

Moodle Overview (Moodle 1.9)

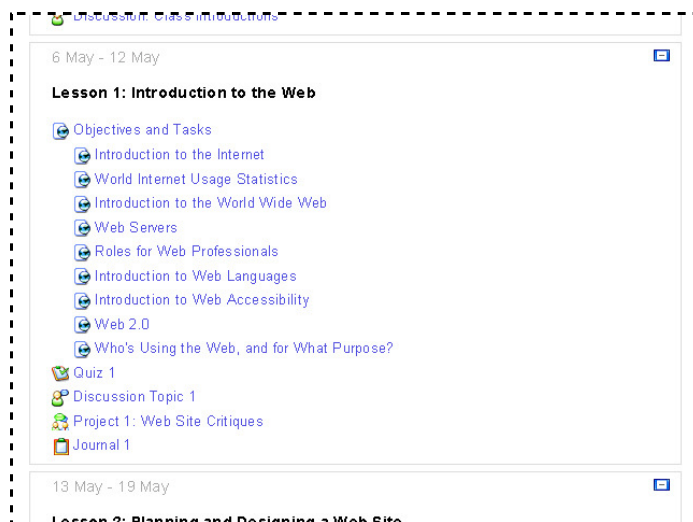
Jared Stein, Utah Valley University – jstein@uvu.edu

Moodle is a lot like other LMSs in that it provides all the basic tools for e-learning. But Moodle differs in its basic organizational structure, and offers a variety of new and specialized tools for e-learning and a *social constructionism* approach to education.



Course Layout: Topics and Weeks

Moodle provides several basic layout formats for setting up a course. Often courses are sectioned into **topics** that correspond to lessons or weeks.



Rather than keeping the course's weekly activities in folders and subfolders, lessons (called **topics**) in Moodle are right on the home page, running vertically in a sequential fashion, and are complemented by **blocks** on either side.

Various out-of-the-box **blocks** can be added to a course to facilitate course management or for student reference. These might include “Latest News”, “Blogs”, “Upcoming Events”, etc. You may choose to include an automated Calendar, or embed RSS feeds.

Topics provide **automatic navigation** for resources and activities similar to Bb Vista, but Moodle also provides a built-in “Jump to...” feature to facilitate quicker course navigation:

Activities & Resources

Moodle categorizes the content in topics/weeks as **Activities** or **Resources**. Activities include anything that the student or the teacher actively engages with (discussions, assignments, chat, wikis, etc). Resources are generally static content pages.

Moodle has the staples of expected LMS tools:

- **Live Chat**
- **Forums** for asynchronous discussions
- **Assignments** with upload “dropboxes”

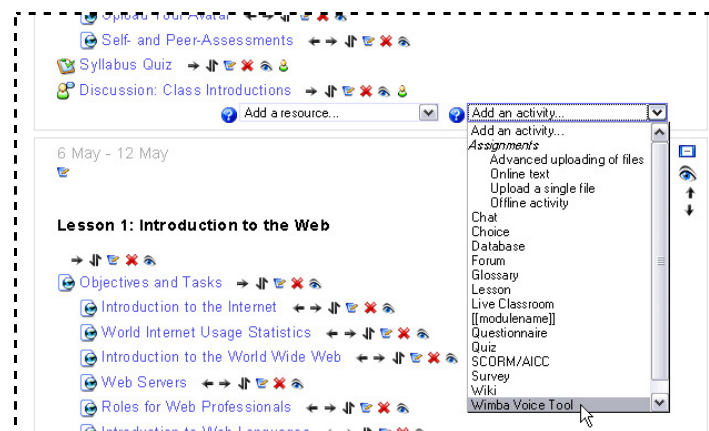
- **Quizzes** with categories, randomization, and results comparisons and tracking, and robust question types
- **Quickmail** for e-mail
- **Calendar** with automatic event notifications
- **Questionnaires** for ungraded surveys with result screens for class discussion
- Content page creation with **WYSIWYG** editor
- Content page upload and **file manager**
- Web site **hyperlinking**
- **Topic** labeling and organization
- **Gradebook** with categories, weights, calculations, drop lowest, and even quick-editing of scores

But Moodle also has a number of unique or specialized tools:

- **Wimba** integration
- Feature-rich, customizable **rubrics** for assignments
- Paper or project **workshops** where students use a rubric to assess peer work (automatically distributed), their own work, or examples that the instructor provides.
- **Lessons** with **learning paths** and branches for recursive assessments
- **Glossaries** that can allow students to edit, add, or rate entries.
- **Blogs** that can extend beyond the course
- **Wikis** for collaborative authoring
- **RSS feeds** from discussion forums
- **RSS feed aggregator** as a course block
- Class **databases** for projects and information storage
- **Offline assignment** tracking
- Access to contents of an entire **file folder**.

Teaching & Designing

Course design is fast and easy, using **drop-down menus to add resources or activities** to any given topic:



Content can be imported as SCORM/IMS. Quizzes can be imported as QTI or GIFT formats. -created content package is open and accessible XML.

Throughout Moodle are **pop-up help** icons (in almost all fields on forms and many other places) that provide just-in-time help on any tool or feature. Additionally, there is a complete set of online documents and tutorials available for free.

Moodle allows you to **quickly switch roles** to test features as a student sees them.

Admins can **login as other users**, and **create custom roles** for the entire system or just a course.

Backup and Restore

When it comes time to roll a course over, Moodle allows you to backup the whole course *or just part of a course*, and restore that backup into a new course, on top of an existing course, or adding into an existing course.

Accessibility

In addition to ensuring it's **code is accessible to users with disabilities**, Moodle runs in all standard Web browsers without requiring any additional technology. **No Java requirement. No Flash requirement. No .net requirement.**

Unlike most LMSs, **Moodle runs in all standard mobile web browsers** (Blazer on Treos, Safari on iPhone and iPod Touch, IE Mobile on phones and PocketPCs, Opera on Nintendo DS, etc).



Look, Feel, and Institutional Branding

Moodle allows for user-developed themes for the entire system or for just a single course. Admins can change nearly the entire look of the system through HTML and CSS, even Flash etc.

Moodle Demo Courses

Moodle.org has made the following Features Demo Course available:
<http://moodle.org/course/view.php?id=34>

Additionally, I've been working on a demo course on our Moodle installation:
<http://open.uvu.edu/course/view.php?id=3775>

Username:

Password:

Server and Admin Info (Geek Stuff)

Moodle is written in XHTML, CSS, JavaScript, and PHP. It's code is open source and fully customizable. Any Web developer can get involved in the Moodle project.

Moodle runs on a wide variety of webservers/database technologies, but Linux-based web server with Apache + PHP = best system, with server and db on separate machines. One can load-balance a Moodle installation with separate web servers.

Scalability & Security

Moodle has proven to be stable, secure, and reliable. The current largest live Moodle installation is at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, which handles **45,000+ students and 6,500+ courses**. Security is addressed fully at security.moodle.org

Authentication and enrolment

While manual enrolment and authentication is possible, Moodle can use **LDAP** protocol (at UVU we use the same XML extract that Bb Vista gets) or direct database lookup.

For more info, see "Case for Moodle":

http://docs.moodle.org/en/Case_for_Moodle

Moodle 2.0 (Q1 2009)

Currently at version 1.9, Moodle developers consider Moodle 2.0 a major step forward in the Moodle system technology, as thousands of lines of code are being rewritten and dozens of functions are being refactored for improved efficiency, flexibility, and longevity.

But back-end stuff aside, here is my list of top 10 new features planned for Moodle 2.0 (available early 2009):

1. **Moodle Voice** - Moodle Voice is a project for embedding VoiceXML support into Moodle Core.
2. **Turnitin** Integration
3. **Conditional activities** - Allowing dependencies and forced paths through activities: ie "You can't do this thing until that thing is completed".
4. **Progress tracking** - AKA Proper competency tracking, so that individuals can have learning plans listing outcomes/courses which are updated when courses are completed.
5. **Course completion**- interface that allows teachers to specify exactly when a course should be considered finished for each user
6. **More tagging** of courses, activities and other things
7. **Community hub** interfaces - Makes it easy for users to find and navigate other systems and external Moodle repositories, leveraging the Moodle Network in various ways.
8. **Standard Web Services Layer** - UPC and moodle.com - Standard set of core API functions made available via SOAP and XML-RPC. Very cool for web dev geeks.
9. **Repository API** - browse and import from external repositories, such as learning object repositories
10. **Portfolio API** - capture and push out course content to external repositories, such as portfolio systems

For more info, see Moodle Roadmap:

<http://docs.moodle.org/en/Roadmap>