

Best Practices for Using the Grade Book

The following are some best practice recommendations for using the Grade Book within eLearning Vista.

Use the "View All" tab and ignore the rest

eLearning Vista gives you four views of the Grade Book: "Members", "Grades", "View All" and "Custom". Each of these has a purpose and some specific capabilities, but only the "View All" tab automatically shows every column you create. More importantly, it is the order of the columns in "View All" that determines the order of the grades viewable by the students (you see the columns from left to right in the Grade Book and students see them in the same order only up and down).

The 12-Letter Rule

The advantage of the new "frozen columns" view is that you can now scroll the grade columns without losing sight of the student names. Unfortunately, this view also limits the width of every column. This means that longer column names are cut off from view, so something like "Weekly Reading Assignment 1" will be indistinguishable from "Weekly Reading Assignment 9". So observing a 12-letter limit for column names will allow you to tell your columns apart. Please be sure not to be too cryptic when naming, however, or your students will not know what the grade is for.

Hide/Show versus Release/Do Not Release

This is probably the most common error that instructors make in using the Grade Book. There are a couple of places within Grade Book that you can hide/show columns. It is very important to remember that you are hiding or showing the column to yourself in the Grade Book view, and has nothing to do with whether or not a student can see that grade!

To show students a grade, you need to use the pull-down menu entitled "Grade Book Options" and select "Column Settings". From the column settings window you will set the "Release" or "Do not Release" properties for each column.

The Midterm/Final Columns

If your course was originally created or migrated before Spring 2008, then you most likely have two extraneous columns which were automatically created: Midterm and Final. These are a result of a Vista bug and should be used for midterm and final grades (they cannot be renamed or deleted) or else they should be hidden from your view and un-released from students to avoid any confusion.

Blanks are not Zeroes

If you have a formula, which calculates a number of other columns to arrive at a total or percentage, you will notice that the resulting numbers will be in parenthesis as long as at least one of the columns referenced contains a blank. So, if by the end of a semester, one of your students has never submitted, you should assign that grade a "0" so that the parentheses go away indicating a calculation is complete.

If using Excel, Start your Spreadsheet in Vista

Vista can export and import from Excel spreadsheets quite easily. However, it goes much more smoothly if you begin by setting up your columns in Vista and then export initially to Excel. By doing this, you will make sure that you get all student names, id's and column names correctly. This will ensure you do not get duplicates or dropped grades due to misspellings or mismatches.