Moodlerooms Frequently Asked Questions

Moodle and Moodlerooms

What is Moodle?
Moodle (abbreviation for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is an open source e-learning software platform, also known as a Course Management System, Learning Management System, or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Currently, Moodle has more than 55 million users globally.

Moodle was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas to help educators create online courses with a focus on interaction and collaborative construction of content, and is in continual evolution. Moodle Pty Ltd (also known as Moodle Headquarters or the Moodle Trust, based in Perth, Western Australia), is an Australian company that performs the majority of the development of the core Moodle platform.

Who is Moodlerooms?
Moodlerooms is an e-Learning solutions provider that is fueling the Moodle phenomenon by making it even easier for educational (universities, colleges, K-12 schools) corporate, and governmental institutions to offer courses and content online. Using a cloud-based, Software-as-a-Service model, Moodlerooms provides turnkey solutions to quickly provision your Moodle site while limiting the financial and personnel investment required to implement, deploy and maintain an open-source instance.

What is the Moodle Community?
The Moodle Community is an open network of Moodle users who interact through the Moodle community website to share ideas, code, information and free support. This community also includes a large number of non-core developers. Moodle’s open source license and modular design allows any developer to create additional modules and features which has allowed Moodle to become a truly global, collaborative project in scope.

What are Moodle Partners?
Moodle partners (part of the Moodle Partner Network) are service organizations that have been certified by Moodle Pty Ltd to provide a wide range of Moodle expertise and technical services, such as hosting, implementation, maintenance, training, customization, etc., to support the use of Moodle across the world. By providing services for a fee, the Moodle partners contribute a portion of their revenue to fund the Moodle Pty Ltd.

“Our faculty was key in our evaluation of a new LMS, and they chose joule because they liked the flexibility, look and feel and ease of use. joule offered a more intuitive user interface for the faculty, whereas older versions of our previous proprietary LMS were more clunky and harder to use.”

- Linda Hilton
Chief Information Officer
The Vermont State Colleges
What does “open-source” mean?
Open source is a specific licensing agreement designed for computer code. The license is designed to encourage collaboration within a world-wide community of developers. Specifically, it allows you to download and use the software program free of charge and modify the source code of the program if desired.

Does an instructor need to be trained to use Moodle?
Although Moodle is an intuitive and user-friendly program, training is required to use Moodle to its fullest potential. Moodlerooms believes there is great value in providing instructors with methodology and ideas so that they can create effective online communities. Online learning is different from face-to-face instruction -- the design of a course and the way content is grouped and organized is critical for a positive experience for students.

Where did the name “Moodlerooms” come from?
Before its inception in 2005, Moodlerooms’ founders were Baltimore-based educators who would use international Moodle forums to connect with fellow educators on a variety of school subjects. Each forum would be focused on a particular subject and were collectively referred to as a “rooms.” There were History Rooms, Math Rooms, Science Rooms, etc. Those who were interested in discussing in-class instruction using Moodle would use “Moodle Rooms.” That’s how Moodlerooms got its name.

What’s the major difference between Moodlerooms and the other Moodle partners?
Every educator and student deserves to have the best possible e-Learning experience. Without well-developed services and support, cultivating a great experience wouldn’t be possible. That’s why since 2005, Moodlerooms has continually expanded its team of Moodle experts to deliver a suite of enterprise-level services and customer support that is simply unmatched by any other Moodle partner across the globe. For more information on Moodlerooms’ service and support, visit http://www.moodlerooms.com/lms-solutions/services/

Product and Services FAQs

What is joule?
joule® is what sets Moodlerooms apart from the rest of the Moodle Partners in the network. joule is an e-Learning platform that builds on a Moodle core to combine feature/functionality enhancements and dedicated service into an affordable and adaptable turnkey solution. While open source Moodle typically requires an investment in hosting infrastructure, personnel and a particular Moodle expertise to deploy, maintain and sustain use, Moodlerooms provides needs-based consultative services that enable customers to flexibly shape their e-Learning platform by choosing the features and services they want and need.

What is joule 2?
joule 2 is the newest iteration of Moodlerooms’ enterprise e-Learning platform. Delivered in a fully-supported, cloud based environment, joule 2 harnesses the activity, collaboration and assessment tools available in the Moodle 2 and provides enhanced features that enable educators to build lesson and course-based rubrics, craft individualized learning paths, and analyze rich student data all within a sleek and intuitive Web 2.0 inspired interface. With seamless access to open-source plug-ins and
flexible course formats, joule 2 provides a platform that evolves over time to accommodate virtually any instructional approach or learning style.

Is joule a fork of Moodle?
No. joule uses Moodle as a core platform. If you backup a joule course, you can restore it into a standard Moodle site. Some of the modular features that you enjoyed in joule will not be present in the standard site; however, the core components will continue to work in Moodle.

What is Power?
Power® is an e-Learning platform that makes it easy for institutions, schools and corporations to teach and learn online with Moodle. Power provides organizations with all of the benefits of open-source Moodle along with the fundamental service options that enable educators to deliver engaging online courses.

What is Power 2?
At the center of Power 2 is open-source Moodle 2, the next iteration of the world’s most widely-used learning management system. Power 2 makes it possible for educators to quickly harness the robust features and functionality of open-source Moodle 2 to increase student engagement and success in the classroom. With a suite of enterprise-level services, Moodlerooms makes Power 2 available within a safe, secure, and fully-supported environment, enabling educators and students to focus on teaching and learning.

What are some of the biggest enhancements of joule 2?

User Interface: joule 2 has been updated to provide users with a more robust AJAX feel, keeping the familiar while allowing administrators to decide how much or how little of the interface to show to their users.

Personalized Learning Designer (PLD): With the PLD, instructors automate elements of their course, so that participants have different experiences, based on their interaction with the course. The PLD goes beyond Moodle 2’s basic conditional release capabilities and enables instructors to “stay personal” by creating individualized learning paths by establishing event-based “rules” that trigger special messages as well as activities and resources.

Folder View: Folder View is a new course format that provides a number of user interface improvements. Course formats define the way users “see” the course.

- **Course Collapsed/Expanded Sections**: Folder View provides “one-click” solutions to collapse course-sections into a streamlined page, as well as expand all course-sections, or individual course sections.
- **Individual Folder/Sections**: Course sections can also be viewed on their own page (without the other sections being visible).
- **Course Editing for Instructors**: Folder view creates a central panel that allows for more efficient activity construction and editing.

Reporting: In joule 2, full ad-hoc SQL report capabilities are given to joule site administrators. There will also be a stock listing of basic reports that enables administrators to quickly run the most
commonly-used reports. Some reports feature a dashboard style page with report summarizes and data visualization.

**Rubrics:** A rubric is a scoring tool/set of criteria for subjective assessments. Rubrics allow for standardized scoring according to specified criteria, making grading simpler and more transparent. Once rubrics have been created, they can be reused through the course or exported/imported into different courses.

**Synchronous:** joule Synchronous provides a real-time virtual meeting space that allows user communication and collaboration to facilitate learning. For corporate customers, it allows meetings and real time professional development experiences.

**What are some of the new features available in Power 2?**

**Community Hubs:** Based on the concept of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), MOOCH (Massive Open Online Course Hub) or “Community Hubs” is a course directory network that enables the public or private sharing of popular courses or templates for use within their own Moodle site. Users can even advertise or enroll in courses.

**Repository Support:** The repository feature in Moodle 2.0 enables users to import content from virtually any stable external repository directly into Moodle using the file picker.

**Portfolio Support:** Portfolios in Moodle 2.0 enable data, such as forum posts or assignment submissions, to be exported to external systems, such as e-Portfolios.

**Conditional Activities (conditional release):** Conditional activities enable teachers to restrict the availability of any activity/access to content according to certain conditions such as dates, grade obtained, or activity completion.

**Cohorts:** Cohorts, or site-wide groups, enable all members of a cohort to be enrolled in a course in one action, either manually or synchronized automatically.

**Web Services Support:** Web services in Moodle 2 enable the communication between external applications in order to complete a specific function. The Web services in Moodle 2 have been expanded to enable administrators to complete common administrative functions pertaining to users, courses, groups and enrollment management.

**New Blocks:** Comments, My Private Files, Community, Course Completion

- **Comments:** Leave comments on any page where the block exists—great for facilitating student feedback.
- **My Private Files:** Gives all users a space for storing personal files (with quota support).
- **Community:** The community block enables users to search for courses to download or enroll in on a community hub and lists courses in which the user is enrolled.
- **Course Completion:** Report on the completion status of courses.
**Plagiarism prevention integration:** Moodle 2 now provides integration with the popular plagiarism prevention tool, Turnitin.

**How often does Moodlerooms rollout updates from Moodle Core and other joule developments?**
Moodlerooms and Moodle’s core developers operate under very different release models. Moodle’s core developers use an “agile development model.” This means that updates to Moodle’s core codebase are released to the public to download as soon as the code is deemed stable and secure.

Moodlerooms operates a six-month release cycle. This means that twice a year (typically once in June/July and once in December) all joule developments and major updates to Moodle core that were developed six months prior are compiled and applied to customer sites. Moodlerooms operates under this six-month schedule for two main reasons: 1) to limit the impact that new features/functionality/UI adjustments have on end users. 2) To allow all Moodle core updates and joule developments to pass through our additional level of QA testing, thereby confirming the code’s security, stability, reliability and performance.

**If I leave Moodlerooms, can I take joule with me?**
Because joule is not a fork of Moodle, you will be able to take your joule database and data files and ingest them into a standard Moodle site. But if Moodlerooms were to share the modular extensions of joule a single time, it would be required to distribute those same extensions to anyone in the world (as per the open source license agreements).

**What payments gateways are available? How does my company collect the money?**
The PayPal enrollment plugin enables Moodlerooms customers to set up paid courses. Once a joule/Power instance is fully provisioned, the plugin has to be enabled by Moodlerooms then added to the course by the site administrator or manager. You can then set an individual price for the course if needed. For more information on the PayPal enrollment plug-in, visit the moodle.org documentation page.

To automatically collect course payments, login to your business’ PayPal portal and connect a merchant bank account to the business PayPal account. For more information on this process, please visit PayPal’s merchant services page.

**Does Moodlerooms provide notifications in the event of a service interruption to my joule/Power site?**
Moodlerooms provides email-based notifications that are sent to the designated site administrators and support contacts that Moodlerooms has on record.

**How can I theme my site?**
**Express:** Instead of using the Moodle theme system to brand a customer’s joule site, “Express” provides basic and advanced users with tools to completely customize the appearance of their site, course categories and courses. Within joule 2, Moodlerooms has made four new templates available, as well as a number of other features.

**Do you have a repository capable of versioning?**
Moodlerooms can provide an enhanced, hosted integration with Alfresco Community, which offers the industry leading open-source document management system to capture, search, and collaborate.
on documents with full library services and lifecycle management on a unified, robust repository. With Alfresco, users can easily maintain the integrity of content using check-in/checkout features, version control, auditing, and full permissions management.

**Can quizzes be different for everyone?**

It is possible to randomize the order of questions and possible answers to those questions for any learner taking an assessment. This ensures that every student answers the same assortment of questions, but in a different order.

Instructors can also setup personalized learning paths in joule 2’s Personalized Learning Designer to ensure that students access different quizzes/assessments depending on their demonstrated mastery/comfort level with a subject.

**How can we track attendance and progress?**

Attendance and progress can be tracked in joule using the attendance module and the course completion block.

- **Attendance Module**: joule’s Attendance module records if a user has logged into the course during a specified time frame and applies an attendance grade in the student’s Gradebook.
- **Course Completion Block**: This block shows whether a course has been completed and can indicate the progress a student is making towards finishing the course according to specific criteria. The criteria can include meeting an activity's grade level or a manual checking “complete” by either the student and/or teacher. The report can also show if the student has completed another course(s) that is marked as a recommended, pre-requisite course.

**Can Moodlerooms create sites that are FERPA compliant?**

joule’s flexibility allows administrators to edit settings, roles and permissions to ensure compliance of FERPA rules. Moodlerooms can assist with this during the implementation process. Current FERPA guidelines currently include, but are not limited to:

- Disabling e-mail-based self-registration (joule offers several other ways of authenticating users).
- Do not use the “opentogoogle” setting (this prevents information in a joule site from appearing in a Google search)
- Eliminate the guest login option or edit guest permissions to prevent view of profiles and participants lists
- Configure the Front Page so that the courses list is not visible for unauthenticated users
- Edit permissions to prevent student users from viewing the profiles of others (even if the two students are in a course together, the profile shows the list of courses a student is in, and thereby discloses non-directory information).

**Do you modify core code in any way for enhancements or hosting purposes?**

With joule, Moodlerooms has made very slight modifications to the core Moodle codebase in order to offer a comprehensive administrator control panel and session management capabilities. Additionally, modification have been made to the core Moodle codebase in order to make site-wide SSL certificates available to specific customers in our multi-tenant cloud hosting environment.
What is a plug-in?
Moodle is designed to be modular, so that developers can write individual plug-ins that add functionality. Everything from course activities and resources (e.g. chat, quiz, assignments, etc.), course formats (e.g. week view, topic view, etc.), question types (e.g. true false, multiple choice, essay type, etc.), filters (e.g. multimedia filter, glossary names, etc.) and authentication and enrollment tools are plug-ins. Plug-ins can often be enabled and disabled, so that you only use the ones that are important to the mission of your learning programs.

Migration to 2 (joule 2 and Power 2)

Why does Migration to a platform based on Moodle 2 require special planning?
Moodle 2 is the most progressive update of Moodle core to date. Considering Moodlerooms’ joule and Power solutions were originally based off of a Moodle 1 core, migration to a solution based on 2 requires prescriptive planning to ensure that customers can make seamless transition to their new platform with all content and configurations intact.

What are the biggest differences between Moodle 2 and 1?
Moodle 2’s file storage and navigation are the most visible differences. 2 also includes numerous structural changes which will allow developers to focus more intently on improving teaching and learning features and functionality rather than the platform foundation.

Does joule 2 do everything that 1 did?
Moodle 2 provides the same basic teaching and learning possibilities that Moodle 1 provided. However, there are some very specific areas that are being re-developed within the context of the new 2 framework. For more information about what’s currently available in each version, please refer to Moodlerooms’ Comparison Matrix.

Will my previous themes work in 2?
If customers are using the Moodlerooms Express themes, then there will be very little transition work to get your themes to appear the same way within 2. If customers were using regular Moodle themes, they will need to be updated to correspond with the new Moodle themes available within 2.

I paid for customizations in 1, will they be updated by Moodlerooms?
Not automatically. In some cases, new functionality in 2 means that customization is not necessary. For specific customization questions, contact your sales representative.

Will my faculty need retraining for 2?
Course activities are very much the same in 2 and won’t require retraining; however, key elements like conditional release on activities, as well as navigation and file storage will require training in order to use Moodle 2 to its fullest potential.

Do I have to switch to 2 immediately?
No. Ultimately, only you’ll know the best migration date for your institution. However, Moodlerooms will be with you to help you evaluate your readiness and explore the changes between the versions to ensure that you’re using the correct platform to meet the needs of your teaching and learning programs.
How long will open source Moodle 1 be supported?
The core Moodle team will be providing security and performance updates to the 1 platform for at least another 12 months; however, new features and innovations won’t be developed for the 1 platform any longer.

How long will Moodlerooms continue active development on the original joule platform (Moodle 1 core)?
Similar to Moodle core’s 1 developers, Moodlerooms will only be applying patches and fixes to the original joule platform and will no longer be developing new features or functionality.

How soon will Moodlerooms stop supporting joule 1 (Moodle 1 core)?
Moodlerooms will continue supporting the original joule platform for the foreseeable future. When Moodlerooms decides that it will no longer support the original joule platform, customers will be given ample notification to plan a migration to joule 2.

What happens during an upgrade?
The Moodlerooms team will schedule a time with you. Next, your site will be put in maintenance mode. At that time, the site will be upgraded to the newest code. Next, the team will log into the site and upgrade the database. The longest element of that process is when the database reorganizes all of the existing site and course files into the new file storage system. The length of the whole process could take minutes to hours, depending on the size of your database and number of files. Upon conclusion, the team will ask you to login to the site, spot check some courses and areas, and then have you approve the work.

When would an upgrade not be recommended?
As a Moodle partner, Moodlerooms is committed to helping customers assess their readiness for an upgrade through surveys, training and consultative conversations. For the time being, some customers must remain on joule 1 as some plug-ins have not been updated for joule 2. Customers must consider the value and dependency of the plug-in, evaluate if an alternative would suffice or delay upgrade until plug-in availability meets customer need.

Is it possible that some 1 community plug-ins are not upgraded to 2?
Yes. A number of plug-ins were created by various developers and institutions. While some of them have become highly adopted, others have been less popular. If you visit the moodle.org support forums, you can view historical conversations around plug-ins. These same conversations will identify some of the community developers around the distinct projects. If it looks like a plug-in that is critical to you does not have traction for a 2 upgrade, contact Moodlerooms to determine options.

Where will my joule1 course files be located in joule2?
In joule 2, course files are managed within a remarkably different file system. For information on these changes, refer to Moodlerooms’ 2 file system document, here.

Where will my joule1 eMailList emails be located in joule2?
The eMailList block has yet to be developed for joule 2. This block is being developed for a future joule 2 version release.
Will there be a need to address Datatel ILP integration issues when we upgrade from joule1 to joule2?
The same Conduit Web Services responsible for synchronizing information between joule and Datatel Colleague remain unchanged in joule 2. However, it is best to discuss migration to joule 2 if you are currently using the Datatel ILP.

Will there be a need to address Conduit integration issues when we upgrade from joule1 to joule2?
Although Conduit integration with your external ERP/SIS will require reconfiguration in joule 2, Conduit’s original integration capabilities remain intact and should pose no lingering issues after migrating to joule 2.

What will happen to plug-ins (blocks, activities, etc.) that exist in joule1 that don’t exist in joule2? Will those missing plug-ins just not display or could there be errors thrown?
If a customer has used plug-ins in the past that will not transition to joule 2 and no longer wishes to use a similar plug-in supported within joule 2, Moodlerooms will use the administrative control panel to disable the feature before the migration process takes place. This process should not cause errors within the joule 2 environment.

We use quite a bit of publisher content currently in joule1. Will this content upgrade successfully into joule 2 or will I need to obtain the ‘Moodle 2’ version of the content from the publisher?
Compatibility is typically based on how a publisher packages the content. Similar to Moodle 1, Moodle 2 is content agnostic and an upgrade should not affect the compatibility of most content within the platform. Currently, Moodle core is working to comply with IMS common cartridge content standards.

Using the mPower Toolbox block we currently download the nightly SQL dump file and run scripts against the dump to generate reports. Will this feature also exist in joule 2? If so, will there be significant changes to the database schema?
The mPower Toolbox block is available in joule 2 and should enable a download of a nightly SQL dump file for customers to run scripts against the dump and generate reports. However, regarding database schema, joule 2 provides customer access to query-based SQL reports to simplify and streamline the reporting process.

How will we be notified when plug-ins are available/certified for joule2?
Customers will be notified of new plug-in availability/certification with new version releases of joule 2. Customers will be notified via email when version releases are being applied to sites. At any time you can review the Comparison Matrix for plug-in availability.

What is the best way to communicate joule2 bugs to Moodlerooms?
Moodlerooms recommends reporting all bugs and issues to the support portal. Bugs and issues will receive immediate attention.

What is the best way to communicate joule2 enhancement ideas to Moodlerooms?
Moodlerooms recommends reporting enhancement ideas by submitting a support ticket in the support portal.

How do I get joule 2?
Please contact your Moodlerooms sales representative to begin the ‘Are you ready for 2’ conversation.
**Moodlerooms’ Code Review Process**

**When is a code review required?**
A code review is required for the upload of any third-party code to the joule code base. This could include:

- Code developed by the customer or by a third-party authorized by the Client (this includes code developed by other Moodle partners).
- Integrations with external third-party tools.
- Plug-ins found on moodle.org or on related sites.

**What is the code review process?**
Moodlerooms will review the customer’s code and determine if it meets Moodlerooms’ review standards. Moodlerooms will validate that the plug-in performs properly within our hosted installation. If the code passes review, Moodlerooms will notify the customer and install the module on a staging site accessible by the customer. Such installations only happen on the first Sunday of the month, and customer expectation should be set to match that. The code may not be available on Moodlerooms’ production site until the next joule release. In this scenario, installation of the code on Moodlerooms’ staging site constitutes project release.

If the code fails review, Moodlerooms will supply the customer with a code review summary outlining identified issues. Note that the initial code review SOW does not include modifications to the code – it merely includes an analysis and summary. In this scenario, provision of the summary constitutes completion of the project. The summary will outline all major and minor code violations; major violations must be fixed before the plug-in can be added to the customer’s codebase. The Client may make those changes on its own and re-submit the plug-in for code review by Moodlerooms, or alternatively can contract with Moodlerooms through a separate Statement of Work to fix the outstanding violations.

**Why does the code require a review? Some Moodle partners don’t require one…**
Moodlerooms uses a single code base for all of our customers, which enables us to push out security patches and upgrades almost simultaneously with their release by moodle.org (and of course, by Moodlerooms). Because all customers are using the same code base, we have to be extremely careful about only pushing out code that is secure and tested. We cannot make customer X happy by introducing risk to customer Y.

Moodlerooms performs this service in order to ensure that customers’ code will work within the agreed upon SLA and perform within the 99.7% up time. Moodlerooms applies these requirements to all customers to prevent any customer from developing code that degrades server performance or uses a high amount of resources. Moodlerooms unique server architecture also demands that certain coding practices are followed in order to work properly in the hosted environment. Moodlerooms inspects all code for security issues and performance issues. The cost of this process is not intended to be prohibitive, only to cover the cost and time required to review the Client’s code for performance and security risks to the hosted instance.

Remote Learner and customers who previously self-hosted did not encounter this because they had
their own code base. Hence, making changes to Core Moodle files or adding new code to the site only risked their particular site, whereas with Moodlerooms, changes made to the code base reflect on all sites on that build. When speaking with such customers, you must emphasize the advantages of the single code base and what they stand to gain from it.

**How can I best ensure that code will pass the review?**

Send customers the Code Review Guidelines early on and encourage them to check that the code meets these guidelines before submitting it to us for review. In addition to ensuring that code does not introduce any risk to the code base, the other most important issue for customers to be aware of is that the code must be modular. Code that involves changes to Core Moodle or joule files will not be approved. All code must be encased in a plug-in, such as a block or activity, that can be turned on/off for customers and that is separate from the Core code.

**Does a code review cost anything? If so, how much?**

There is a cost associated with a code review. The cost of code reviews is wholly dependent on the code itself, such as:

- Its length (number of lines)
- Complexity
- Number of identified problems
- Customers should not be provided with a ballpark figure until the code has been preliminarily reviewed by the Client Development team and estimated.

**I have a customer who wants to develop his own code. How does that work?**

Moodlerooms is dedicated to providing tools and features that meet the unique needs of its customers. To ensure joule remains relevant to the evolving needs of its customers, Moodlerooms has developed a Client Contributor Program to allow customers to contribute to the development of joule.

Client contributors can develop custom features based on the Core Moodle code that is available for free and can be downloaded at www.moodle.org. They can then submit the code to Moodlerooms for a code review. If approved and accepted by Moodlerooms, customer contributions may be incorporated into the standard joule product line.

**I paid for a Code Review and I even paid for Moodlerooms to fix the major findings from the review, but I still see bugs in the plug-in. Why?**

The code review process does not ensure that the code being reviewed will be bug free. It only ensures that it meets our code review guidelines in terms of not introducing risk to our code base. Moodlerooms does not endorse third-party code that is uploaded to the site; it merely is satisfied that the code will not introduce security or performance risks to our customer. If the customer wishes to address bugs found in the plug-in once it is uploaded to their site, Moodlerooms recommends one of the following options:

- Contract with Moodlerooms via a subsequent SOW to fix specific, named bugs in the plug-in.
- Contact the original third-party developer to have him/her fixes the code. Note that in this case, if the code has already been modified by Moodlerooms to meet our review guidelines, the revised code should be provided to the developer for fixes to be done on that.