ToolGPA

NOVEMBER 2026

Simple Machines Forum

The Insider's Guide

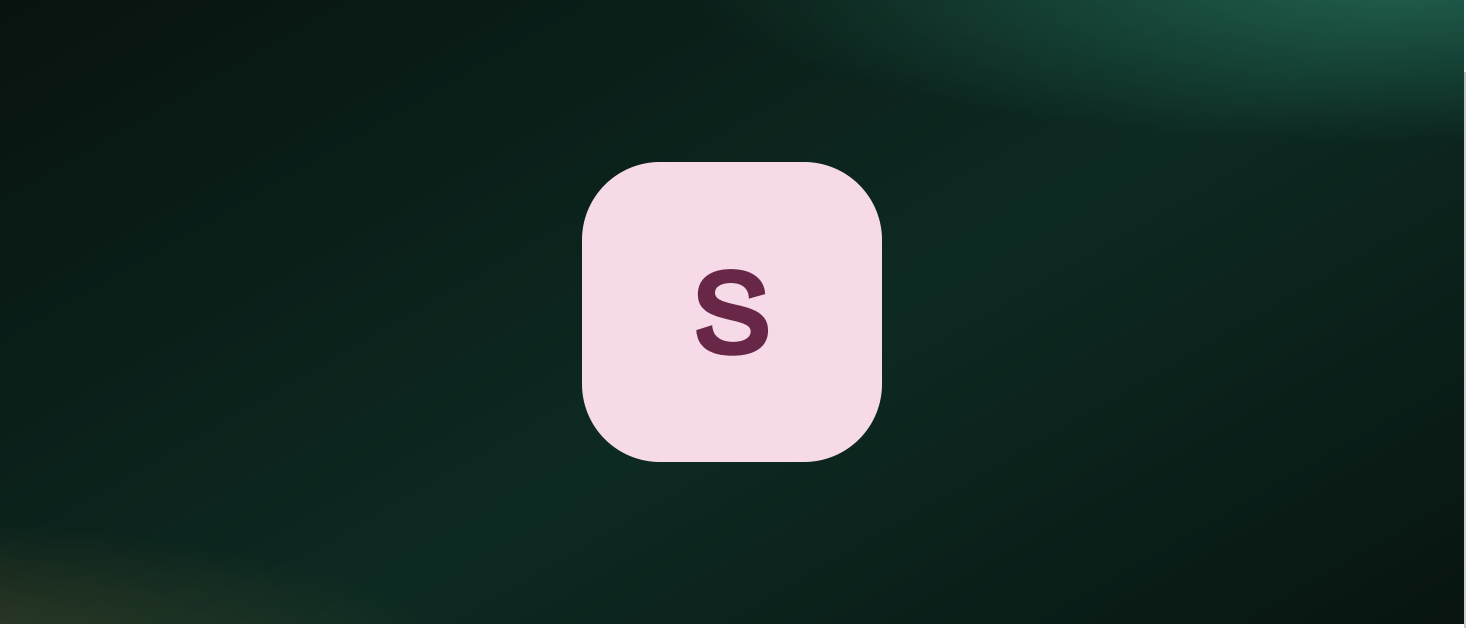
Free open-source community forum software (SMF)



Every plan, grade, refund rule and rival among course and community platforms, read from Simple Machines Forum's own pages.

Made by Simple Machines · checked Nov 13, 2026 · toolgpa.com

2.0
GPA



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Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

ToolGPA put this guide together from Simple Machines Forum's own pages, its app-store listings and our grades. Every fact in it is on Simple Machines Forum's page too, where it is kept up to date. Checked Nov 13, 2026.

Welcome

What it is, who it suits, its grades and the ten things to know first

2.0

GPA, above 23 of the 98 other course and community platforms we grade

Simple Machines Forum, usually called SMF, is free and open-source community forum software written in PHP. You install it on your own web server and it stores its data in a database such as MySQL or PostgreSQL. The project describes it as a way to set up an online community within minutes.

To get you started, here are **8 things to know about Simple Machines Forum**, taken from its own pages and our grades.

> **You run it yourself, and its listing is thin because the project's own site could not be read.**
>
> From our report card of Simple Machines Forum

1 **Best for free BSD-licensed forum software**

Simple Machines Forum is free forum software under a BSD licence on PHP with MySQL or PostgreSQL.

2 **It is free**

Simple Machines Forum has no paid plan at all. The software is free and open source under a BSD 3-clause license; you pay only for your own web hosting.

3 **It runs on Web**

Web.

4 **Open-source license**

The software is licensed under the BSD 3-clause license, and its development repository is public on GitHub.

5 **PHP with MySQL or PostgreSQL**

The project's repository lists PHP, MySQL and PostgreSQL as its stack, so it runs on common shared and virtual hosting.

6 **Quick setup**

The project says you can set up your own online community within minutes of getting the software.

7 **A 2.0 GPA, above 23 of 98**

That is against the other course and community platforms we grade, on value, the free plan, features, ease of use and platforms.

8 **Keep it**

Simple Machines Forum is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

Simple Machines Forum at a glance

PRICING Free	FREE PLAN Yes
FREE TRIAL None stated	RUNS ON Web
MADE BY Simple Machines	CATEGORY Courses & Communities
OUR GRADE 2.0 GPA, fair	

The report card

Best for free BSD-licensed forum software

Simple Machines Forum is free forum software under a BSD licence on PHP with MySQL or PostgreSQL. You run it yourself, and its listing is thin because

the project's own site could not be read.

TOOLGPA REPORT CARD	Simple Machines Forum	Graded Nov 13, 2026
SUBJECT	GRADE	COMMENT
Value for money	C	The software is free but you pay for hosting and run it yourself, which keeps it at the ordinary grade.
Free plan and trial	B	Free and open source with no caps, though you provide the server.
Features	C	The listing shows a basic forum with a wiki and community forum for help, but little about its features.
Ease of use	D	No store rating on record, and it must be installed and maintained on your own server.
Platforms and integrations	C	Web only, and no integrations are listed.
Grade point average		Fair, out of 4.0 **2.0**

An A is worth 4 points, a B 3, a C 2, a D 1 and an F nothing. The GPA is the average of the five.

Who Simple Machines Forum is for

- ✓ Fits if you can host a PHP forum yourself
- ✓ Works for people who want a BSD-licensed forum

Who it is not for

- ✕ Not for you if you want hosting included, as the project does not offer hosted plans on the pages read
- ✕ Tight if you need paid support, as help is a community forum and wiki
- ✕ Watch out: the project's own site could not be read, so details come from its GitHub repository

Good to know

Good for

- ✓ Small communities that want a free forum on their own host
- ✓ Admins who prefer a permissive BSD license

Worth knowing

- ⓘ You install and maintain it yourself; the project's site does not offer hosted plans on the pages read.
- ⓘ The project's own website could not be read during research, so details come from its GitHub repository.
- ⓘ Support comes from the project's community forum and wiki.

What it costs

Every plan, the free plan, ways to pay less and how prices have moved

Free

No paid plan at all

Simple Machines Forum is free to use.

> **The software is free but you pay for hosting and run it yourself, which keeps it at the ordinary grade.**
>
> From our grade for value for money

SMF

$0

Free download. You host and maintain it yourself.

The free plan

The software is free and open source under a BSD 3-clause license; you pay only for your own web hosting.

Read from github.com on Nov 13, 2026.

What it does

Its main features, where it runs, what it works with and who makes it

1

Place it runs: Web

Free open-source community forum software (SMF). Here is what it does, as its own site describes it, and what it covers: open source, self-hostable, community.

> **The listing shows a basic forum with a wiki and community forum for help, but little about its features.**
>
> From our grade for features

Open-source license

The software is licensed under the BSD 3-clause license, and its development repository is public on GitHub.

PHP with MySQL or PostgreSQL

The project's repository lists PHP, MySQL and PostgreSQL as its stack, so it runs on common shared and virtual hosting.

Quick setup

The project says you can set up your own online community within minutes of getting the software.

Project wiki and forum

The project runs a community forum and a wiki for documentation and help.

Where it runs

Web

What it works with

Its own pages name no integrations.

Simple Machines Forum is made by Simple Machines.

PART 04 · STANDING

Where it stands

Its grades against its category, and whether to keep it or make your own

23/98

Other course and community platforms it is graded above

Simple Machines Forum's GPA of 2.0 is higher than 23 of the 98 other course and community platforms we grade, and level with 21.

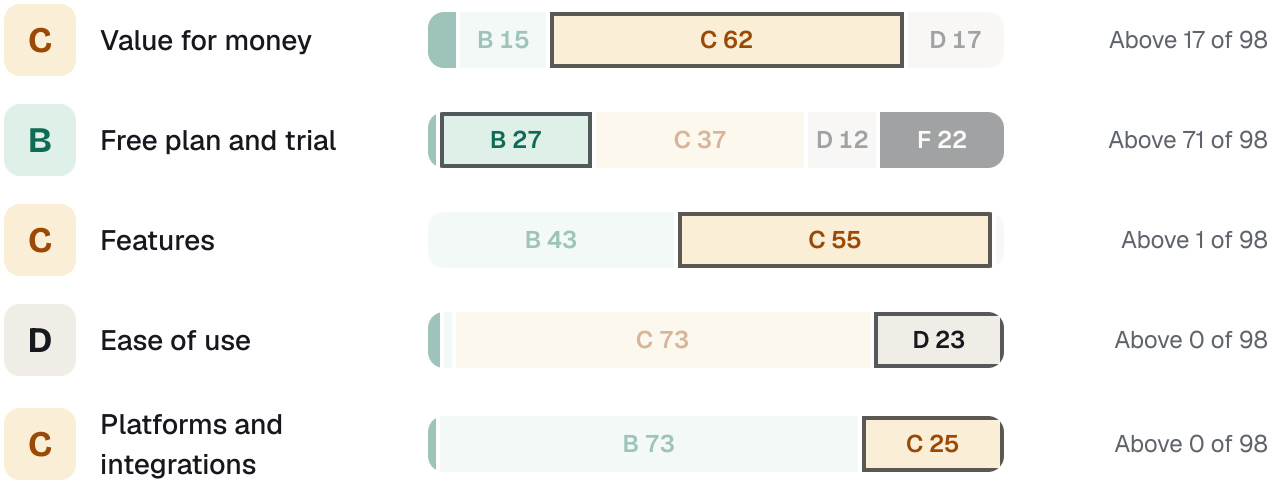
It stands best on free plan and trial (B, above 71 of 98) and worst on ease of use (D, above 0).

Simple Machines Forum has no paid plan.

On features, ease of use and platforms it scores 1.7 out of 4. Nothing scores higher for less, though at least one tool matches that score at a lower price.

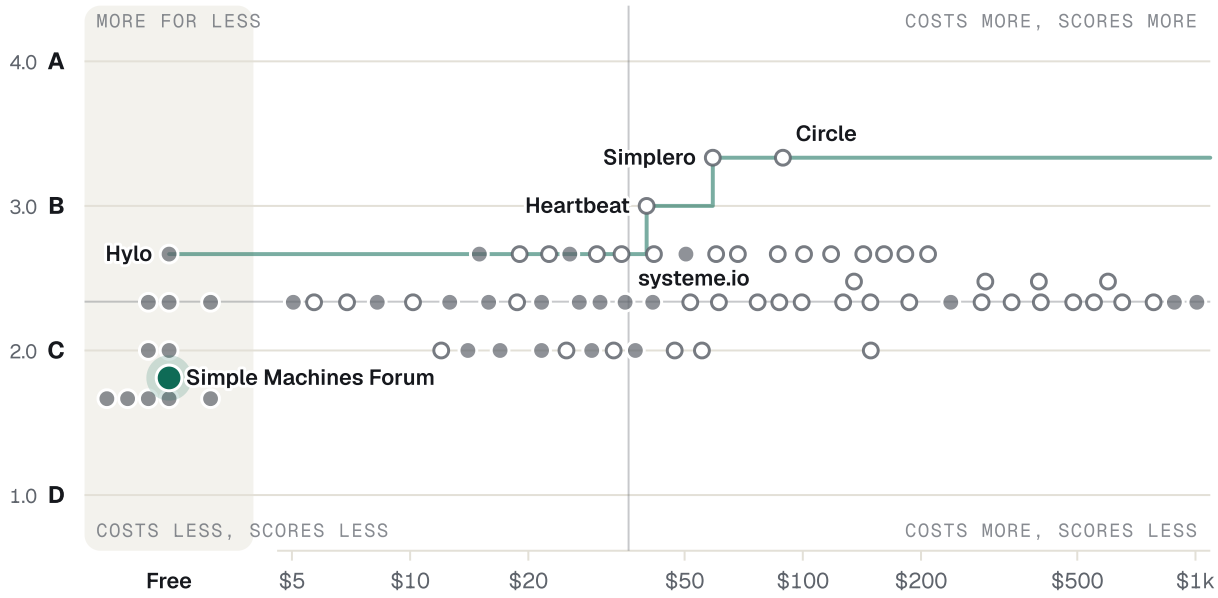
Each grade against the category

Every bar is all 99 course and community platforms we grade, cut by the letter each got. Simple Machines Forum's own letter is outlined.



Price against what you get

Each dot is one of 78 course and community platforms. Further left costs less; higher up scores better on features, ease of use and platforms. Simple Machines Forum is the marked dot.



What paid plans start at, a month (each step along is roughly double)

Keep it, or make your own?

Whether this is something you could build for yourself with an AI app builder, and what you would give up.

Keep it

Simple Machines Forum is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

That makes this kind of software worth paying for, not this one in particular: 54 of the 98 other course and community platforms grade higher.

What you could not

- ✕ A members' space with posts, chat and events that people keep coming back to.

What this rests on. Simple Machines Forum's listing: what it does, where it runs, what it plugs into and what it costs. It is a judgement about the kind of software this is. We have not built a replacement for it, and making your own means looking after it too. How we decide, and every tool's verdict.

The alternatives

The tools it is most often weighed against, side by side



phpBB, MyBB, Flarum and NodeBB

The 4 tools Simple Machines Forum is most often weighed against, with where each one differs from it.

2.0 GPA

phpBB

Free

Free open-source bulletin board software written in PHP.

Simple Machines Forum and phpBB compared in full

2.0 GPA

MyBB

Free

Free open-source forum software with plugins and themes.

Simple Machines Forum and MyBB compared in full

2.0 GPA

Flarum

Free

Free open-source forum software you host yourself.

Simple Machines Forum and Flarum compared in full

2.4
GPA

NodeBB

Free plan · from $20/mo

Open-source forum software with managed hosting plans.

Simple Machines Forum and NodeBB compared in full

PART 06 · QUESTIONS

Quick answers

The questions people ask about it, each answered in a line or two

11

Questions, each answered in a line or two

The short version of everything above, for when you only need the answer. Each one is told in full in its part of the guide.

Is Simple Machines Forum free?

Yes. Simple Machines Forum is free to use.

How much does Simple Machines Forum cost?

Simple Machines Forum lists one plan. SMF: $0.

What platforms does Simple Machines Forum work on?

Simple Machines Forum is available on Web.

Does Simple Machines Forum have an Android app?

No Android app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. Simple Machines Forum is listed for Web.

Does Simple Machines Forum have an iPhone app?

No iPhone app was listed when its pages were read on Nov 13, 2026. Simple Machines Forum is listed for Web.

Is Simple Machines Forum open source?

Yes. Simple Machines Forum is open source, according to its own site.

Who makes Simple Machines Forum?

Simple Machines Forum is made by Simple Machines.

What are the alternatives to Simple Machines Forum?

The closest alternatives to Simple Machines Forum in our directory are phpBB, MyBB, Flarum and NodeBB.

How does Simple Machines Forum compare with other course and community platforms?

Simple Machines Forum's GPA of 2.0 is higher than 23 of the 98 other course and community platforms we grade, and level with 21.

Is Simple Machines Forum good value for money?

ToolGPA grades Simple Machines Forum C for value for money. Simple Machines Forum has no paid plan.

Could I make my own version of Simple Machines Forum?

Simple Machines Forum is free, so making your own would save you nothing.

Where this guide comes from

The prices, plans, platforms and features were read from Simple Machines Forum's own pages on Nov 13, 2026, and the grades were given on Nov 13, 2026. Graded from this listing, whose facts were read from Simple Machines's own pages on 13 November 2026. Not based on using the product, and shorter than our full reviews.

Every tool we list gets five grades, A to F, each with its reason, and a GPA that averages them. How each is decided is at toolgpa.com/grades. This guide is ToolGPA's own work; it is not made, paid for or approved by Simple Machines. Prices change, so check simplemachines.org before you buy.

github.com/SimpleMachines/SMF

About ToolGPA

Who made this guide, what else is on the site, and how to cite it

7,721

Tools graded, in 95 categories

ToolGPA grades software the way a school report grades a pupil: five subjects, a letter for each with the reason written beside it, and a GPA that averages them. Prices, plans and platforms are read from each maker's own pages and dated, so you always know how fresh a figure is.

Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Every tool on the site has a guide like this one, free to download and pass on. It all lives at toolgpa.com.

7,721	95	739	579
tools graded	categories	price changes on record	apps priced in 12 countries

What else is on toolgpa.com

Simple Machines Forum, kept up to date

Everything in this guide, with prices and grades as they are today

toolgpa.com/tools/simple-machines-forum

How grades are given

The rules behind every letter and every GPA

toolgpa.com/grades

Value charts

What each tool costs against what it scores, for every category

toolgpa.com/charts

Compare

Any two tools side by side, plan by plan

toolgpa.com/compare

Price changes

Every price rise and cut on record, each with its source

toolgpa.com/price-changes

Prices by country

What apps cost on the App Store in 12 countries

toolgpa.com/prices-by-country

Pay less

Every public discount: yearly billing, students, nonprofits

toolgpa.com/save

Keep or make

Which tools are worth paying for, and which you could build yourself

toolgpa.com/keep-or-make

Scan for the live page

Prices and grades as they are today

Quoting this guide?

Please name ToolGPA and link to the live page, so readers can check the figures for themselves:

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ToolGPA, "Simple Machines Forum: The
Insider's Guide", checked Nov 13, 2026.
https://toolgpa.com/tools/simple-
machines-forum
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Know someone choosing between course and community platforms?

Send them this guide: toolgpa.com/tools/simple-machines-forum/guide

ToolGPA elsewhere: youtube.com/@toolgpa

See our other guides

The best-graded course and community platforms after Simple Machines Forum, each with an Insider's Guide of its own.

Courses & Communities Insider's Guide

Every one of the 99 course and community platforms we grade, compared

Hylo Insider's Guide

Free open-source platform for community groups and coordination

3.2 GPA

Academy LMS Insider's Guide

WordPress LMS plugin with a free core and Pro licenses by site count

2.8 GPA

Circle Insider's Guide

Community platform with courses, events, payments and branded apps

2.8 GPA

ToolGPA

Choosing software? Every tool graded, every price dated.

Compare tools at toolgpa.com ›

Everything in this guide is ToolGPA's own summary of what Simple Machines Forum's pages, its app-store listings and public reviews said on the dates shown. Grades are our judgement under the rules at toolgpa.com/grades. Every grade, review and ranking on ToolGPA is our own judgement. No company can pay for a grade or change one. Simple Machines Forum is a trademark of its owner, and this guide is not made, paid for or approved by Simple Machines. Prices and plans change: check simplemachines.org before you buy.