

Blackboard Gradebook: *Tips for Advanced Users*

How can I use Blackboard's gradebook to calculate final grades?

There are three options for calculating final grades using Blackboard.

NOTE: If you want to DROP a low grade, you must use option 3!

OPTION 1: Weight grades by item

- The simplest method!
- In the gradebook, click **Weight Grades** then click on **Weight by Item**
- Type in a percentage "weight" for each gradebook "item" that contributes to the final grade.
Example:

Weight by Item		
Test 1	25.0	%
Test 2	25.0	%
Test 3	25.0	%
Paper	15.0	%
Participation	10.0	%

- The "Weighted Total" column on the far right of the gradebook will reflect students' progress.
NOTE: The weighted total will be low (and inaccurate) until grades for every assignment have been posted. (The weighted total builds over time as the semester progresses and grades are posted.) For this reason, you may want to hide the weighted total from students' view until the end of the semester. (For instructions, see page 2 of Blackboard Gradebook Basics handout.)



OPTION 2: Weight grades by category

- Use this method if you have a number of items (such as homework assignments) that together contribute a certain percentage to the final grade
- Important: When creating each gradebook item (or column) BE SURE to assign items to an appropriate category (e.g. assign all homework items to the same category).
- You can create your own categories if needed under **Gradebook Settings > Manage Gradebook Categories**
- In the gradebook, click **Weight Grades** then click on **Weight by Category**
- Type in a percentage "weight" for each category
- Note: The weighted total will be low (and inaccurate) until grades for every assignment have been posted. For this reason, you may want to hide the weighted total from students' view until the end of the semester. (For instructions, see page 2 of Blackboard Gradebook Basics handout.)

OPTION 3: Download gradebook to Excel, then use Excel to calculate final grade

- Best option if you need to drop a low grade (or do anything else fancy)
- Follow the instructions on the "basics" handout to download your grades to an Excel (csv) file.
- You'll need to know a bit about Excel in order to use it to calculate your grades...

General Excel tips:

- Begin by creating a formula to calculate a grade for ONE student, then copy the formula to all other students--by using the handle in the lower right corner of the cell: 
- An equal sign must always precede a formula or calculation.
- You can use the **function button** on the main toolbar to select and configure formulas: 
- When finished constructing a formula, be sure to press the ENTER key to finalize.

Handy functions for grade calculations:

- "Average" function calculates an average across cells. Blank cells are ignored.

Example: To average 5 homework assignments located in cells B2 thru F2...

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Student	HW 1	HW 2	HW 3	HW 4	HW 5	HW AVG
2	Jones, Jan	85	80	78	91	82	

... use this formula:

=AVERAGE(B2:F2)

- To calculate an average while dropping a low grade you must construct a formula:

1. Add the grades you want to average **=SUM(B2:F2)**
2. Identify the low grade using the MIN function **=MIN(B2:F2)**
3. Subtract the MIN from the total **=SUM(B2:F2) - MIN(B2:F2)**
4. Divide (/) by number of grades after drop **=(SUM(B2:F2) - MIN(B2:F2)) / 4**

- To arrive at the final grade, construct a formula using basic math operators like multiply (*), add (+), and parentheses.

Example: To calculate a final grade assigning various weights to each of these items...

	A	K	L	M	N	O
1	Student	Paper	Particip.	HW Avg	Test Avg	Final Grade
2	Jones, Jan	81.5	85	83.2	82	

...use this formula:

= (K2 *.15) + (L2 *.10) + (M2 *.15) + (N2 *.60)

For more info on using Excel to calculate grades, see:
<http://www.utexas.edu/its/training/handouts/excelgrade/>

Can I enter letter grades in Blackboard's gradebook (e.g. for a paper, assign grades like "A" or "C+")? How are those grades calculated into the final grade?

Blackboard's gradebook contains a rubric for converting letter grades to numbers so they can be included in grade calculations. You'll want to examine the rubric to see if the letter-to-number conversions are the ones you want!

To see Blackboard's rubric:

- Click on Gradebook Settings > Manage Display Options
- To the right of the "Letter" option, click on Modify
- For now, concentrate on the RIGHT SIDE of the rubric and ignore the left:

Automatically-graded items with a grade of	Manually-graded items entered as
97.0 % to 100.0 % will display as	A+ will be calculated as 98.5 %
94.0 % to 97.0 % will display as	A will be calculated as 95.0 %
90.0 % to 94.0 % will display as	A- will be calculated as 91.5 %
87.0 % to 90.0 % will display as	B+ will be calculated as 88.5 %

- You can make changes to this rubric if needed.
- If MAJOR changes are needed, you should make a COPY of the rubric and modify the copy instead. To do this:
 - Go back to the "Manage Display Options" screen
 - To the right of the "Letter" option, click on Copy
 - A new item named "Copy of Letter" will appear. Click on Modify beside THIS option to make changes. (You should change its name from "Copy of Letter" to something that makes sense to you...)
 - Once you have made the changes you want, click SUBMIT to save.
 - Then, BE SURE to specify THIS display option when adding columns to the gradebook. (To set existing columns to use your new rubric, click on the item's column heading, then on "Item Information", then select the appropriate display option.)

Can I record "grades" other than numbers or letters in the gradebook? For example, can I enter a check mark or a comment to show that an assignment was completed?

Yes. When you create an item (column) in the gradebook, choose the following types of display options if you will be recording "grades" other than letters or numbers:

- **Complete/Incomplete** – lets you record a check mark to indicate completion of a student's assignment. To record check marks for students, enter any number as a "grade". The student will see a green check mark displayed when he views his grades.
- **Text** – lets you type in a word or short phrase to indicate status of an assignment.

Is it possible to record grades (or assignment completion) in the gradebook but NOT count these toward the final grade?

Yes. When you set up Bb to weight grades, YOU determine which items to include in the weighted calculation. Simply do not include those items that you don't want counted towards the final grade!

If you do not want a grade included in the "Total Points" column, you can answer NO to the question "Include item in Gradebook score calculations" when setting up the item.

How can I print the gradebook?

Printing Bb's gradebook can be a problem. Depending on the "width" of your gradebook, the printer may "chop off" one end.

If your gradebook is just a little too wide to print completely, try choosing "landscape" mode when printing. (This option is often found under the "Layout" tab after you choose "Print" from the File menu.)

If your gradebook is too wide to print completely in landscape mode, you will need to download the gradebook to Excel and print from there.

Tips for printing in Excel:

- Print Preview is especially handy in Excel. While previewing the page, you can adjust margins, set up headers/footers, and specify landscape or portrait mode.
- If your gradebook spans multiple printed pages, it can be VERY helpful to have students' names printed on EVERY page. To do this:
 1. On the File menu, click Page Setup, and then click the Sheet tab.
 2. Under Print titles, locate the box that says "Columns to repeat at left".
 3. Click the red/white/blue icon on the right edge of this box.
 4. Click the topmost cell in the column that contains students' names (probably column A).
 5. Click X to close the small box in the center of the screen.
 6. Click OK. Now the students' names should print on all pages (not just on page 1).

Can I make a "button" on my course menu to allow students to view their grades?

By default, students can access their grades in Blackboard by clicking "Tools" on the main course menu, then clicking "My Grades".

Some instructors like to provide this option directly from the main menu. Here's how to do this:

1. Go to Control Panel > Manage Course Menu
2. At the top, click "Tool Link"
3. From the drop-down, choose "My Grades"
4. In the box below, you can modify the name of this menu item if you want.
5. Click SUBMIT, then OK. Your new item is now at the bottom of the menu. You can specify a higher menu location if you want, by changing the number to the left of this item.