

FOL Discussions

What are they?

Online discussions are a great tool to for allowing students to engage with each other, the instructor, or the class material in an online environment. Online discussions are often arranged by discussion boards, forums, and threads.

- A discussion board is the tool that hosts the space for online discussions.
- Discussion boards can hold multiple **forums**, which can be organized by **topic**.
- Discussion **threads** are conversations within discussion forums and begin with a leading question or prompt. Users can respond to the original prompt and can reply to other responses.

Advantages of Using Online Discussion

- Provide a forum for student-to-student engagement in an online environment
- Allow for conversations to continue after class ends - English language learners might need extra time to process ideas
- Introverted students may feel more comfortable contributing to an online discussion
- Instructors can respond to, and validate, posts from individual students

Tips for Using Online Discussions

It can be challenging to create online discussions that are not repetitive. Here are some ideas for using discussion in your course:

- **Connect the discussion to your learning outcomes** - from a student's perspective, frequent online discussions can seem like 'busy work.' Make sure there is a clear connection with the course learning outcomes
- **Stick to open ended questions** - ask questions that may have different responses, or that may be subject to different interpretations.
- **Provide specific instructions** - students may not know how to participate constructively in an online discussion. You need to give them clear guidelines and expectations for participation.
- **Describe the assessment** - tell student how you will be grading their posts. It may be helpful to provide an exemplar

Examples of online discussion assignments

- Assign each student a question for exam review - have students post a response
- Assign multi-part questions, where groups of students must each answer one part of a question
- Ask them to post examples of something discussed in class (i.e after a lecture on urban planning, students could take photos of walkable streetscapes they encounter)
- Health and safety lesson - get students to post examples of hazards they see in the school/work
- Ask students reflections on course readings and lectures in relation to personal experiences.
- Assign a collaborative exercise, such as a problem-based learning activity or case study.

How to use the FOL discussion tool

Organizing Forums and Topics in FOL

- A discussion **Forum** refers to a category or type of discussion threads. For example, you may want a forum for graded discussions and a separate forum for general information.
- A discussion **Topic** refers to the specific discussion question or assignment to be completed by students. A topic must appear in an overarching Forum.

Creating a Discussion Forum

1. From the Course Links menu within your course, select **Discussions**
2. On the Discussions List page, click the **New** button, and select **New Forum**.
3. Enter the forum title in the **Title** field.
Note: you may also add a description (optional)
 - to create a new topic in this forum with the same title check box to automatically create a topic in the forum with the same name.

In the **Options** section there are several features available to use:

- Selecting Allow anonymous posts will enable anonymous posting to topics in the forum.
 - **Note:** You cannot evaluate anonymous posts.
- Selecting A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the forum will allow you to approve posts before they appear in forum topics.
- Selecting Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads in each topic requires users to start a thread before they can read and respond to other threads in each topic.

Availability Options

In the availability section there are several options:

- Select a **Visibility** option for your forum:
 - Use the Has Start Date and Has End Date check boxes to set your availability. You can also display the dates in the calendar tool by checking the Display in Calendar checkbox
- Select forum **Locking Options:**
- If the discussion assignment will have a specific start date and end date:
 - Select Unlock forum for a specific date range to open the forum within a date range.
 - Select the Has Start Date and Has End Date check boxes to set your forum availability.
- Click **Save and Close** or **Save and Add Topic**.

NOTE: Once you have created a Discussion Forum, you can proceed to Set Up a New Topic within that Forum. The same steps apply to set-up criteria for a Discussion Topic.