



Blackboard Grade Center – Best Practices

Faculty can support student success by providing grade feedback to students throughout the semester in Blackboard. Consider these best practices when managing your Grade Center.

Prepare ahead of time. To the best of your ability before the course begins, attempt to set up as many of the grade columns - if not all - that you can. Naturally, unexpected changes can come up during the semester, but having as much of the Grade Center ready in advance can save you time once the course is underway. And of course, the Instructional Technology Lab is here to help!

Delete or hide unused columns. There are two options to hide columns, *Hide from Students (on/off)* and *Hide from Instructor View*. You can also choose to delete columns you don't need however you can't remove columns associated with gradable items like assignments and tests or a column marked as an *External Grade*.

How to: Click the down arrow next to the title of the column, then click either *Hide from Students (on/off)*, *Hide from Instructor View*, or *Delete*.

Organize Columns. Students see Grade Center columns from top to bottom in *My Grades*, corresponding to an instructor's left-to-right view in the *Full Grade Center*. Use the *Grade Center Organization Tool* to reorder columns to a logical order, such as sequential order by due date. From here, you can also verify if there are any hidden columns from you that might still be visible to students and could impact grade accuracy. Hidden columns are labeled as such and italicized.

How to: Select *Manage* from the tabs above the Grade Center and click *Column Organization*, click and drag the multi-directional arrows next to each column's name to reorder them. Select hidden columns, then click *Show/Hide Selected Columns* and choose *Show Selected Columns*.

Use Categories for flexibility. Categories are useful if you intend to weight grades or create Smart Views to filter grade columns. For example, you can group multiple graded items that you want to weight as a certain percentage of a final grade. Say you have six quizzes during the semester that are cumulatively worth 30% of a students' final grade. You can categorize all quizzes the same way and then apply the 30% weight to the category in your weighted grade column. You can also drop the lowest score(s) from a category.

How to: Select *Manage* from the tabs above the Grade Center, then click *Categories*. Click the *Create Category* button and enter a Name and click *Submit* to save.

Decide how to calculate final grades. To calculate final grades in Blackboard, you must decide whether to weight grades (e.g., all assignments = 25%, final exam = 35%) or use a points system. The choice you make determines if you use the *Weighted Total (percentages)* or *Total (points)* column. Once you decide which total column fits your grading structure, you can customize it to calculate a final grade based upon assessment grades entered during the semester. To avoid confusion, you can remove the total column you don't use.

Note: Blackboard is NOT the official place for final grades. You must manually submit students' final grades in the [GWeb Information System](#) (Banner). For assistance, please contact GW's Division of IT at 202-994-4948.

Shorten column names using a Grade Center Name. If a column name is too long, you can use an abbreviated name to make the Grade Center easier to navigate. This changes the column name for instructors only. Students continue to see the original name that corresponds to the assignment or assessment.

How to: Click the drop-down arrow beside a column, enter the shortened column title in the *Grade Center Name* box, and click *Submit* to save.



Customize grade displays. It's important to consider how students view their grades. Should they see a numeric score, a percentage, a letter grade? Regardless of the chosen display, consistency provides students a clearer understanding of their progress. Edit a column's information to set a *Primary Display*. A *Secondary Display* is also available if an additional grade view would be helpful, but students can not see it. If you plan to display letter grades to students, also edit the default Letter Grade Schema to match your grading scale.

How to: Select *Manage* from the tabs above the Grade Center, then click *Grading Schemas*. Click the drop-down arrow beside the existing Letter schema and *Edit*. Remove unneeded letter grade values, like plus and minus grades, and adjust the percentage ranges to match your grading scale. Click *Submit* to save.

Check the Grade Center for accuracy. To avoid common causes of miscalculation, review column information and use both Primary and Secondary Display settings to verify that the grades entered match a column's expected format. Then, you can use *Student Preview Mode* to add a temporary student to the Grade Center and verify grade calculation accuracy and availability.

How to: Click the *Student Preview Mode* icon, browse the course and complete assignments or tests just as a student would. To then grade the preview user's work, *Exit Student Preview Mode* and choose to keep the preview user and data. After grading, *Enter Student Preview Mode* once again and click *My Grades* see how grades and feedback appear to students.

Use Smart Views to filter your view. Smart Views provide you the ability to categorize students into groups in the Grade Center based on selected criteria. They are useful to quickly find data when the Grade Center includes a significant number of students and columns. Some default smart views are available, but you can also create your own.

How to: Select *Manage* from the tabs above the Grade Center and choose *Smart Views*, click the drop-down arrow next to a *Smart View* to edit it or click *Create Smart View* to create your own. Click the star icon next to a *Smart View* to add it as a *Favorite link* on the *Control Panel* under *Full Grade Center*.

Provide private comments and feedback. Use the *Feedback to Learner* textbox when you want to provide individual feedback or clarification. You can also attach files like a rubric or a student's document with tracked changes. Additionally, Blackboard's *Rubric* tool allows you to create rubrics and use them to grade right in Blackboard. Students view all of this information through *My Grades*.

Hide student grades while grading. When grading student work you may want to hide student's scores from them until you grade everyone. This step can be helpful if you are grading one student's work and realize you need to make changes to another student's grade. A red slash in the column header indicates students cannot see the column.

How to: Click the down-arrow next to a column name and choose *Hide from Students (on/off)*, when finished, click the down-arrow again and click *Hide from Students (on/off)* to make the column visible again.

Download a copy of student grades. At the end of the semester, or periodically during the semester, it is prudent to download the Grade Center for your records as a backup. Blackboard generates a spreadsheet file that you can open in Excel or other spreadsheet programs.

How to: In the *Full Grade Center*, click *Work Offline* and select *Download*, on the following page, choose to download the *Full Grade Center* and click *Submit*. On the next page, click the *Download* button to download the file to your computer.