



## Discussion Forums

Discussions are a give and take with a social purpose. Forums is a great place for Instructors to make announcements, share news or offer a FAQ area. Forums can also offer students a place to exchange their understanding and perceptions of course content. Discussion forums stimulate engagement and foster a community that promotes cognitive learning. Common misuses of discussion forums include prompts that are "close-ended" questions or forums that are optional and unmoderated.

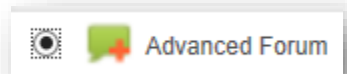
Consider these tips:

- Offer questions that will prompt critical thought and conversation.
- Encourage response posts.
- Be sure students have a clear expectation of post/response length.
- Allow an appropriate amount of white space between text and/or media
- Use one font type, one size and limit the use of italics or bold font.
- Use only 1 or 2 colors.

Avoid being the "Sage on Stage" when managing discussions. Students will be more encouraged to participate when they know you are present, but not dominating conversation. Instructor participation using global responses shows you're reading and are interested in their posts, but not micromanaging each post. Also, prepare students for an "even flow" of conversation: Without guidelines on when to post initial and response discussions, some students may end up never benefitting from an exchange.

## Procedure for Adding a Discussion Forum

1. **Login to Moodle**
2. **Locate and select your course**
3. **Turn Editing On**
4. **Click "+Add an Activity or Resource"** in the section where you wish to add the discussion forum
5. Scroll the down the activity option list, **locate and select "Advanced Forum"**
6. **Click the blue "Add" button**
7. **In the General settings area> Type your Discussion Forum name.** *Tip: Avoid naming forums "Discussion 1" or "Week 1 Discussion". Make the name more meaningful like, "Introduce Yourself" or "Special Topic Discussion"*
8. **Complete the Description area with your forum instructions.** *Tip: Be creative with your instructions! Add images, video or audio*
9. **Uncheck Display description and Display recent posts on course page.** *Why? These items have a tendency to clutter the course home page.*
10. **Select Forum Type**
11. **Select Post option**
12. **Select highest attachment size if you or students are using audio, image or video. Select lowest for just text.**
13. **Select quantity for attachments**
14. **Select Subscription Mode**
15. **Select "Don't Block" under Post Threshold for blocking.** This utility should only be used if you have students who are submitting irrelevant and numerous posts.
16. **Select Grade Settings**





17. **Select Outcomes** (If needed)

18. **Select Ratings Settings** or choose **NO** ratings in **Aggregate** type if creating a manual grade column

*Tip: By default, posts are recorded and sent to emails about 30 minutes after the post was first written.*

### Moodle Discussion Forum Types

- **A single simple discussion** - A single topic discussion is developed on one page, which is useful for short focused discussions (this type cannot be used with separate groups)
- **Each person posts one discussion** - Each person can post exactly one new discussion topic (everyone can reply to them though); this is useful when you want each student to start a discussion or reflect on the week's topic, and everyone else responds to these
- **Q and A Forum** – This is a post first discussion. You may post a critical thinking question and student reply to it. They will not see the replies of other Students to the question in that discussion until they have themselves replied to the same discussion.
- **Standard forum** displayed in a blog-like format
- **Standard forum for general use** - An open forum where anyone can start a new topic, and reply to any of those topics, at any time; this is the best general-purpose forum

More information on forum types can be viewed at [https://docs.moodle.org/30/en/Forum\\_activity](https://docs.moodle.org/30/en/Forum_activity)

### Moodle Subscriptions

When a user is subscribed to a forum, it means that they will receive email notification of each new posting.

People can usually choose whether or not they want to be subscribed to each forum. However, the teacher can choose to force the subscription on a particular forum so all course users will be subscribed automatically. *TIP: Forcing everyone to subscribe is especially useful in the news forum and in forums towards the beginning of the course (before everyone has worked out that they can subscribe to these emails themselves).*

The subscription mode and subscribe or unsubscribe links appear in *Navigation>Forum administration* after the selection of the forum title. Teachers can quickly change the mode via the 'Subscription mode' options and view the current subscribers via the 'Show/edit current subscribers' link.

There are 4 subscription mode options:

- **Optional subscription** - Participants can choose whether to be subscribed
- **Forced subscription** - Everyone is subscribed and cannot unsubscribe
- **Auto subscription** - Everyone is subscribed initially but can choose to unsubscribe at any time
- **Subscription disabled** - Subscriptions are not allowed



## Post Options

- **Allow marking as substantive:** If enabled this feature allows instructors to flag posts that have a considerable value.
- **Allow Post bookmarking:** If enabled, forum posts can be bookmarked
- **Allow Private Replies:** With this feature, instructors can send a private reply to a forum post. This reply is only viewable by the student that made the original post or reply, and is invisible to the rest of the students.
- **Allow Anonymous Posts:** If checked, then the author's name for each post will be suppressed when viewing the forum.
- **Display Word Count:** This setting specifies whether the word count of each post should be displayed or not.

## Ratings

An 'aggregate type' decides how all the ratings given to posts in a forum are combined to form the final grade (for each post and for the whole forum activity). There are five options:

- **No ratings**
- **Average of ratings (default)** - This is the mean of all the ratings given to posts in that forum. It is especially useful with peer grading when there are a lot of ratings being made.
- **Count of ratings** - The counts the number of rated posts becomes the final grade. This is useful when the number of posts is important. Note that the total cannot exceed the maximum grade allowed for the forum. A count may be used if the teacher simply wants to acknowledge that a reply was given in
- the case students being required to make a certain number of posts in the discussion. Note: Count of ratings does not work for the "Separate or Connected Ways of Knowing" scale or custom scales due to the limitation imposed by the max grade.
- **Maximum rating** - The highest rating is returned as the final grade. This method is useful for emphasizing the best work from participants, allowing them to post one high-quality post as well as a number of more casual responses to others.
- **Minimum rating** - The smallest rating is returned as the final grade. This method promotes a culture of high quality for all posts.
- **Sum of ratings** - All the ratings for a particular user are added together. Note that the total is not allowed to exceed the maximum grade for the forum. Note: Sum of ratings does not work for the "Separate or Connected Ways of Knowing" scale or custom scales due to the limitation imposed by the max grade.

## Grading Forums

In forum settings, Grade, Outcomes and Ratings areas are where you can assign a grade/rating scale.

If you choose Grade type "manual", a column will be created in the grade center for this forum and you can manually grade the forum there.

If you choose Grade type "rating", a column will be created in the grade center for this forum and a scale can be used to generate a rating.



By default, only teachers can rate forum posts, though students can be given permission to do so if desired. Role permissions for the activity can be changed in *Settings > Forum administration > Permissions*. The forum rating tool is useful for giving students participation grades. Any ratings given in the forum are recorded in the gradebook.

If you choose to use "Outcomes", a column for each outcome will be created in the grade center for this forum and you can manually grade the outcomes there. Outcome choices may be generated in *Course Administration>Outcomes*.

Lastly, you can choose No Grade, No Outcomes, NO Ratings or Aggregate Type, but still offer a grade by manually creating the discussion forum columns in the grade center and use a rubric to guide your marks.

### Managing Forums

Next to the title of the forum, you will see the number of any unread posts. By clicking on that notice or on the title of the forum, you will be able to view the new posts.

Using the Search area or Sort area, you can find more specific posts via

- Most recently posted
- Most active
- Creation date
- Subscribed
- Any key word

This forum feature is helpful in assessing forum project completion and grading for students.