12: DISCUSSION FORUMS

WELCOME TO THE DISCUSSION FORUMS TUTORIAL!

In this tutorial, you will learn:

- What the Moodle Discussion Forum is
- Some ways to use a forum with students
- How to set up a forum in Moodle

If you have not used one of CareerTech's "How to Moodle" tutorials before, view the instructions for using it as a self-paced tutorial or as a resource for classroom instruction.

Before taking this tutorial, you should be familiar with:

- Setting up a course in Moodle
- Adding an activity to a topic in your course

To begin, select from the menu below or simply turn to the next page.

MENU OF TUTORIAL TOPICS

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INTRODUCTION TO MOODLE FORUMS

The Moodle Discussion Forum is a place to hold asynchronous online conversations. Depending on the need, it can be set up as a discussion amongst all students in your classroom, a way for students to respond to a question that you pose, a way for student groups to communicate within their group, or a way for a teacher or tutor to communicate with a single student.

The steps below outline the general process for using a discussion forum in a classroom:

1. The instructor sets up the forum activity in Moodle so that it is available for students to use. As part of the setup, the instructor poses a question or a task for students to respond to. An instructor typically sets a timeframe for students to respond, for example, within a week.
2. Students access the forum through Moodle to post their responses. As students make posts, other students can reply to those posts, thereby developing the online discussion of the forum topic.
3. Instructors can choose to use the forum as an ungraded community space, or as a graded activity. If the activity is graded, the teacher can choose how to grade when setting up the forum in Moodle.

WAYS TO USE A DISCUSSION FORUM

Why use the Moodle forum with your class?

Listed below are ways to make the forum an effective pedagogical tool.

- **Foster a sense of community**. This can be a way to supplement your face-to-face course, or it can be a major component of an online, asynchronous course. When using the forum in a face-to-face course, you may notice students who don't normally initiate a comment in class will do so in the online forum. The forum allows students who are more reserved in person to feel more comfortable offering their input.
  - ✓ **Best practices**—Begin the forum with a welcome or introductory message. For example, invite students to post some specific details to introduce themselves to you and their peers.
- **Develop discussion on a topic over time**. During a course, student opinions about a topic may change as their knowledge grows. Ask students to post weekly on different aspects of a relevant topic as a way to record the evolution of opinions.

- **Homework help**. Students often have common questions or concerns as they tackle a homework assignment individually. A forum can be a place for you to answer such questions on a homework assignment. It can also be set up so that students can help each other.
- **Reactions to a resource**. Is there a relevant documentary or movie being aired on TV? Have students watch and then respond to questions about it that you set up on a forum.

These are just a few suggestions. Try some out, and talk with other instructors to see how they have used forums. Experiment with your own ideas.

What is the instructor's role in the forum activity?

Your role as an instructor depends on the type of forum you are using and the experience you want students to get from it. However, every forum activity requires you to:

- Create and communicate guidelines for using forums. For example, require students to use proper etiquette, and define the rules for proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation in the forum.
- Make sure all students understand their responsibilities for making the forum a safe place to share information.
- Consider how best to set up the forum for students to get value from the activity.
- Review forum posts regularly. Be prepared to edit or delete posts if they are inappropriate. If the forum is languishing, make a contribution designed to encourage discussion.
- Be clear about what students need to do in order to get credit if the forum is a graded activity.

SETTING UP THE MOODLE FORUM

VIDEO DEMONSTRATION:

Watch these video to see a demonstration and explanation of Moodle discussion forums.

http://youtu.be/34jTBQBlG90 (7 minutes)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yA_59Sonai0 (4 minutes)

NOTE: Video demonstrations were not created by Oklahoma CareerTech, and they may use a different version of Moodle. However, the steps are the same as the ones that you will use.

To set up any activity in Moodle, you must first:

1. Go to your course page.
2. Turn editing on.
3. Choose the topic or week where you will add the activity.
4. Click "Add an activity" under that topic or week. This displays the list of available activities.

Follow these steps to create a discussion forum:

Step	Action	Notes
1.	Choose **Forum** from the **Add an activity** dropdown menu.	The Forum settings page will display.
2.	**Section:** General **Field:** Forum name Enter a name for your forum.	The forum name should be concise but descriptive. This name will appear on the course page. The name is hyperlinked so users can click to open the forum. For training purposes, use the name: The Supportive Society.
3.	**Section:** General **Field:** Description Enter instructions for the student describing how you want them to use this forum.	Notice that you can use formatting tools for this text. For training purposes, use the following description: In this forum, you will respond to this prompt: "What do you do, or have you done, to help another person succeed in achieving something? Share an experience where someone else helped you when you were struggling." Each student may create one discussion with your response. Please review other students' responses and post at least two replies.
4.	**Section:** General **Field:** Display description on course page Click to have description display on course page.	If you check the box, the course page will display the description below the forum name. If you do not check this box, only the forum name will appear on the course page. For training purposes, check the box to display the description on the course page.

Step	Action	Notes
5.	**Section:** General **Field:** Forum type Choose the desired forum type from the dropdown list.	This selection dictates the format of the forum, including how students view and can use it. For a detailed description of forum types, see "Forum Type Explained" at https://docs.moodle.org/34/en/Using_Forum For training purposes, select **Each person posts one discussion**. Note that your instructions to the student in the Forum Description are predicated upon selecting this forum type. If you choose a different forum type for this exercise, you may also want to modify the instructions.
6.	**Section:** Attachments and word count **Field:** Maximum attachment size Choose the desired maximum attachment size from the dropdown menu.	A few reasons to limit file size include limited server file capacity, slow downloading speeds, and wanting the focus to be on discussion rather than images. For training purposes, leave this field and all remaining set up fields in the default state.
7.	**Section:** Attachments and word count **Field:** Maximum number of attachments Choose the desired maximum number of attachments from the dropdown menu.	Consider limiting the number of attachments allowed in order to avoid cluttering the forum or distracting from the focus of the discussion.
8.	**Section:** Attachments and word count **Field:** Display word count Choose if the word count for each post will be displayed.	This can usually be left at the default selection of **No**.

Step	Action	Notes
9.	**Section:** Subscription and tracking **Field:** Subscription mode Choose a subscription mode for the forum from the dropdown menu.	When a user is subscribed to a forum it means that they will receive notification of each new posting. Choose from: • **Optional subscription**—Participants can choose to be subscribed. • **Forced subscription**—Everyone is subscribed and cannot unsubscribe. • **Auto subscription**—Everyone is subscribed initially, but they can choose to unsubscribe at any time. • **Subscription disabled**—Subscriptions are not allowed.
10.	**Section:** Subscription and tracking **Field:** Read tracking Choose the type of read tracking the forum will use.	Read tracking allows users to see which forum posts they have read and which are unread. Choices are: • **Optional**—Students can turn their tracking on or off for the forum. • **Off**—No tracking provided for the forum.
11.	**Section:** Discussion locking **Field:** Lock discussions after period of inactivity Choose from the dropdown menu whether to lock discussions after a period of inactivity.	This allows you lock discussions after a determined amount of time. It can lock after 1 day, 1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month, 2 months, 3 months, 6 months, or 1 year. For training purposes, leave this field in the default state.
12.	**Section:** Post threshold for blocking **Field:** Time period for blocking Choose from the dropdown menu to prevent students from creating more than one post over certain time period.	Choices range from "Don't block," and from 1 day to 1 week.
13.	**Section:** Post threshold for blocking **Field:** Post Threshold for blocking Enter the number of posts that a user may add before being blocked.	This setting specifies the maximum number of posts allowed per user in the given time period. If you selected "Don't block" in the time period for Blocking field, this setting is inactive.

Step	Action	Notes
14.	**Section:** Post threshold for blocking **Field:** Post threshold for warning Enter the number of posts that a user may add before being warned that blocking will occur.	Note that the forum displays an alert about the limits that you set, regardless of the number you enter here. If you selected "Don't block" in the Time Period for Blocking field, this setting is inactive.
15.	**Section:** Grade **Field:** Grade category; Grade to pass Choose from the dropdown menu the category in which this forum will appear if ratings are enabled, and then type in the required grade the student must earn.	This setting controls the category in which this activity's grades are placed in the gradebook. This section is tied to the Rating section as well as the gradebook, so options in the dropdown menu will depend on other factors related to course and forum setup.
16.	**Section:** Ratings **Field:** Roles with permission to rate This list displays for informational purposes.	By default, only teachers can rate forum posts, though students can be given permission to do so if desired. You must use Forum Administration > Permissions in the Administration block to add roles to this list.
17.	**Section:** Ratings **Field:** Aggregate type Choose from the dropdown menu to determine how ratings are used for a grade.	If "No ratings" is selected, the remaining fields in this section become inactive. The activity will not appear in the gradebook. Click the "?" for this field to view definitions for available selections.
18.	**Section:** Ratings **Field:** Scale Choose the desired rating scale.	For example, selecting 10 in this field will allow the rater to rate each forum post on a scale between 10 and 1.
19.	**Section:** Ratings **Field:** Restrict ratings to items with dates in this range. Click to check this box if you want to set a date range to allow ratings. If you check this box, you must also enter the desired range in the date fields.	The teacher can choose to allow only posts within a certain date range to be rated. The date fields are inactive if this box is not checked. The dates displayed by default will not be used to restrict ratings.

Step	Action	Notes
20.	**Section:** Common module settings **Field:** Availability Choose to show or hide the assignment on the course page.	Use the Hide setting to prevent the activity from appearing on the course page. You may change the setting at any time.
21.	**Section:** Common module settings **Field:** ID Number Enter an ID number if desired.	Setting an ID number provides a way of identifying the activity for grade calculation purposes. If the activity is not included in any grade calculation then the ID number field may be left blank.
22.	**Section:** Common module settings **Field:** Group mode Choose the group mode desired for this forum.	This allows you to have students post to or view the forum as groups rather than as individuals. When groups are enabled, the teacher can add discussion items to each group separately. There are 3 options: • **No groups**—There are no sub groups, everyone is part of one big community. • **Separate groups**—Each group member can only see their own group, others are invisible. • **Visible groups**—Each group member works in their own group, but can also see other groups. If the group mode is forced at course level, you will not be able to change the group mode at the activity level.
23.	**Section:** Common module settings **Field:** Grouping Choose the grouping mode desired for this forum.	The default is none. For other options to appear in this field, you must first set up groups in the course administration area. A single grouping can include just one group or several groups.

Step	Action	Notes
24.	**Section:** Restrict access > Access restrictions > Add restriction **Fields:** Activity completion If desired, select an activity from the dropdown list and the condition that must be met to allow access to the forum.	This type of restriction may be used in place of the grade condition fields.
25.	**Section:** Restrict access > Access restrictions > Add restriction **Field:** Date If enabled, you must also enter the appropriate dates that will restrict access to the forum.	This set of fields allows students to view and access the forum only during the specified time period.
26.	**Section:** Restrict access > Access restrictions > Add restriction **Field:** Grade If desired, select an activity from the dropdown list and an acceptable grade range which must be met to allow access to the forum.	These fields allow you to specify any grade conditions from other parts of the course that must be met prior to accessing the forum. You may set multiple grade conditions. If you do, access to the forum will only be allowed when ALL grade conditions that you specify here are met.
27.	**Section:** Restrict access > Access restrictions > Add restriction **Field:** User profile Select a field and a logical condition that must be met for the user to access the forum.	You can restrict access based on any field from a user's profile.
28.	**Section:** Restrict access > Access restrictions > Add restriction **Field:** Restriction set This setting allows nested restrictions.	This is an advanced setting that allows for restrictions to be placed within a restriction.

Step	Action	Notes
29.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Completion tracking Select the desired completion tracking status from the dropdown menu.	The user will see a checkmark next to the activity name on the course page when the activity is complete, if tracked. Activity completion can be tracked manually by the student, automatically based on certain conditions, or not at all. Multiple conditions may be set if desired. If so, the activity will only be considered complete when all conditions are met.
30.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Require view Click this box to enable if you are tracking completion with the system and would like students simply to view the forum to complete the activity.	This is a condition that can be used if Completion Tracking is set as "Show activity completion when conditions are met." If checked, the student must open the forum for the system to mark the activity as complete on the course page.
31.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Require grade Click this box to enable if you are tracking completion with the system and would like students simply to view the forum to complete the activity.	This is a condition that can be used if Completion Tracking is set as "Show activity completion when conditions are met." If checked, the student must receive a forum grade for the system to mark the activity as complete on the course page.
32.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Require posts Click this box to enable if you are tracking completion with the system and would like students to make a certain number of posts to complete the activity.	This is a condition that can be used if Completion Tracking is set as "Show activity completion when conditions are met." If checked, the student must make the required number of posts or discussions for the system to mark the activity as complete on the course page.
33.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Require discussions Click this box to enable if you are tracking completion with the system and would like students to create a certain number of discussions to complete the activity.	This is a condition that can be used if Completion Tracking is set as "Show activity completion when conditions are met." If checked, the student must create the required number of discussions for the system to mark the activity as complete on the course page.

Step	Action	Notes
34.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Require replies Click this box to enable if you are tracking completion with the system and would like students to post a certain number of replies to complete the activity.	This is a condition that can be used if Completion Tracking is set as "Show activity completion when conditions are met." If checked, this student must make the required number of replies for the system to mark the activity as complete on the course page.
35.	**Section:** Activity completion **Field:** Expect completed on Click the **Enable** box if you would like activity in the forum to be completed by a set date. Enter the appropriate date in the date fields.	The date is not shown to students and is only displayed in the activity completion report.
36.	Click the **Save and display** button at the bottom of the Forum setup screen.	To see the forum that you have just created as it will appear to users, click **Save and display**.

What you see will depend on the parameters that you have set for your forum. You can still modify setup parameters if needed. Notice that forum setup can be performed easily and quickly. A good way to get used to the forum activity and to generate ideas for its use is to collaborate with other teachers. Each of you can set up a different type of forum, and then contribute to each of the forums you have created. This will give you familiarity with exactly what students experience during the forum activity and practice with reviewing posts, and can also get your creative juices flowing.

SUMMARY AND RESOURCES

This tutorial gave you the steps you will use to set up a Forum Activity in Moodle, including the types of decisions you will be making when you create this type of activity. To learn more about this topic, visit:

- https://docs.moodle.org/34/en/Forum_settings
- https://docs.moodle.org/34/en/Using_Forum
- https://docs.moodle.org/34/en/Forum_FAQ
- MulinBlog: How to best use forum in Moodle courses

HOW TO USE THIS TUTORIAL:

This tutorial can be used as a self-paced lesson or as a lesson plan in a classroom setting.

- **As a self-paced lesson.**

  If this is a completely new skill for you, work through the tutorial from beginning to end. However, if you have some prior experience with the topic, use the menu hyperlinks on page one to jump to a topic that you want to learn.

  Most topics include hyperlinks to video demonstrations. While the videos are useful, you don't have to watch them. All the information you need is listed in the tutorial text and step instructions.

  Use the exercises at the end of the tutorial to practice the skill. This will help to correct any misunderstandings or mistakes before you use the skill in your classroom.

- **As a lesson-plan for a classroom.**

  When teaching this skill in a classroom, use the tutorial for:

  ✓ **Motivation**—Use the tutorial introduction as a springboard for a deeper exploration of how instructors might use this functionality in their classrooms. Encourage discussion and contributions from your students.
  ✓ **Demonstration**—Once your learners understand the purpose and pedagogical value of the functionality, demonstrate the steps of the relevant tasks as listed in the tutorial, using your computer and a projection system.
  ✓ **Practice**—Use the tutorial exercises for student practice. Assist as necessary.
  ✓ **Reference**—Encourage learners to use the tutorial post-session as a reference when using the functionality.

Return to the tutorial main menu.

We would appreciate feedback on this tutorial! Please contact the ctYOU.org General Support Staff listed under contacts on ctYOU.org.