that are site-wide and ones that are specific to a single course. Students can also add to the glossaries. Finally, Moodle offers a powerful workshop tool, which enables students to view and evaluate each others, work. Each of these interactions makes the course more interesting, but also makes it more complicated for the teacher to manage. *Chapter 8* helps you to make the best use of Moodle's social features. The result is a course that encourages students to contribute, share, and engage.

Step 9: Add functionality by using blocks (Chapter 9)

Every block adds functionality to your site or your course. You can use blocks to display calendars, enable commenting, enable tagging, show navigation features, and much more. This chapter describes many of Moodle's blocks, helps you decide which ones will meet your goals, and tells you how to implement them.

Step 10: Take the pulse of your course (Chapter 10)

Moodle offers several tools to help teachers administer and deliver courses. It keeps detailed access logs that enable teachers to see exactly what content students accessed, and when they did so. It also allows teachers to establish custom grading scales, which are available site-wide or for a single course. Student grades can be accessed online and also downloaded to a spreadsheet program. Finally, teachers can collaborate in special forums (bulletin boards) reserved just for them.

The Moodle philosophy

Moodle is designed to support a style of learning called *Social Constructionism*. This style of learning is interactive. The social constructionist philosophy believes that people learn best when they interact with the learning material, construct new material for others, and interact with other students about the material. The difference between a traditional class and a class following the social constructionist philosophy is the difference between a lecture and a discussion.

Moodle does not require you to use the social constructionist method for your courses. However, it best supports this method. For example, Moodle allows you to add several kinds of static course material. This is course material that a student reads, but does not interact with:

- Web pages
- Links to anything on the Web (including material on your Moodle site)
- A directory of files
- A label that displays any text or image

However, Moodle also allows you to add interactive course material. This is course material that a student interacts with, by answering questions, entering text, or uploading files:

- Assignment (uploading files to be reviewed by the teacher)
- Choice (a single question)
- Lesson (a conditional, branching activity)
- Quiz (an online test)

Moodle also offers activities where students interact with each other. These are used to create social course material:

- Chat (live online chat between students)
- Forum (you can have zero or more online bulletin boards for each course)
- Glossary (students and/or teachers can contribute terms to site-wide glossaries)
- Wiki (this is a familiar tool for collaboration to most younger students and many older students)
- Workshop (this supports the peer review and feedback of assignments that students upload)

In addition, some of Moodle's add-on modules add even more types of interaction. For example, one add-on module enables students and teachers to schedule appointments with each other.

The Moodle experience

Because Moodle encourages interaction and exploration, your students' learning experience will often be non-linear. Moodle can be used to enforce a specific order upon a course, using something called conditional activities. Conditional activities can be arranged in a sequence. Your course can contain a mix of conditional and non-linear activities.

In this section, I'll take you on a tour of a Moodle learning site. You will see the student's experience from the time that the student arrives at the site, through entering a course, to working through some material in the course. You will also see some student-to-student interaction, and some functions used by the teacher to manage the course. Along the way, I'll point out many of the features that you will learn to implement in this book, and see how the demo site is using those features.

The Moodle Front Page

The Front Page of your site is the first thing that most visitors will see. This section takes you on a tour of the Front Page of my demonstration site.



Probably the best Moodle demo sites are <http://demo.moodle.net/> and <http://school.demo.moodle.net/>.

Arriving at the site

When a visitor arrives at a learning site, the visitor sees the Front Page. You can require the visitor to register and log in before seeing any part of your site, or you can allow an anonymous visitor to see a lot of information about the site on the Front Page, which is what I have done:

William Rice's Moodle Demo Site You are not logged in. ([Login](#))

Main menu

- [How to use this site](#)
- [How to enroll in a course](#)

Navigation

- [Home](#)
- [Courses](#)

Calendar

May 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Moodle 2.0 Book Almost Ready!

I'm working hard on the Moodle 2.0 for E-learning book. It's due out this summer. I'll let you know on Twitter as soon as it's published.

[FOLLOW ME ON twitter](#)

[Win a Prize: Test Your Knowledge of E-mail History](#)

[Global Chat Room](#)

At last, Moodle 2.0 is here! Welcome to my demonstration site. Here you will find demonstration courses from my book, *Moodle 2.0 E-Learning*, available from Packt Publishing.

Tags

All tags:
[courses: knowledge management](#)
[more...](#)

Please [log in](#) to tag your favourite courses

Login

Username

Password

[Login](#)

[Create new account](#)
[Lost password?](#)

Courses

Corporate Demo Courses

- [Email Overload: File, Act, Defer](#)

Academic Demo Courses

- [Basic Botany in Plain Language](#)
- [How to Outline](#)
- [Memorization Skills with Mnemonics](#)

One of the first things that a visitor will notice is the announcement at the top and centre of the page, **Moodle 2.0 Book Almost Ready!**. Below the announcement are two activities: a quiz, **Win a Prize: Test Your Knowledge of E-mail History**, and a chat room, **Global Chat Room**. Selecting either of these activities will require to the visitor to register with the site, as shown in the following screenshot:

William Rice's Moodle Demo Site You are not logged in

[Home](#) ► [Login to the site](#)

Returning to this web site?

Login here using your username and password (Cookies must be enabled in your browser) ?

Username

Password [Login](#)

[Forgotten your username or password?](#)

Some courses may allow guest access

[Login as a guest](#)

Is this your first time here?

Hi! For full access to courses you'll need to take a minute to create a new account for yourself on this web site. Each of the individual courses may also have a one-time "enrolment key", which you won't need until later. Here are the steps:

1. Fill out the [New Account](#) form with your details
2. An email will be immediately sent to your email address.
3. Read your email, and click on the web link it contains.
4. Your account will be confirmed and you will be logged in.
5. Now, select the course you want to participate in.
6. If you are prompted for an "enrolment key" - use the one that your teacher has given you. This will "enrol" you in the course.
7. You can now access the full course. From now on you will only need to enter your personal username and password (in the form on this page) to log in and access any course you have enrolled in.

[Create new account](#)

Anonymous, guest, and registered access

Notice the line **Some courses may allow guest access** at the middle of the page.

You can set three levels of access for your site, and for individual courses:

- **Anonymous** access allows anyone to see the contents of your site's Front Page. Notice that there is no Anonymous access for courses. Even if a course is open to Guests, the visitor must either manually log in as the user Guest, or you must configure the site to automatically log in a visitor as Guest.
- **Guest** access requires the user to login as Guest. This allows you to track usage, by looking at the statistics for the user Guest. However, as everyone is logged in as the user Guest, you can't track individual users.
- **Registered** access requires the user to register on your site. You can allow people to register with or without e-mail confirmation, require a special code for enrolment, manually create their accounts yourself, import accounts from another system, or use an outside system (like an LDAP server) for your accounts. There's more on this in *Chapter 2*.

The Main menu

Returning to the Front Page, notice the **Main menu** in the upper-left corner. This menu consists of two documents that tell the user what the site is about, and how to use it.



In Moodle, icons tell the user what kind of resource will be accessed by a link. In this case, the icon tells the user that the first resource is a PDF (Adobe Acrobat) document, and the second is a web page. Course materials that students observe or read, such as web or text pages, hyperlinks, and multimedia files are called **Resources**. In *Chapter 5, Adding Static Course Material*, you will learn how to add Resources to a course.

Blocks

In the side bars of the page, you will find Blocks. For example, the **Main menu**, **Calendar**, and **Tags** blocks. You can choose to add Blocks to the Front Page and to each course, individually.

Other Blocks display a summary of the current course, a list of courses available on the site, the latest news, a list of the people who are online, and other information. In the lower-right corner of the Front Page you will see the **Login** Block. *Chapter 9* tells you how to use these Blocks.



Your site's Front Page is a course!

You can add Blocks to the Front Page of your site because the Front Page is essentially a course. Anything that you can add to a course—such as Resources or Blocks, can be added to the Front Page.

Site Description

On the rightmost side of the Front Page you can see a **Site Description**. This is optional. If this were a course, you could choose to display the **Course Description** here.

The Site or Course Description can contain anything that you can put on a web page. It is essentially a block of HTML code that is put onto the Front Page.

Available courses

You can choose to display available courses on the Front Page of your site. In the demonstration site, I've created a category for **Free Courses** and another for **Wild Plants**. **Free Courses** allow Guest users to enter. Courses in other categories require users to register.

Courses	
▼ Corporate Demo Courses	
Email Overload: File, Act, Defer	i
▼ Academic Demo Courses	
Basic Botany in Plain Language	i +
How to Outline	i + +
Memorization Skills with Mnemonics	i

Clicking on the **Information** icon [i](#) next to a course displays the **Course Description**. Clicking on a course name takes you to the course. If the course allows anonymous access, you are taken directly into the course. If the course allows guest access, or requires registration, you are taken to the Login screen.

Inside a course

Now let us take a look inside a course.

The screenshot shows a Moodle course page for 'Basic Botany in Plain Language'. The page is viewed by a user logged in as 'Student1 AATest'. The breadcrumb trail at the top left reads 'Home > My courses > Basic Botany'. The page is divided into three main sections: a left-hand navigation menu, a central content area, and a right-hand sidebar with various utility blocks.

Navigation: A tree view showing the site structure. The 'Basic Botany' course is expanded, showing sub-sections like 'About this Course', 'Course Goals and Outline', 'Course Discussion', 'News forum', 'The Plants Around You', 'Interesting Finds', 'Terminology', and 'The Elements of Botany by Asa Gray'. Other sections include 'Types of Plants', 'Life Cycles of Plants', 'Flowers', 'Topic 4', 'Outlining', and 'Mnemonics'.

Topic outline: The main content area. It features a section titled 'About this Course' with a sub-section 'Basic Botany'. The text describes the course's focus on understanding plant field guides and common North American plants. Below this is a 'Course Description' section, which includes a paragraph about the difficulty of memorizing botanical terms and a suggestion to join the 'Course Discussion' forum. A 'Group Activities' section lists 'The Plants Around You', 'Interesting Finds', and 'Terminology'.

Right-hand sidebar: Contains several utility blocks: 'Latest news' (no news posted yet), 'Upcoming events' (Global Chat Room today), 'Search forums' (with a search box and 'Go' button), 'Messages' (one message from Teacher1 AATest), and 'Online users' (Student1 AATest, last 5 minutes).

Breadcrumbs

In the preceding screenshot, the user has logged in as **student1** and entered the **Basic Botany** course. We know this from the breadcrumbs trail in the upper-left corner of the screen, which tells us the name of the site and the name of the course. In the upper-right corner of the screen, we see a confirmation that the user has logged in.

Blocks

Like the Front Page, this course uses various Blocks. The most prominent is the Navigation Block on the left. Let's talk more about navigation.