

SET UP DISCUSSIONS

The most common form of interaction in an online course is through the discussion board using forums established by an instructor. Participation and interaction in the discussion board does not occur naturally, but must be intentionally designed into your courses. To encourage engaging, quality discussion, craft discussion questions carefully and create inquiry.

If you want to encourage participation, consider allowing students to post anonymously. Also, allow students to create new threads. This flexibility may encourage members to post their ideas and questions. You can also provide incentive by grading the discussion or adding exam questions based on discussion content.

DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

You can help your students feel comfortable and provide them with guidelines as they begin to use the discussion board.

The following list describes four steps for developing successful online discussions to help build community and fulfill assignments.

-  **Define participation requirements**
Students need to be aware of your expectations. Create a forum where students can read about etiquette and access grading information. Model proper online interaction and reinforce appropriate behavior with public recognition.
-  **Craft an effective question**
Incorporate multimedia resources into your questions to reduce the monotony of purely text based interactions. With the popularity of services like YouTube™, you can ask students to view a clip and ask for responses. Use the mashups feature to include images, videos, and slide presentations to your questions. Students can also add mashups to their replies.
-  **Encourage new ideas**
If discussion posts contain too much agreement and not enough questioning of ideas, try assigning students with the last names A–M to support one side and N–Z to support the other.
-  **Moderate**
Establish your presence by asking for clarification, resources, or input from silent participants.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FORUM SETTINGS

Forum settings allow you to use the discussion board in different ways. For example, to fully control a forum, you create all threads, moderate, and grade the posts. For a student-led discussion, allow students to create new threads with the option of posting anonymously.

The following table includes some of the ways you can control the behavior of forums in a discussion board.

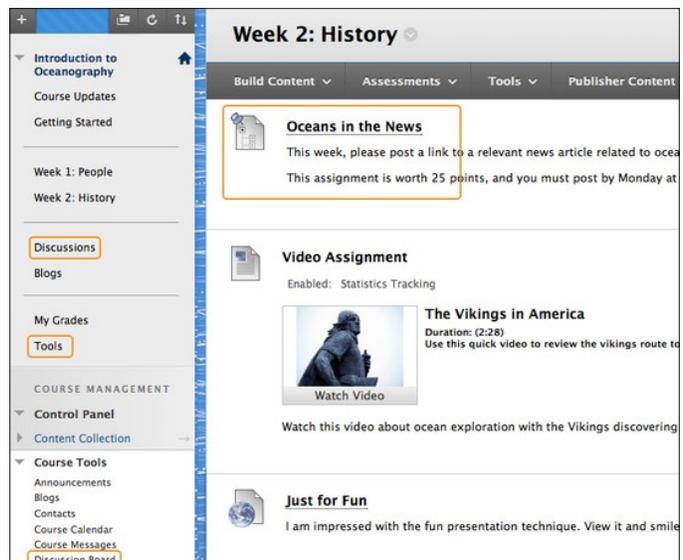
| Goal | Forum Setting |
|--|---|
| Promote originality and a variety of ideas | You can create "post first" forums where you ask students to respond before they can read and reply to their classmates' posts. |
| Create effective social forums | Allow students to post anonymously and without worrying about receiving a grade. Allowing students to post anonymously is important at the beginning of a course when they are still becoming comfortable with discussions. |
| Monitor quality and behavior | Assign a moderator to review each post before making it public. To learn more, see Moderate Discussions. |
| Allow students to control the discussion | Allow students to edit, delete, and rate posts. To learn more about ratings, see How to Rate Posts. Also, you can allow students to create new threads and direct the discussion. |
| Have a tightly controlled forum and use it to evaluate student performance | Select the grading and moderating options. To be sure students focus on the existing threads, do not allow the creation of new threads. |
| Allow authors to edit their published posts | Consider locking the thread after grading. Users cannot change locked posts. To learn more, see How to Change a Thread's Status. |

You cannot select some settings in combination. For example, if you are grading forums or threads, anonymous posts are not allowed. Also, if you enable thread grading, members cannot create new threads.

ACCESS THE DISCUSSION BOARD

You can allow users to access the discussion board in several ways. You can add a customized link to the course menu and to a course area. When you provide a link to the discussion board in a course area, students can access the tool alongside other course content. See also, How to Add a Link to the Discussion Board in a Course Area.

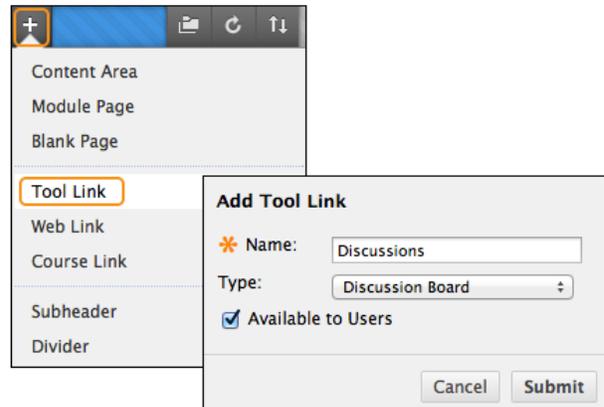
As an instructor, on the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section and select the **Discussion Board**. From this link, access the course discussion board and the group discussion boards for the groups in your course.



HOW TO ADD A DISCUSSION LINK ON THE COURSE MENU

If you want students to access the discussion board often, you can include a link on the course menu for one-click access to the tool. You can also customize the name of the link.

1. Change **Edit Mode** to **ON** and point to the plus sign above the course menu. The **Add Menu Item** drop-down list appears.
2. Select **Tool Link**.
3. Type a **Name** for the link.
4. From the **Type** drop-down list, select **Discussion Board**.
5. Select the **Available to Users** check box.
6. Click **Submit**.



The screenshot shows a course menu with a plus sign icon at the top left. A drop-down menu is open, listing options: Content Area, Module Page, Blank Page, Tool Link (highlighted), Web Link, Course Link, Subheader, and Divider. To the right, the 'Add Tool Link' dialog box is displayed. It has a title bar, a 'Name' field with the text 'Discussions', a 'Type' dropdown menu set to 'Discussion Board', and a checked 'Available to Users' checkbox. At the bottom of the dialog are 'Cancel' and 'Submit' buttons.

The new tool link appears last in the course menu list. Press and drag the arrows icon to move the link into a new position. Access the link's contextual menu to rename, delete, or hide the link from students.

HOW TO ADD A DISCUSSION LINK IN A COURSE AREA

You can incorporate the discussion board into course areas, allowing students to access the tool alongside content. For example, you can add links to the discussion board itself or specific discussion forums to any content area, learning module, lesson plan, or folder.

In a content area, you can add a forum link following lecture notes to gather questions on the material presented or after an assignment to gather students' perceptions on how they did.

1. Access the content area, learning module, lesson plan, or folder where you want to link to the discussion board or forum. Change **Edit Mode** to **ON**.
2. On the action bar, point to **Tools** to access the drop-down list.
3. Select **Discussion Board**.
4. On the **Create Link: Discussion Board** page, select the **Link to Discussion Board Page** option to link to the discussion board itself.

-OR-

Select the **Select a Discussion Board Forum** option and select a forum from the list.

-OR-

Click **Create New Forum** to add a link to a forum you create at this time. You select all forum settings at the time of creation. The newly created forum appears in the list of forums to choose from when adding the link in your course.

5. Click **Next**.

6. On the next **Create Link: Discussion Board** page, type a **Link Name**. The **Link Name** cannot exceed 50 characters. Students click the name to access the discussion board or forum.
7. Optionally, type instructions or a description in the **Text** box. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, web links, multimedia, and mashups. Files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.
8. For the **Available** option, select **Yes** to make the link available to users.
9. For the **Track Number of Views** option, select **Yes** . If you enable tracking, the number of times the link is viewed, when it is viewed, and by whom is recorded.
10. For **Date Restrictions**, you can set the link to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the availability of the discussion board or forum content, only when it appears.
11. Click **Submit**. The discussion link appears in the course area.

