



WORCESTER COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

MrCute for Moodle - Teacher's Manual

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MrCute for Moodle

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About MrCute

MrCute is an optional add-on to the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment. More specifically, it extends the functionality of the IMS Repository system originally developed by Alton College, UK.

MrCute is known to be compatible with Moodle 1.8.2 but not with earlier versions. At the time of release (March 2008), it has also been tested in 1.8.4, 1.9 and an early version of Moodle 2.0 with no apparent problems.

A repository is a storage area where materials – in this case e-learning materials – can be held and from where they can easily be accessed by teachers and learners. IMS (Instructional Management Standards) Global Learning Consortium is an international body which aims to set standards for interoperability between learning systems. The specific standards involved in this case are the IMS Content Packaging Standards.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Please note that it is NOT important for teachers and other users to understand what an IMS package is in any detail. Put simply, it is a way of packaging useful information (such as keywords) with a file (or a number of files) and storing the finished package in a repository. Teachers and administrators who require a fuller understanding of the technical particulars should see the MrCute Administrator's Manual.

Before MrCute

The existing Moodle IMS repository system is as follows:

Moodle Administrator creates a folder (usually in the Moodle webroot and name “IMS_repository”). This folder is populated with (unzipped) IMS-compliant packages. In the UK, these are normally the interactive e-learning packages produced by the National Learning Network, but any IMS compliant package may be added, within a subdirectory structure which is aimed at browsing by category and title.

Moodle Administrator “switches on” the repository system by making minor changes to a single configuration file.

Teacher selects “Add an IMS content package” from Add Resources option, then uses the Browse Repository option to search for relevant materials, which can then be previewed and add to a course.

Note: The current upload facility within the option only uploads an IMS-compliant zip file to the currently selected course – this is both wasteful of space and precludes the use of that uploaded material in any other course (unless uploaded again).

The problems

Although this functionality was a useful addition to Moodle, and has been widely adopted in the UK, especially in educational sectors where National Learning Materials are available, there are no easy ways of:

- Finding materials which are relevant to a number of disciplines but only filed under one (for example, material about accepting credit card payments may be applicable to a number of service and sales based vocations, but only files under “beauty salons”).
- Adding more materials to the repository (for example, a teacher may feel that a particular handout or flash animation has relevance to other teachers; at present this would need to be passed to a technically competent person to create an IMS package, and that package then passed to an administrator to load into the ims_repository folder)
- Extending keywording (tagging) or amending title and descriptions. This functionality is required by librarians where validation or reclassification of materials is acceptable.

After MrCute

MrCute addresses these three issues. It adds:

- A search and embed option (and a hidden automatic indexing option to support the search)
- An upload and IMS package creation option
- A new Moodle block to simplify previewing, and to allow editing by the uploader or by an administrator

Why MrCute

Acronyms are fun so we wanted a fun acronym! Nevertheless, it has a meaning too: Moodle Repository Create Upload Tag Embed (admittedly the letters are in the wrong order, and the Validate function is missing – but who would ever remember MrEutcv?)

Credits

Funding for this project came from the United Kingdom's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Capital Programme and we acknowledge this, and the help given by the JISC in general.

The Project was led by Worcester College of Technology (WCT), a college of further Education in the United Kingdom with the involvement of an independent consultant.

Project Team:

Project Director:
Peter Kilcoyne (WCT)

Project Oversight:
Dave Kings (WCT)

Lead designer, specification and documentation:
Richard Goddard (Learning Objectivity UK)

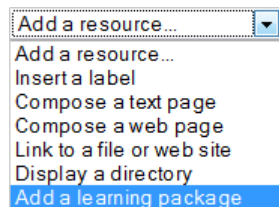
Programmer:
Alastair Hole (WCT)

We also acknowledge all the work done of Moodle by our colleagues all over the world, and particularly the initial inspiration of Martin Dougiamas in Australia and, in relation to our project, Helen Foster (formerly of Alton College UK and latterly Moodle Community Manager).

Checking whether MrCute is installed

Try adding a resource

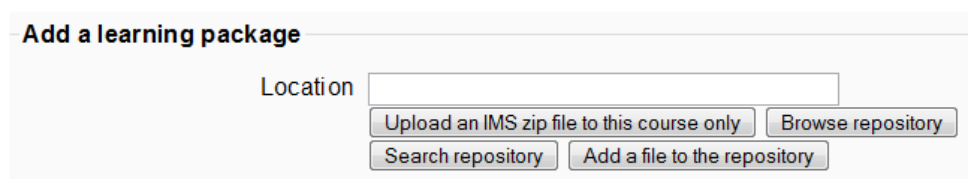
When editing is switched on, each Moodle course area includes an option called “Add resource”. Clicking the drop-down arrow next to this phrase normally displays a list of options. Note that we’ve changed the default wording of the relevant option from “Add an IMS Content Package” to “Add a learning package” as we think that will be more meaningful to teachers – your Moodle Administrator can change this (and any other wording) through the Moodle language system.



Select the “Add a learning package” (or “Add an IMS Content Package”) option. This will display a new window. In the non-MrCute version of Moodle you should see the following buttons (amongst other things):



If MrCute has been installed then you’ll see something like this:



The first option (which allows you to upload a “zipped” IMS package into your own course only) has been renamed for clarity but its functionality has not been changed. We do not recommend use of this option as the repository offers a way of using content in more than one course, and of sharing content where relevant. The remaining displayed buttons are dealt with in the following sections, including the existing Browse option (since some teachers may not have used it in the past).

If MrCute does not seem to be installed (or indeed if even the Browse button is missing) you should contact your Moodle Administrator who will find full installation details in the MrCute Administrator’s documentation. If the “Add a file to the repository” button is missing, your Moodle Administrator may have removed this facility. Contact your Administrator to check.

Deployment

Note: If the word “Deploy” or the phrase “Deploy all” appears when browsing or searching the Repository, the materials displayed are available but have not yet been added to the MrCute indexing system. Clicking “Deploy” will correct this. The “Deploy All” function is normally only available to Administrators, since the process can take some time if a large number of packages require deployment.

Browsing and searching the repository

In order to embed (incorporate) a piece of learning material from the repository into a course, teachers can now either:

“Browse” to the desired material via the predetermined directory (folder) structure. Assuming a logical and intuitive folder structure has been put in place this will give reasonable access to many materials; for example, most materials covering plumbing might be found in a folder named “Built Environment” and a sub-folder named “Plumbing”.

“Search” for materials by title, description or keyword. This has the advantage of allowing teachers to find material which is relevant to their required topic but which is filed within a folder which does not immediately suggest that relevance. For example, the mathematical calculation of area may be found within a “flooring” section of “built environment” but may be relevant to stage design or painting and decorating.

Browse

This option (if installed and enabled) has been available in Moodle since version 6. To browse to a piece of learning material (which may be anything from a single document to a full web-based multimedia package) make sure Editing is switched on and then click on the Add a Resource option in the relevant topic/date box. Then select “Add a Learning Package” and the following options will appear:

General

Name*

Summary ?

Trebuchet | 1 (8 pt) | Lang | **B** | *I* | U | ~~S~~ | x₂ | x² | [List] | [Undo] | [Redo]

[Bulleted List] | [Numbered List] | [Decrease Indent] | [Increase Indent] | [Text Color] | [Background Color] | [Link] | [Unlink] | [Image] | [Table] | [Smiley] | [Globe] | [Print] | [Code] | [Fullscreen]

Path:

Add a learning package

Location

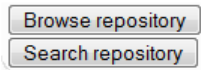
Select the Browse Repository option and follow normal browsing procedures to get to the material you require. When you find a likely package you can **Preview** it and then (if acceptable) **Choose** it. The latter option will add the material to your course. You will also need to enter a Name for the item selected. Depending on the material, you may wish to include or exclude the navigation options listed at the foot of the main IMS Repository window.

Search

This is one of the new functions added by MrCute. The process is essentially identical to the Browse function but allows you to search for relevant materials by title, keyword and author. To search for a piece of learning material make sure Editing is switched on and then click on the Add a Resource option in the relevant topic/date box. Then select “Add a Learning Package” and the following options will appear:

The Repository Block

If the Moodle Administrator has enabled the Block, you can also Browse to and Search for IMS packages from the block rather than from the “Add a resource” option. The block can be added by teachers in a course, using the “Add block” option which is normally displayed (when editing is available) at the bottom right of the Moodle course window. The following two options will be displayed.



Although this option does not allow embedding of the materials in a particular topic/date box, it can be a useful way of simply determining what materials are available. The browse and search procedures are essentially the same as described above but normally only the **Preview** function is available.

The additional **Edit** function will be displayed if you were the person who originally uploaded the material (or if you are a Moodle Administrator). This allows the correction of errors, the addition of keywords, and (in the case of an Administrator) the ability to allow or disallow the material as a shared resource for anyone other than the original uploader (see Chapter 5).

Adding to the repository

Any repository needs materials. In the United Kingdom, many repositories include packages produced by the National Learning Network. Now, however, teachers and others can also contribute materials to the Moodle IMS repository using the MrCute module.

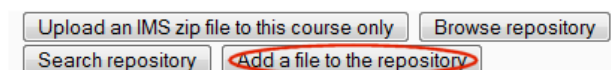
In non-MrCute versions of Moodle, teachers can upload ready-made IMS packages to their own course areas using “Choose or upload a file” within the “Add an IMS content package” option. However, there are two disadvantages to this approach:

- Teachers must create the IMS package to “contain” any resource they wish to store – most teachers have neither the technical expertise nor the spare time to do this.
- Materials uploaded in this way are stored within the specific course area, not in the Moodle repository for the whole institution. This means that (a) any material cannot be easily shared with or viewed by teachers on other courses, and (b) if the material IS shared by copying and uploading to another course, wasteful duplication occurs.

As noted earlier, this original Choose and upload functionality remains available in the MrCute module but has been renamed to “Upload an IMS zip file to this course only”.

However, it is recommended that for single files teachers use the new MrCute option to create an IMS package automatically and to place that package in the repository as follows:

Make sure Editing is switched on and then click on the Add a Resource option in the relevant topic/date box and then select “Add an learning package”. Click on the “Add a file” button:



MrCute will display a new screen on which you will be asked to enter some basic details about the material you are sharing – we usually call this the “tagging” screen. It

is important that you complete the details carefully and fully – if you skip the detail people will not be able to find the package which you have been kind enough to share! Here is the screen largely completed.

The screenshot shows a Moodle file upload form. The fields are filled as follows:

- Title:** MrCute icon
- Description:** This icon is used on the MrCute website to designate a MrCute-specific item
- Keywords (one per line):** MrCute, Moodle, Icon
- File:** MrCute.jpg
- Repository location:** (empty)
- I am not willing to share this material:**

A dropdown menu is open for the Repository location, showing the following options:

- Construction(Choose)
- Engineering(Choose)
- Generic(Choose)
- HowToUseMoodle(Choose)
- Images(Choose)
- HairAndBeauty(Choose)

Buttons for 'Upload' and 'Cancel' are visible at the bottom.

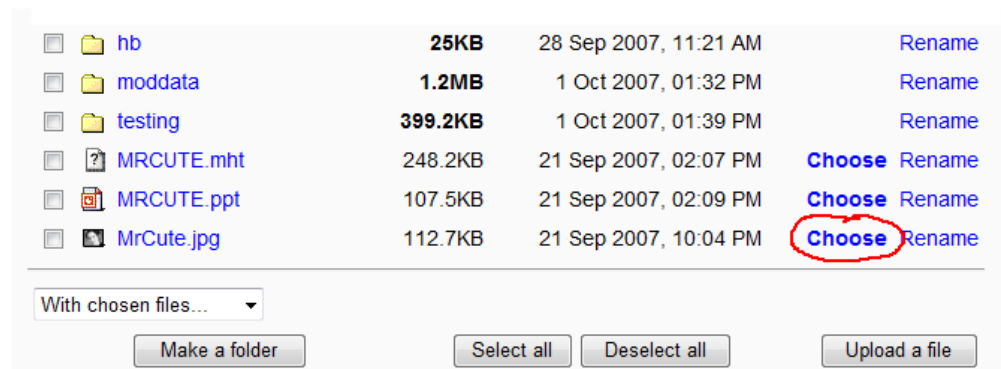
All entries should be considered carefully – you might find it useful to put yourself in the position of someone *looking* for the material you are uploading!

Then browse to the file which you want to use as the basis for the IMS package and to share with other teachers in your institution. The file must be one of several types:

- An MS Word document
- An Adobe Acrobat file in PDF format
- Any text document
- Any PowerPoint file
- An image in JPG, PNG or GIF format (including GIF animations)
- A Flash file in SWF format
- A video file in MPG, WMV, MP4, H264 or Quicktime format
- A sound file in MP3, WMA, WAV, MIDI, AAC, A4A or OGG format

Note that whatever format is selected, the finished package will only display correctly on computers with the relevant capabilities (so, for example, to show a PDF file, Acrobat reader must be installed) and if your Administrator has enabled the relevant “multimedia filters” in Moodle. You will probably find it easiest to stick to the most common formats at first.

The file should be uploaded (in the normal Moodle way) and then, when the file is displayed in the list, click the **Choose** option:

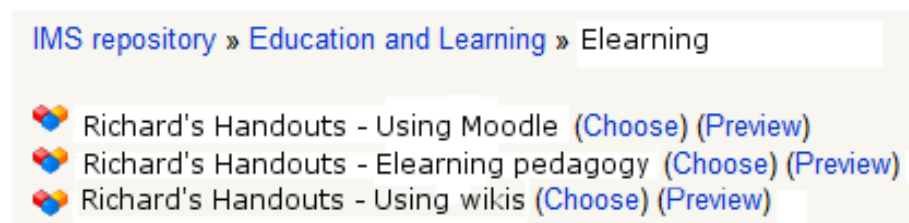


About folders: You will be able to select a main category and, if necessary, sub-categories. The choices shown will be based on the structure of the repository in your institution. Try to work within the given folders, but if you need to add a new main or sub category (or both) you'll need to contact your Moodle Administrator.

Note that in some institutions library staff or other acceptable persons may have the right to validate your tagging (and even in rare circumstances to hide your material). Normally this facility is made available to staff who have particular skills such as cataloguing and keywording. They may also need to look at copyright issues.

Once you have clicked the Ok button, your file will be “packaged” to meet the IMS contact packaging standard and will be added to the repository (and to the internal indexing system so that it becomes immediately available to searchers). This may take a few moments.

Once the package is in the repository, you will see it listed as if you had searched for it yourself:



You can **Preview** your package and then (if acceptable) **Choose** it. The latter option will add the material to your course (you will need to place your title for the package in the “Name” box).

Clearing the uploaded files: The file which has been transferred to the repository will also remain in your own course's Files area. Unless you need it, you can (and should) safely delete this file using the Files link in your course's Administration block.

Support and Upgrades

Support

We are not in a position, in financial terms or in the availability of time, to offer direct support to administrators or users of MrCute.

However, we will monitor the MrCute email address (mrcute@wortechn.ac.uk) and respond when possible to queries VIA THE RELEVANT MRCUTE DISCUSSION FORUMS, initially on the MrCute Moodle (where you can also try out MrCute) for yourself) at <http://www.learningobjectivity.com/moodle182> and (in due course we hope) on Moodle.org. We will not normally respond direct to individuals.

Bugs

Please report bugs to mrcute@wortechn.ac.uk . We will again respond via the MrCute discussion forums.

Upgrades

No guarantee is given or implied that later versions of Moodle will support, or be supported by, MrCute.

However, the team undertakes to keep a watch on future Moodle developments and where possible to make available amended code.

Our eventual aim is that MrCute be accepted into the Moodle core, as the earlier IMS repository system has been.

Licence

No guarantee is given or implied in any way that MrCute is suitable for any task.

The software is copyright Worcester College of Technology and the documentation is copyright Worcester College of Technology and Learning Objectivity UK. However the software is released under the terms of the full GNU General Public Licence which disallows inclusion of the code into any proprietary software and prevents anyone charging you for it. The licence wording may be viewed at the GNU website at <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl-3.0.txt>.

The following is a selective quote from the GNU website:

What is Free Software?

“Free software” is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of “free” as in “free speech”, not as in “free beer”.

Free software is a matter of the users' freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software. More precisely, it refers to four kinds of freedom, for the users of the software:

- 1. The freedom to run the program, for any purpose (freedom 0).*
- 2. The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs (freedom 1). Access to the source code is a precondition for this.*
- 3. The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).*
- 4. The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits (freedom 3). Access to the source code is a precondition for this.*

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