Using the Grades Tool in Brightspace

Introduction

Your grade book in Brightspace is known as the Grades tool. Both instructors and students have this tool in each of their courses – instructors use the Grades tool to enter and manage grades for their classes, and students use it to view their own grades in each of their classes.

This handout will introduce you to some essential skills and concepts for using the Grades tool in Brightspace.

Key Concepts

Every grade book in Brightspace includes two fields by default, designed to be the place(s) where you calculate final course grades – Final Calculated Grade and Final Adjusted Grade. Your students cannot see either of these fields until you deliberately go through the process of releasing their final grades to them in the course.

You have a choice of three different Systems for calculation of final course grades. The choices are:

- **Weighted**: Allows you to set up weighted categories in your grade book. If you use this system, it is not necessary to manually input a formula for the final calculations of your course grades.

- **Points**: Simply adds up the possible total points across all grade items, and determines the students' final course grades by dividing the total points each student earned by the total overall possible points that are available. If you use this system, it is not necessary to manually input a formula for the final calculations of your course grades.

- **Formula**: Permits you to enter a formula to calculate your final course grades.

You have a choice of various Schemes in your grade book that provide an extra visual layer over the top of your numerical grade data. For example, if you are using a Percentage scheme for a grade column and a student has earned a 9.5 out of 10 on that activity, in addition to the points earned, the Percentage scheme would cause a "scheme symbol" of 95% to display next to the points value. Or if you are using a Letter Grade scheme for that same column, a "scheme symbol" of A would display by the points value.

You can create and customize your own schemes, or completely turn off the display of scheme-related symbols and colors if you wish.

Grade items exist independently of discussion topics, dropbox folders, and quizzes. Gradable course activities can be associated with grade items, but the act of creating an activity does NOT automatically create a grade item. It is also possible to break existing associations between gradable activities and grade items, and then to delete one or the other without deleting both. In other words, deleting a discussion topic will not automatically delete the associated grade item.

This gives you a lot of flexibility in terms of workflow, in that you could build your grade book separately and then later connect specific grade items to the desired discussion topics, dropbox folders, and quizzes. But with this flexibility comes responsibility, in that you must remember to deliberately select or create a grade item when you create a discussion topic, dropbox folder, or quiz.

Don't Fear the Wizard

The first time you click on Grades in a new, blank course, you'll be taken directly to the Setup Wizard screen.

The choices you make in the Setup Wizard can all be reversed or changed later on; making selections in the Wizard does **not** set anything in stone. Everything you select in the Wizard can be altered under Grades Settings and Grades Schemes later.

Building and Structuring Your Grade Book

You'll use the Manage Grades screen to build your grade book's structure. Just click the **Grades** link in your course toolbar, and then click on the **Manage Grades** link at the top of the screen (*the Manage Grades screen may display by default without you needing to click the link*).

On this screen you can create Categories and Items, and get everything organized. Categories are not required, but if your grade book contains a lot of items, creating categories to section off different types of course activities (e.g. Homework, Quizzes, Papers, and so on) might aid you and your students in keeping track of grades.

Creating a Category

There are a number of advantages to creating and using categories in your grade book.
- If you plan to use a Weighted system, you'll need categories, as you'll be grouping all your grade items into them and assigning each category a weight value (e.g. the Quizzes category and all the grades it contains might be worth 20% of a student's overall course grade).
- Categories help your students understand and interpret what they are looking at on their Grades screen.

- When looking at the Standard View of your grade book on the Enter Grades screen, you can collapse categories and choose to see only the category totals, making it much easier to locate and isolate the grades you want to see at the moment and hide those you don't.

- Categories are self-totaling – they will show you a running total.

- You can choose settings in a category to assign the same maximum points to each item the category contains, and can even choose settings that will automatically drop the lowest score a student earns on items in the category.

Here's how to create a category:

1. On the Manage Grades screen, click **New** > **Category**.

2. Type a name for the new category in the **Name** field. This is the name that will display on your Manage Grades screen as well as on the students' view of their grades.

3. If desired, type an abbreviated name in the **Short Name** field. The short name is what will display on your Enter Grades screen – it can save you from excessive horizontal scrolling.

4. Select any additional options you wish. (The boxes and options will vary depending on the grading system you've selected.)

5. Click **Save and Close** to finish creating the category.

Creating an Item

An item is a column in your grade book; a column of cells in which you enter students' grades for a specific activity. You can create various types of grade items, including numeric items, pass/fail items, text items, and more. Numeric items are what you will probably use most frequently.

Here's how to create a new numeric item:

1. On the Manage Grades screen, click **New** > **Item**.

2. Under "Choose a Grade Item Type," click **Numeric**.

3. Type a name for the new item in the **Name** field. This is the name that will display on your Manage Grades screen as well as on the students' view of their grades.

4. If desired, type an abbreviated name in the **Short Name** field. The short name is what will display on your Enter Grades screen – it can save you from excessive horizontal scrolling.

5. If desired, select a category from the **Category** drop-down menu, or create a new category. Categorizing the item is optional.

6. Enter the total points that the activity is worth in the **Maximum Points** field.

7. If you wish to be able to enter scores greater than the value of the maximum points, click the check box beside **Can Exceed**. This gives you leeway to add a bonus question to a quiz, for example.

8. If this is an extra credit activity, click the check box beside **Bonus**. Bonus items display with yellow stars ⭐ beside their names on your Manage Grades screen, and display for students with the word (Bonus) in parentheses beside them.

9. Select additional options as desired:

   a. Depending on the grade system you have selected (Weighted, Points, or Formula), the specific check box(es) you see below the Bonus check box will vary.

   b. The grade scheme defaults to **Percentage** (unless you have changed your default). This is fine in most cases; again, it would mean that if a student earned an 8.5 out of 10 on a quiz, the student would see both their points score as well as a "scheme symbol" of 85%.

   c. If you want students to see the class average grade on the activity and/or see a bar chart with the class grade distribution, click the link to **Show Display Options** and then choose the check boxes for the options you want.

   d. At the very bottom of the Display Options section you'll see several check boxes to control the **Managing View** – these options affect only your view as the course instructor.

10. When finished selecting the options you want, click **Save** or **Save and Close** to finish creating the item.
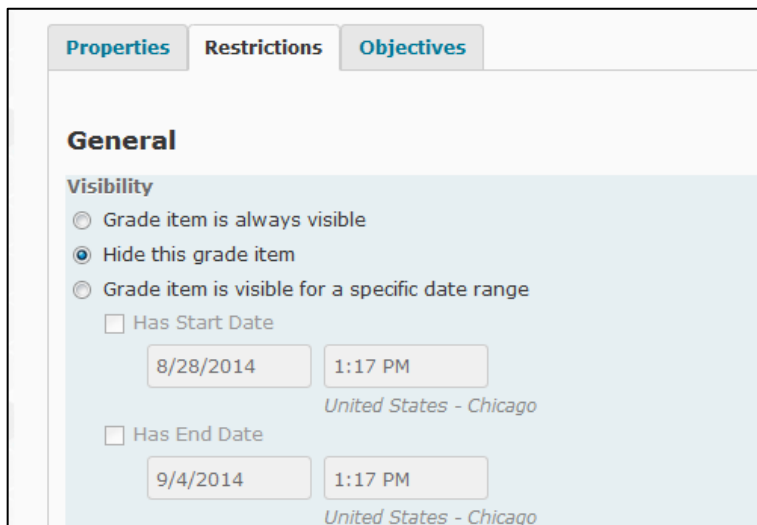
Hiding an Item

To hide a grade item from students:

1. On the Manage Grades screen, click the name of the item you want to hide.
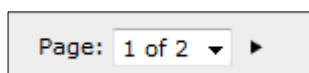2. Click the item's **Restrictions** tab.

3. Select **Hide this grade item**.
4. Click **Save and Close**.

Note that hiding a grade item does not hide the activity in the course that it might be associated with – it hides only the grade field itself. Conversely, hiding a course activity – such as a quiz or discussion topic or dropbox folder – does not hide the associated grade item.
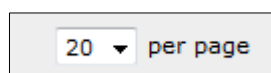
Viewing All Your Students on the Enter Grades Screen

The Enter Grades screen is where you can see the spreadsheet view of your grade book that includes student names and grades.

If you have more than 20 students in your course, you will probably have to use the Page Number drop-down menu to move back and forth between screens of students, and/or the Results Per Page drop-down menu to choose to see a larger number of students on one screen.
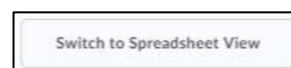
Entering Grades

You have three options for entering grades directly in the grade book. In addition to entering grades, you can also enter feedback for students in the grade book, or even enter feedback that will display to the entire class for a given activity.

Entering Grades Directly on the Enter Grades Screen

1. Go to the **Enter Grades** screen.
2. If you don't see clickable cell fields in the grade book, click the **Switch to Spreadsheet View** button near the top of the Enter Grades screen.

3. Click in any cell and type a grade. Repeat as needed.
4. Click the **Save** button when finished.

Tip: To move down a column of cells without using the mouse, simply press <Enter> on your keyboard. Pressing <Enter> moves the cursor down to the next cell in the column. To move across rather than down, press <Tab>.

Entering Multiple Grades for a Specific Student

1. Go to the **Enter Grades** screen.
2. Click on the student's name.
3. Type grades in the desired fields.
4. Click **Save and Close** when finished.

Entering Grades and Feedback

In addition to entering grades, you can also enter comments in the grade book that students will see on their Grades screen.

1. Go to the **Enter Grades** screen.
2. Click the drop-down arrow at the top of the column for which you want to enter grades, then choose **Grade All**.
3. Type grades in as desired.
4. To enter comments for any given student, click the pencil icon in the Feedback column on their row.
5. Type your comments for the student in the **Feedback** field and then click **Save**.
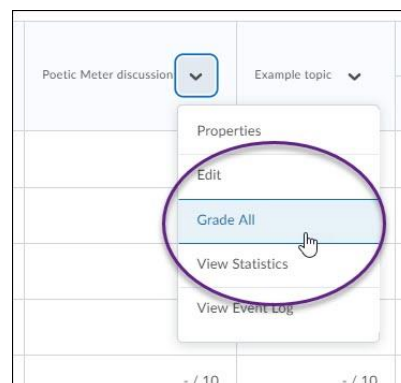
Entering Grades and Feedback for Multiple Students at Once

It is easy to give the same grade and/or feedback to multiple students at the same time once you know where to look. Here's how:

1. Go to the **Enter Grades** screen.
2. Click the drop-down arrow at the top of the column for which you want to enter grades, then choose **Grade All**.
3. Click the checkboxes next to the names of all the students who will be receiving the same grade. **Tip**: To select all the students in the list, click the checkbox at the very top of the column, in the header row.
4. Click **Set Grades**.
5. Enter the desired grade, then click **Save**.
6. To enter feedback for multiple students at once, select the desired students (just as you did in step 3), then click **Add Feedback**.
7. Type your comments in the Feedback box, then click **Save**.
8. When you are finished entering grades and feedback, click **Save and Close**.

Exporting a Copy of the Grade Book

To export a copy of your grade book that you can open and edit in Excel:

1. At the top of the Enter Grades screen, click the **Export** button.

2. Use the check boxes to select what you want to export (or to de-select what you do not want to export).

3. Click the **Export to CSV** or the **Export to Excel** button at the bottom of the screen. A dialog box will pop up and show that your file is being prepared.

4. When the message in the dialog box indicates that your exported file is ready to download, click the **Download** button.

What happens next will vary dependent on your computer's operating system, your browser, and your local settings – but typically, a dialog box will pop up that prompts you to either open the file with Microsoft Excel, or save the file. Choose the option you want.

Importing Grades from Excel (.csv)

To import a copy of your grade book that you've already begun building in Excel:

1. On the Enter Grades screen, click the **Import** button.
2. Click the **Browse** button and located the file you wish to import. **Note**: If you aren't sure how an importable file should be formatted, look at the sample file.

3. If you have columns in the spreadsheet that don't yet exist in your Brightspace grade book, click the checkbox next to "Create new grade item when an unrecognized item is referenced."
4. Click **Continue**.
5. Wait while the import processes.
6. If you checked the box to create new grade items and if the system detects any unrecognized items in your CSV file, you will see a screen asking you to verify the creation of new grade items. Make the choices you want on this screen, then click **Continue**.

7. If you chose to create new grade items, you'll now see a screen that gives you the opportunity to input the maximum points for each new item, categorize each new item, and select other options. Make the choices you want on this screen, and then click **Continue**.

8. On the **Preview Import** screen, verify that everything looks correct, then click **Import** to complete the process.

Note: After importing grades, it's a good idea to double-check all the data on your Enter Grades screen to be sure everything imported as you expected it to.

Releasing Final Course Grades to Students

To make students' final course grades visible to them on their Grades screen in the course, you'll release either the Final Calculated Grade or the Final Adjusted Grade column. By default, these grade items are hidden from students.

First, choose which one of these you wish to use in the course under **Grades** > **Settings** > **Calculation Options**. Look for the choices under "Final Grade Released" about half-way down the screen. Choose the option you prefer, then click the **Save** button.

When you are ready to release final grades to students in Brightspace, follow these steps:

1. On the Manage Grades screen, near the bottom, click the on drop-down arrow next to **Final Calculated Grade**, then select **Enter Grades**.
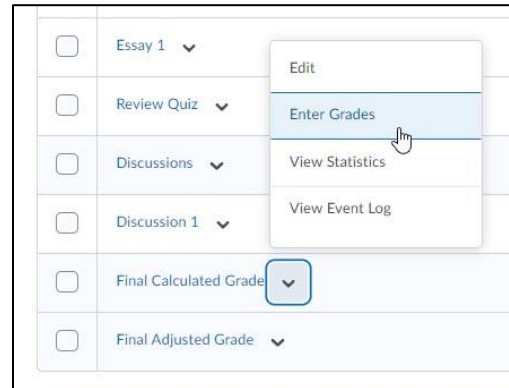
2. What you do next varies slightly depending on whether you chose to release students' final calculated or final adjusted grades:

    a. To use/release the Final Calculated Grade, verify that the students' grades in the Final Calculated Grade column are correct, then continue to step 3.

    b. To use/release the Final Adjusted Grade, click the arrow icons to transfer each student's grade into the Final Adjusted Grade column, then make the necessary adjustments before continuing.

3. After verifying that the information is correct, click the checkboxes in the Released column to release each student's grade.

    Tip: To release all the final grades at once, click the drop-down arrow next to **Final Grades** at the top of the screen, choose **Release All**, then click **Yes** to confirm your choice.
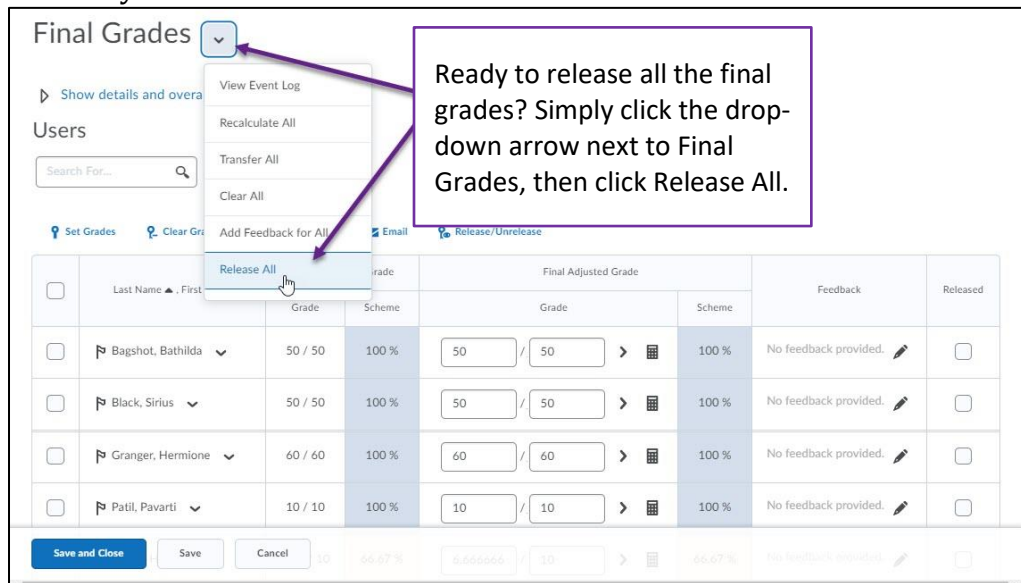
4. After releasing the grades, click the **Save and Close** button.

5. If a Confirmation box pops up, click **Yes** to save the changes and continue.

Once you have released the grades, students will see their final grade for the course near the top of their Grades screen.

Representing Students' Final Course Grades as Letter Grades

To make students' final course grades display not only as numerical values but also as their letter grade equivalents (i.e. A, B, C, D, F), edit the Final Calculated Grade and Final Adjusted Grade fields to use a Letter Grade scheme. Here's how:

1. At the bottom of the Manage Grades screen, click the **Final Calculated Grade** item.
2. In the **Grade Scheme** drop-down menu, choose the desired Letter Grade scheme.
3. Click the **Save and Close** button at the bottom of the screen.
4. Back on the Manage Grades screen, scroll down to the bottom again and click on the **Final Adjusted Grade** field.
5. In the **Grade Scheme** drop-down menu, choose the desired Letter Grade scheme.
6. Click the **Save and Close** button at the bottom of the screen.

Previewing Student Grades
(*to see grades exactly as a student would see them*)

To see how the Grades screen looks for any given student, simply preview that student's grades. Here's how:

1. Go to the **Enter Grade**s screen.
2. Click the drop-down arrow next to any student's name.
3. Select **Preview**. A dialog box appears, showing you a preview of exactly how grades appear to that student.
4. Close the dialog box when you are done previewing.
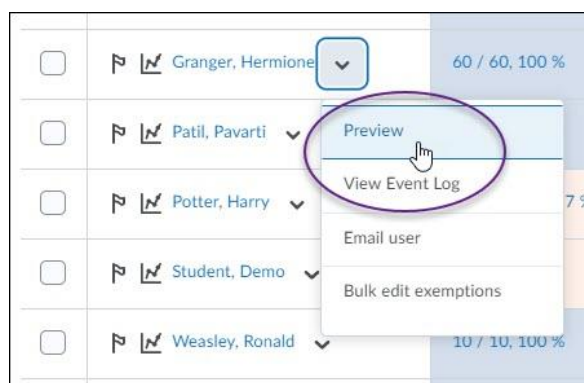
Conclusion

Remember, if you need help using Brightspace, support is just a call or email away – call us at 936-468-1919, or send an email to Brightspace@sfasu.edu. Our support team is available Monday through Friday, from 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.