

Glossaries

This chapter covers the following MTC skills: 5.5 Glossary

Part of becoming an expert in any field is learning the vocabulary used by practitioners. Experts in an area of study develop new language and word usage to communicate new ideas or subtle variations of old ones. As communities develop within a field and experts communicate with each other over time, new languages emerge. Many experts find it increasingly difficult to communicate with novices as they become more immersed in the language of their field. For example, computer experts have developed an entirely new vocabulary of acronyms, names, and shorthand to help them rapidly communicate complex ideas to each other.

Jason: As someone with a degree of expertise in computer technology, I know I need to be careful not to confuse others when I explain technical concepts. If you've ever been privy to a discussion among geeks, you know it can be nearly impossible for an outsider to follow the three- and four-letter alphabet soup that passes for geek speak.

Fortunately, Moodle has a tool to help you and your students develop glossaries of terms and embed them in your course. On the surface, the glossary module doesn't seem to be more than a fancy word list. In practice, however, it's a powerful tool for learning. The glossary module has a number of features that make it easy for you and your class to develop shared vocabulary lists, add comments to definitions, and even link every appearance of a word in a course to its glossary entry.

Creating Glossaries

Each Moodle course has its own set of glossaries. Only teachers can edit the main glossary. Secondary glossaries may be configured to allow student entries and comments.

Your Moodle course may contain one main glossary and as many secondary glossaries as you want. You can export entries from any secondary glossary into the main glossary.

You can create the link to your glossaries anywhere in your course sections. We suggest that you add a main glossary to the general section at the top of your course page, then add secondary glossaries to the topic or weekly section where they are relevant.

To create a glossary:

1. Click the “Turn editing on” button.
2. Select Glossary from the “Add an activity” drop-down menu.
3. On the “Adding a new glossary” page, as shown in Figure 8-1, give your new glossary a descriptive name.
4. Write a description of the glossary and give directions to your students in the Description area.
5. Select the general options:

Entries shown per page

This sets the number of words and definitions your students will see when they view the glossary list.

Is this glossary global?

Administrators can make a global glossary, with entries linking throughout the whole site. Any course may contain a global glossary, though usually they are only included on the site front page.

Glossary type

The glossary can be either main or secondary. As mentioned, you can export entries from any secondary glossary into the main glossary.

Duplicated entries allowed

This allows the entry of more than one definition for a given word.

Allow comments on entries

Students and teachers can leave comments on glossary definitions. The comments are available via a link at the bottom of the definition.

Allow print view

This provides a printer-friendly-version link for students.

Automatically link glossary entries

Moodle has a text-filter feature that automatically creates a link from a word in the course to its glossary definition. Linked words are highlighted.

Approved by default

If students are allowed to add entries, you can allow entries to be automatically approved and added to the glossary, or they can require your approval before other students are able to see them.

Display format

You can select how the glossary appears when students list the entries. There are a number of different options:

Simple, dictionary style

This looks like a conventional dictionary with separate entries. No authors are displayed and attachments are shown as links.

Continuous without author

This shows the entries one after other without any kind of separation apart from the editing icons.

Encyclopedia

This is similar to the “Full with author” format apart from attached images being displayed inline.

Entry list

This lists the concepts as links.

FAQ

This is useful for displaying a list of Frequently Asked Questions. It automatically appends the words QUESTION and ANSWER in the concept and definition respectively.

Full with author

This is a forum-like display format with attachments shown as links.

Full without author

This is a forum-like display format that does not show author’s data with attachments shown as links.

Show “Special” link

When users browse the glossary, they can select the first character of a word from a list. The Special link displays special characters such as @, #, \$, etc.

Show alphabet

You can use this option to display the alphabet for easier glossary browsing.

Show “ALL” link

If you want students to see all of the glossary entries at once, set this to Yes.

Edit always

If you want entries to be always editable, set this to Yes.

6. Select the grade options:

Allow entries to be rated

You can grade entries yourself or allow students to grade entries as well. Select “Only teachers” or “Everyone” from the Users menu. Then select a grading scale. You can also restrict when entries can be graded to a specific date range.

7. Select the common module options:

Group mode

Another location to set the group mode for the activity. If group mode is forced in the course settings then this setting will be ignored.

Visible

This determines whether students may view the activity or not.

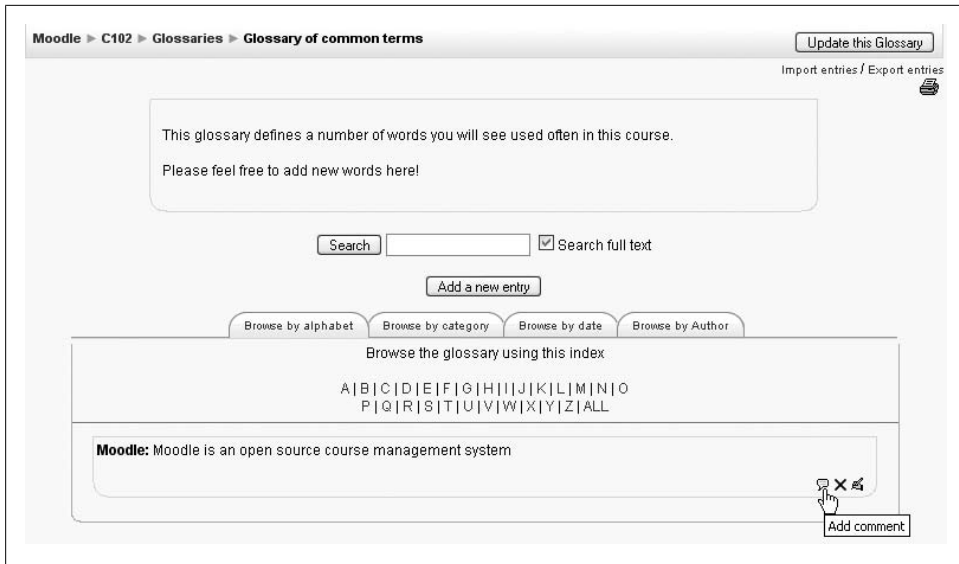


Figure 8-2. A glossary

The main view of the glossary can be a bit confusing at first, as you can see from Figure 8-2. Under the main Moodle navigation bar, you’ll find the glossary description. Directly below the glossary description, you’ll see the search bar. Checking the “Search full text” box allows searching for a given word in any position in the text.

Below the search bar is the “Add a new entry” button, then four browse tabs:

Browse by alphabet

Students can look for glossary entries by the first letter of a word when they select this tab.

Browse by category

You can create word categories and make them available for students to use when they are searching the glossary.

Browse by date

You can view entries based on the date they were last edited.

Browse by Author

If you want students to add entries, this is a useful way to keep track of who has entered what.

At the top right of the page, below the “Update this Glossary” button, are a few links:

Import entries

You can import glossaries from within this course or from other courses.

Export entries

You can use this to export your course glossary to an export file stored in the course files area. You can then download it to your computer and upload it to another course.

Waiting approval

If your default approval is set to No, this link will appear with the number of entries waiting approval in brackets. Clicking on the link will list the entries, with an approve tick icon opposite each one.

Once you've oriented yourself to the page, you can add an entry to the glossary.

Adding Entries

Clicking the “Add a new entry” button gives you access to the definition entry page.

To add a glossary entry:

1. From the Glossary page, click the “Add a new entry” button.
2. Enter the word you want to define in the Concept text field, as shown in Figure 8-3.
3. Add the definition of the word or concept.
4. If you've defined categories in the “Browse by category” tab, you can categorize your entry here. We'll cover how to add a category in the next section.
5. If there are synonyms you want to include with the entry, add them to the Keyword(s) text area. Enter one word per line.
6. If you want to add an attachment, such as a picture or an article, you can attach it below the Keyword(s) text area.
7. If you want this particular entry to be linked automatically within the course, check the “This entry should be automatically linked” checkbox. If you select automatic linking, the checkboxes below determine whether the links are case sensitive and whether only whole words are linked.
8. Click the “Save changes” button to add your word to the glossary.

Glossary Categories

Categories can help organize your glossary entries. If you've enabled autolinking, the category names can be linked along with individual entries.

To create a glossary category:

1. Click the “Browse by category” tab in the main page of the glossary.
2. Click the “Edit categories” button on the left side of the page.
3. Click the “Add category” button on the resulting Categories page.
4. Give the category a name.

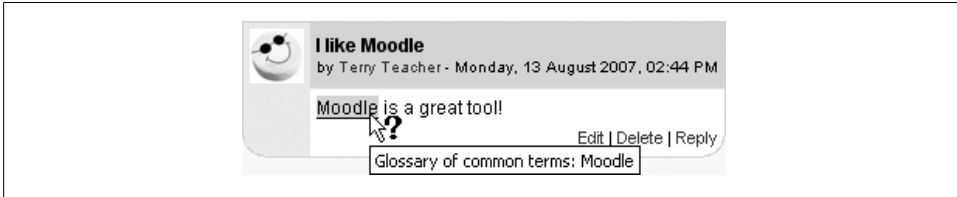


Figure 8-4. An autolinked word in a forum

Importing and Exporting Glossary Entries

As you build your glossaries, you may want to share them between classes or with other instructors. Fortunately, there's a way to export and import glossary entries without needing to share your entire course structure.

To export glossary entries:

1. Follow the “Export entries” link at the top right of the main glossary page.
2. Click the “Export entries to file” button.
3. Save the automatically generated XML file on your computer.

To import glossary entries via an XML file:

1. Follow the “Import entries” link at the top right of the main glossary page.
2. Browse for the exported entries XML file on your computer.
3. Select the destination for the new entries, either the current glossary or a new one.
4. If you want to import category information, click the checkbox.
5. Click the “Save changes” button. You'll then see a report of the entries and categories added to the glossary. If you enabled duplicate entries when you created the glossary, the import process will add all of the new definitions. Otherwise, it will not allow you to import any duplicate entries.

Commenting on Entries

If you enabled comments on the glossary entries, users can annotate the definitions in the word list. When you look at a word in the glossary list, you'll see a little cartoon speech balloon icon in the lower-right corner of the definition block, as shown previously in Figure 8-2.

When you click on the balloon, you're taken to the comment entry page. Add your comment then click the “Save changes” button.

Once you've saved your comment, Moodle will display all of the comments for the entry. When you return to the main glossary page, you'll see a new message next to the speech balloon telling you how many comments there are for the entry.

Printing a Glossary

If you've set "Allow print view" to Yes, then you'll see a little printer icon at the top right of the main glossary page. If you click the icon, Moodle will open a new browser window and present all the words and definitions in a printer-friendly format.

To print the glossary:

1. Click the printer icon at the top of the main glossary page.
2. From the newly opened window, choose Print from the File menu of your browser.
3. Once the word list has printed, close the printer-friendly format window.

Glossary Capabilities

The glossary module has a number of capabilities available to create roles. With capability overrides, you can enable your students to have a high degree of control over their glossaries.

Glossary capabilities are:

Create new entries

This allows a user to add new entries. If you want a glossary in which only teachers can add entries, you can use a role override to prevent students from adding entries.

Manage entries

A user with this capability can edit and delete other users' entries.

Manage categories

This allows a user to edit and delete glossary categories for organizing the terms.

Create comments

This allows a user to add comments, if commenting is enabled in the glossary. By default, both teachers and students are allowed to add comments. If you want only teachers to be able to add comments, you can use a role override to prevent students from doing so.

Manage comments

This allows a user to edit and delete other users' comments.

Import entries

This allows a user to import glossary entries.

Export entries

This allows a user to export glossary entries.

Approve unapproved entries

If the glossary is set to hide entries until they are approved, a user with this capability can approve new entries. This is a capability to consider giving trusted student moderators.

Rate entries

This allows a user to rate entries, if rating is enabled in the glossary.

View ratings

This allows a user to view all glossary ratings.

Effective Glossary Practices

A glossary can be an important part of your course. As we discussed earlier, acquiring vocabulary in a new field can be one of the biggest challenges to new learners. As an expert in your field, you are comfortable using the important terms and concepts in your area of expertise. Your students, however, are not experts. They may be just starting to learn new words representing new ideas and concepts. More advanced students will need to refine their learned definitions with subtle improvements to make the definitions more useful.



As an experiment, go to the library and randomly choose a journal article in an area outside your field. As you read the article, does it make sense to you? Notice the number of unfamiliar terms, or familiar terms that seem to be used in a different way than you are used to.

Glossary Basics

At its most basic, Moodle's glossary can be used like a regular word list for a class. You can develop a list of terms you know students find difficult or confusing and make the list and definitions available for your class.

If you want to get more in-depth, we recommend creating either a weekly or chapter-based word list. Students can use it as they do weekly readings and assignments. A weekly glossary can make it easier for students to organize their learning process.

Creative Glossary Strategies

While a basic glossary is important, creatively applying the glossary can really make an impact on your class. Autolinking is very useful for integrating glossaries with other course activities. In addition, you may want to make use of the Random Glossary Entry block to display glossary entries on your course page. With the introduction of the database module, many activities can now be either glossary or database activities. Glossary has two advantages over the database at this point. First, many instructors find using the Random Glossary Entry block motivates students to submit high-quality entries, because they know the entries will be shared with the class on the front page of the course. The automatic term-linking is also useful to integrate the glossaries with other activities in the course.

Collaborative glossaries

Instead of creating a glossary on your own, why not have the students create it as they encounter unfamiliar terms? A collaborative glossary can serve as a focal point for collaboration in a course. Each member of the class could be assigned to contribute a term, a definition, or comments on submitted definitions. Multiple definitions can be rated by you and by the students, with the highest-rated definitions accepted for the final class glossary.

When students are responsible for creating the definitions, they are much more likely to remember the word and the correct definition. Engaging in the process of learning, debating, and refining a glossary can go a long way toward helping students begin using new terms. Moodle community member Leslie Smith has created a glossary for students to submit entries that contain the definition, part of speech, an original sentence using the word correctly, and some type of mnemonic or visual device to help classmates remember the word's meaning. The visual devices the students use are quite creative and definitely help with memorization.

You can also structure multiple glossaries over the course of a semester. Break them up by unit, chapter, week, or any other organizational structure. Another Moodle community member, Andy Diament, has his students create as many entries as they can in 20 minutes after a topic review, which creates both a framework for further discussion and a nice study aid when printed out.

If you have a large class, assign student teams to come up with definitions and answers. One strategy for managing large courses is to make each team responsible for one week's worth of definitions, while all the other teams must rate and comment. Alternatively, each team could be responsible for one definition per chapter and then rate and comment on the other teams' work.

To set up a collaborative glossary, create a new glossary for each unit with the following options:

- Glossary type: Secondary glossary
- Duplicate entries allowed: If you want teams to be able to submit multiple definitions for rating, select Yes
- Allow comments on entries: Yes
- Approved by default: Yes
- Allow entries to be rated: Yes—by everyone

The other options are up to you. Once you've selected the above options, students can add their own definitions, rate each other's, and add comments.

Mini-projects

Mini-projects are small research projects where students create small resources for each other. One high school teacher has the students do research on organs in the body,

then create an encyclopedia-style entry in the glossary, including pictures and other resources. Moodle community member A. T. Watt uses the glossary for students to share biographies of people in the field they are studying. In both of these uses, the automatic linking makes this a very valuable resource, as anytime someone mentions the organ or person in a lesson, forum, or wiki, the word is linked back to the definition in the glossary.

Collaborative quiz questions

One of the most creative uses we've heard about is using the glossary to create collaborative quiz questions. Students are given the Moodle question formats and they create questions in the glossary matching one of the import types. The teacher has the glossary set to require approval, which hides the submitted questions from other students. When the students have all submitted their questions, the teacher exports the glossary and then imports it into a question bank. The quiz can then be built from student-submitted questions.

Credit for word use

This is a combination strategy using the forum and the autolink feature of the glossary. After you and your students have defined the glossary terms, it's important for students to begin practicing using the words in realistic contexts. Students, however, are usually reluctant to experiment with new terms. With the autolinking feature, it's easy to spot when a glossary word has been used in a forum or in a posting on the web site.

To encourage word use, assign a portion of the credit students receive for their forum postings for correct use of glossary terms. As you or other students rate posts, you can quickly scan for highlighted glossary words and award points for usage. You may even want to break the score down further. Perhaps award one point for using the word and two points for using it correctly.

Summary

At first glance, the glossary doesn't seem to be a very interesting tool. You could simply create a word list in a word processor and upload it. The power of the glossary tool in Moodle comes from its ability to automatically create links in your course for every word in the list, and to easily build collaborative glossaries.

Use the glossary tool to help your students learn the vocabulary of your field and encourage them to experiment with new terms. Collaborative glossaries give your students even more practice using the new words and negotiating their meaning.

In the next chapter, we'll take a look at a tool for developing linear lessons that combines multiple resources and little quizzes to help students progress through the course materials.