

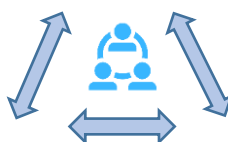
# Using Discussion Forums



## Discussion Forums

Discussion forums are used in online courses to encourage student discourse that may have been provided in the classroom in face to face courses. It can be challenging to meaningfully engage students in online forums, but careful design and management of the forums will result in success. Key to success is ensuring that the discussion forums are meaningful and that students understand, and agree with, the benefits of participation.

Follow the best practice tips below to ensure successful discussion forums.



<i>Getting discussion forums going</i>	<i>Maintaining the discussion</i>
Align the discussion forum with the module learning outcomes and make this explicit for the students.	Post early and regularly to the discussion forum. Model both the behaviour and the type of responses you expect from your students.
Outline the 'rules of engagement' which include both the expected student input and the netiquette required. For example, see the 3CQ model (developed by Jenn Stewart-Mitchell)	Listen to the students, let them know you are listening by responding with both approval and further questions.
Use directed prompts rather than open questions. Allow students to post multimedia responses.	Make sure the discussion stays on track. Deal immediately with negativity, contact wayward students individually.
Use group discussion forums for large classes. The group discussion can be private to the group, but request the group post their final comments to a class discussion forum.	Acknowledge the validity of student contributions within the module context and correct all misunderstandings.
Grade for quality not quantity. For example, allocate a high grade to students who build on other students' points.	If the discussion is petering out without having achieved the discussion objective, bring in a new idea, move the discussion onward.

Participation in forums is higher when it is required and graded. But it is not always feasible to allocate grades, thus the benefits for posting in non-graded discussions must be explicit. For example, create a discussion forum for students to ask questions about an upcoming assignment, encourage them to answer each other's questions and intervene to inform them if they are on the right/wrong track.






In order to avoid last minute posting by students, make the post a two-stage process. Ask students to post an initial answer to the prompt in the first week and then a more substantive response that will be graded in the second week.

Contact students who are not engaging, individually via email or by phone. Some students may lack the confidence to put their ideas in an open discussion forum, consider using private forums that only you and the students sees as a scaffolding mechanism.

At the end of the discussion summarise the main points of the discussion thread towards the end of the period before requesting any final thoughts.

### Discussion Forum Tools

Most Virtual Learning Environments have their own discussion forum tools inbuilt. But you can also think creatively about using other types of tools to support this activity.

 <b>Standard VLE Tools</b>	The chat or forum tools can be used to create effective discussions. The forum tools allow many different formats, select the one most appropriate to your learning activity.
 <b>YouTube</b>	The commenting feature available in Youtube can facilitate a lot of discussion about particular videos and is a very useful feature from a learning perspective.
 <b>Meet</b>	(Google) Meet while it does not offer as much functionality as Zoom or Connect it is still a very useful tool for discussion based activities.
 <b>slack</b>	Slack is a cloud based tool purposely designed for collaboration that is built for discussion based activities. It can facilitate persistent chat rooms (channels) organized by topic, private groups, and direct messaging.
 <b>Glossary</b>	Use a glossary to encourage discussion. Students can comment on each entry and even rate entries, both of which can facilitate "discussion" between learners.

## Further Resources:

Rules of Engagement in discussion forums the 3CQ model (developed by Jenn Stewart-Mitchell)

[https://transliteratelibrarians.weebly.com/uploads/3/7/4/2/37427333/publishing\\_sharing\\_and\\_commenting2.pdf](https://transliteratelibrarians.weebly.com/uploads/3/7/4/2/37427333/publishing_sharing_and_commenting2.pdf)

Five Tips for Improving Online Discussion Boards <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/five-tips-for-improving-online-discussion-boards>

Discussion Boards: Valuable? Overused? Discuss <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/03/27/new-approaches-discussion-boards-aim-dynamic-online-learning>

Teaching in a Digital Age : <https://opentextbc.ca/teachinginadigitalage/chapter/6-5-online-collaborative-learning/>

The Most Successful Online Discussion Board — a Case Study <http://at.blogs.wm.edu/the-most-successful-online-discussion-board-a-case-study/>

## References

Corfman, T., & Beck, D. (2019). Case study of creativity in asynchronous online discussions. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0150-5>

Mbati, L., & Minnaar, A. (2015). Guidelines towards the facilitation of interactive online learning programmes in higher education. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i2.2019>

Kibaru, F. (2018). Supporting faculty to face challenges in design and delivery of quality courses in virtual learning environments. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 19(4), 176–197. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.471915>