COURSELINK DISCUSSIONS TOOL

Reading Week Series

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**Land Acknowledgement**

While we are coming together today in a virtual space, it is important to recognize the physical space that connects us and brings us together. The University of Guelph is located within the Between the Lake Treaty (1792); the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this land continues to be home to diverse communities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. By acknowledging the land, we reaffirm our commitment to decolonization and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and our collective responsibility to the land on which we work and learn.
AGENDA

• The Basics
  – Discussion structure
  – Group-restricted topics
  – Monitoring discussions
  – Assessment options

• Advanced Options
  – Anonymous posts
  – Requiring an initial thread before replies
  – Moderator approval
  – Rating posts

• Support & Resources
THE BASICS

Getting started with CourseLink Discussions
WHEN TO USE DISCUSSIONS

Discussions are a useful tool in CourseLink to encourage asynchronous interaction between students as well as students and the instructional team

- Ask Your Instructor
- Content-specific discussions
- Assessed discussions
- Coffee shop
GETTING STARTED

You don't have any discussion topics available to post to. First create a forum by clicking New > Forum and then add a discussion topic to it by clicking New > Topic.
DISCUSSION STRUCTURE

• All discussions in CourseLink have the same basic structure
• **Forum**: Creates categories for discussions, helps to keep Discussions organized
• **Topic**: Space where the actual discussion will take place
• **Thread**: Start of a new idea or question
• **Reply**: Responses to a thread

**Note**: An Instructor (or TA) **must** create the Forum and Topic for students to be able to participate
## Discussion Structure

### Demo Forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Threads</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Last Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demo Open Topic</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open topic, everyone can access this topic and all its contents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Threads</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Last Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demo Group Topic</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group or section topic, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CREATING A FORUM AND TOPIC

Select New Forum

Create a Title for Forum

Create a Topic with the same title

Save and Close

Create a Title for Topic

Create Topic separately

Save and add Topic

Save and Close
ADDING TOPICS

New Topic Details

Forum *
Demo Forum [New Forum]

Topic Type
- Open topic, everyone can access this topic and its contents
- Group or section topic, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section

Title *

Description
TOPIC TYPES

Two topic types exist in CourseLink

• **Open topic**
  – All students can see all posts and respond to them
  – Common uses:
    • FAQ topics
    • Smaller class sizes

• **Group/section topic**
  – Everyone has access, but students only see the posts from students in the same group, instructors/TAs see everything
  – Common uses:
    • Assessed discussions in larger classes to break down into more manageable sized groups
TOPIC RESTRICTIONS - AVAILABILITY

- **Visible with access restricted**
  - Students can see the topic but cannot access it
- **Visible with submission restricted**
  - Students can see the topic, access to view any previous submissions, but cannot create new submissions
- **Hidden**
  - Topic does not appear to students
**TOPIC ASSESSMENT**

- **Grade Item Association**
  - Select current grade item
  - Create new
- **Score out of**
- **Attach a rubric**
  - Select existing rubric
  - Create new
- **Allow assessment of individual posts**

**Note:** Ensure that the point values for the grade item and rubric match with the Score Out Of!
ALLOW ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL POSTS

• Each post a student makes can be score individually. The scores are then used to calculate the overall grade
• Calculation methods:
  – Average post score
  – Maximum post score
  – Minimum post score
  – Mode post score (highest or lowest)
  – Sum of post scores
MONITORING DISCUSSIONS

- Keeping an eye on the discussions can be challenging, particularly for larger courses
- Develop a plan for regular engagement and presence within the Discussion tool
- Setting clear expectations for students around posting up front
- Discourage unwanted behaviours
  - If consistent across class, consider a public post
  - If individual student, have conversation privately (e.g., email)
DISCUSSION STATISTICS

- Provide insight into student engagement with the topic
- Includes:
  - Overall statistics
  - User statistics
- Access through topic context menu
  - View Topic Statistics
# Discussion Topic Statistics

## User Statistics

View By: [User ▼](#)  [Apply](#)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name, First Name</th>
<th>Number of Posts</th>
<th>Post Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Threads</td>
<td>Replies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 01, CourseLink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 02, CourseLink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 03, CourseLink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 04, CourseLink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DELETING A DISCUSSION POST

• There could be an instance were removing a student’s post is necessary
  – E.g., language, tone, etc.
• Instructors and TAs can delete posts from a discussion topic
• Caution should be taken as removing a post also removes any replied
• Students can delete a post as long as another student has not already replied
ASSESSMENT OF DISCUSSIONS

• Two main methods for assessment
  – Assessment with a rubric
  – Assessment of individual posts

• Access assessment panel by selecting Assess Topic from topic menu

• To enter assessment for a specific student, select Topic Score

• Assessment recommendations
  – While grading, save completed evaluations in draft form
  – Use Publish All Feedback to release evaluation to all students at the same time
ASSESSMENT OF GROUP TOPICS

- Default option for View By is Users
- Can change to Groups to sort by group membership
- Helpful for dividing grading assignments equally between TAs
  - E.g., TA 1 has groups 1 & 2, TA 2 has groups 3 & 4, etc.
ASSESSMENT WITH A RUBRIC
ALLOW ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL POSTS
ADVANCED OPTIONS

Taking Discussions to the next level
ADVANCED OPTIONS

CourseLink provides several options to enhance the Discussions experience. Today we’ll look at four available options.

1. Allowing anonymous posts
2. Requiring a thread to view posts
3. Moderator approval
4. Rating posts
TOPIC OPTIONS

Options

- Allow anonymous posts
- Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads
- A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic

Rate Posts

No Ratings

Found at the bottom of the Create/Edit Topic – Properties page
ANONYMOUS POSTS

- Provides **the option** to post anonymously, but students must check a box that indicates they want a particular post or reply to be anonymous.
- Anonymous posts are **excluded from assessment**.
- This option can be helpful for increasing participation in:
  - Ungraded discussions such as “Ask your instructor”
  - Discussions that involve divisive subjects
  - When asking students to share a personal experience
- This doesn’t mean anonymous posts are without risk:
  - Anonymous posts can be deleted if they are found to be inappropriate.
  - CourseLink Support can investigate such posts to determine who made them (if necessary).
  - Be upfront with students that inappropriate posts can be investigated through support to reveal the name on the account that posted (this will usually discourage such posts).
**Require a Thread to View Posts**

- Students will not be able to see any posts in the topic until they have posted a new thread of their own.
- Prevents students from simply looking at what their peers have posted and reworking it into something unoriginal.
- This can be very helpful for:
  - Assessed discussions where the assignment focuses on the originality of posts.
  - Discussions where difference in opinion is vital.
  - The sanity of assessors who often must read several variations of the same posts over and over for evaluation.
- **Note:** Keep an eye out for students that post a fake thread, then delete it and include penalties for such actions in the assignment.
REQUIRING MODERATOR APPROVAL

• All posts and replies made to the discussion topic by students remain hidden to their peers until approved by a moderator
• A moderator is anyone with a TA or Instructor role in the course site
• A link to (and count of all) the posts requiring approval is listed on the discussion topic, they are also flag with an orange indicator
• We recommend enabling this option only in smaller courses, as thousands of student posts needing approval will be overwhelming
• This option can be helpful for:
  – Ensuring the requirements of a discussion assignment are met
  – For bonus assignments where participation is optional and the best posts are approved, scored, and shared with the class
  – To help maintain some order when tempers flare
RATING POSTS

3 Rating Options

★★★★☆ – 5-star:
Allows users to assign each post a score out of five

⬆ – Up Vote:
Allows users to increase a post's rating
• Everyone starts at 0 and can only increase

⬆ ⬇ – Up Vote/Down Vote:
Allows users to increase or decrease a post's rating
• This option should be avoided
• It provides an easy avenue for students to “rating bomb” a specific student and decrease their rating
SUPPORT & RESOURCES
RESOURCES

• Discussions – OpenEd Support & Documentation website, https://support.opened.uoguelph.ca/instructors/courselink/tools/content/discussions

• Strategies for Online Discussions (OpenEd website), https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/resources/Strategies-for-Online-Discussions.pdf

• Next Level Discussions Options (ITS Webinar), https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/rethink-your-assessments-for-remote-environments-with-ed-tech#Discussion

• Get a Grip on Groups – Exploring the CourseLink Groups Tool & How it Works with Other Tools (ITS Webinar), https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/instructional-technology-webinar-series#Grip
**SUPPORT**

CourseLink Technical Support

- Phone:
  - 519-824-4120 x56939
  - 1-866-275-1478 (CAN/US)
- Email:
  - courselink@uoguelph.ca

Instructional Technology Specialists

- Email: instttech@uoguelph.ca