

# COURSELINK TUNE-UP SERIES: DISCUSSIONS TOOL

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Owen Wooding,  
Instructional Technology Specialist

Carolyn Creighton,  
Instructional Technology Specialist

# AGENDA

- Discussion Challenges and Engagement Options
- Working with Availability Options
- Quick Discussion Tips
- Finding Support for Discussions
- Question & Answer Period (Optional)

# DISCUSSION CHALLENGES AND ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS

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## DISCUSSIONS – CHALLENGES

Discussions can be a great way to engage students with material and with each other... **BUT**

- New students may not be familiar with the tool and nervous about using it
- Students often feel overwhelmed by the number of posts they need to make daily/weekly (across all courses)
- Getting students to post original/meaningful threads is sometimes difficult & a lot of what is posted is repetitive
- Discussion activities can often feel like a box-checking activity rather than a true active learning experience

# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT

**How can you make your discussions more engaging?**

Let's explore some ways to:

- Encourage/increase activity in discussion topics
- Avoid repetitive, unoriginal posts
- Give students a reason to access discussions beyond making required/graded posts

# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: NUMBER OF REQUIRED DISCUSSIONS

## Have less required/assessed discussion activities!



- Do you *really* need students to post every week?
- Consider every 2 weeks (6 total) or every 3 weeks (4 total)
- Students can post anytime in the 2- or 3-week window
- Use a grade category to drop the lowest discussion grade

### Bi-Weekly Discussions (Graded) ▾

These group discussions take place during a two-week period through out the semester, for a total of 6 graded discussions. Your lowest discussion grade will be dropped and not counted toward your final grade.

Each group member is expected to post at least **1 original thread** and **2 thoughtful replies** every two weeks.

Please see the "Discussions" section of the Course Outline for more information on expectations and assessment.




Topic	Threads
<b>Weeks 1-2</b> ▾	
 Group/section restrictions.	
Reflect on the lectures and text and provide a stance on [TOPIC X] and 2 reasons why you believe your position is correct.	0
Read posts from your fellow group members, select one and reply to either provide additional support to their position or an argument against their position.	
<b>Weeks 3-4</b> ▾	
 Group/section restrictions.	
Add discussion criteria here...	0

# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: STIMULATE DISCUSSIONS WITH ORIGINAL THOUGHT

## Encourage original posts

- Leverage the “*users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads*” option
- Helps avoid students rehashing what the first 2 or 3 students posted

### 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 

Start a New Thread

Filter by: All Threads 

Sort by:




Most Recent Activity 


You must start a thread before you can read and reply to other threads

# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: ENCOURAGE READING WITH RATINGS

## Encourage students to read their peers' posts

- Enable the 5-star rating or up vote option
- Provides a small element of gamification
- Consider a small reward (bonus mark) for students with the highest-rated posts (as judged by their peers)

 Discussion Post Example 1   
CourseLink Student 01 posted Jun 20, 2022 9:09 AM  [Subscribe](#)

 2  
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Cras porttitor placerat laoreet. In egestas nunc maximus commodo mattis. Nulla malesuada tortor rhoncus, finibus elit vel, pretium felis. Sed posuere laoreet laoreet. Etiam tincidunt ipsum neque, ac ornare lorem finibus in. Sed tempor gravida nunc eget maximus.

Praesent tristique leo orci, vitae aliquam nisi aliquam faucibus. Cras eu interdum augue, vitae euismod neque. Duis mattis, quam bibendum iaculis ornare, mauris ipsum placerat sem, tincidunt consequat felis dolor ut urna. Aenean rutrum varius nibh in lacinia. Ut imperdiet non augue eu cursus.

Rate! 

[Reply to Thread](#)



# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: ANSWER STUDENT QUESTIONS (REDUCE EMAIL)

## Create an Ask Your Instructor Topic

- Students access discussions to ask questions & find answers
- Set expectations on replies via the description
- Popular questions/answers can be pinned (top of topic)
- Enable the anonymous post option for students to increase activity

### Ask Your Instructor ▾

Use this discussion area to ask questions to your instructor throughout the semester.

- Answers are typically provided by your instructor within 48 hours
- Students are free to reply with answers as well
- Please check the discussion first to see if your question has already been answered
- I will try to pin common questions with answers to make them easier to locate
- If your question is of a personal nature, please email me instead
- Anonymous\* posting is enabled, please feel free to ask questions anonymously

\*Please note: instructors cannot see who makes anonymous posts, however any anonymous posts of an inappropriate nature will be sent to CourseLink Support to investigate as they are able to determine the accounts attached to anonymous posts.

Topic	Threads
Ask Your Instructor ▾	1

### Ask Your Instructor ▾

☆ Subscribe

Start a New Thread

Filter by: All Threads ▾

Sort by:

Most Recent Activity ▾

#### Can we use older versions of the textbook? ▾

Anonymous posted Jun 20, 2022 9:56 AM • 28 Words



☆ Subscribe

Just curious if we have to get the latest version of the textbook or if an older version will suffice?

I have the 2009 edition, will that work?

^ less

1 Unread 1 Replies 1 Views



Last post just now by Owen Wooding

< 1 / 1 >

# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: BUILD A COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

## Create an informal discussion area (Coffee Shop)

- Popular in OpenEd’s DE courses
- Helps students learn how to use the tool
- Allows students to continue in-class discussions online, look for study groups, etc.
- Set rules/expectations for the discussion area!

### Class Coffee Shop ▾

This discussion area is intended for students. As your instructor I will not be actively monitoring this discussion, however please feel free to contact me if anything in this discussion requires my attention.

This discussion area is a great place to connect with your classmates to form study groups, talk about the course or course-related topics, continue discussions started in the classroom, or just enjoy each other's company online.

Topic	Threads	Posts	Last Post
<a href="#">Class Coffee Shop</a> ▾	0	0	



# DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: RELATE COURSE CONTENT TO CURRENT EVENTS

## Add New Topics During the Semester

- Connect course content with current events
- Ask related open-ended questions in the description and link to a reference/source
- Continue the discussion in-class

### Course-Related Current Events ▾

Throughout the semester I will create some discussion topics in this forum that relate course content to current events/news. We will continue conversations online in class during seminars.

Topic	Threads	Posts	Last Post
<b>Inflation Rates</b> ▾ Review this recent video clip from CBC News about Canadian Dealing with high inflation.  <b>Power &amp; Politics</b> 	0	0	

Considering what was covered in lecture this week, how long do you expect inflation rates to continue to rise and why? What are some possible measures both public and private sectors could take to lessen the impact?

# DEMO

- Enable the “users must start a thread before they can read and reply” option
  - Student experience
- Enable star rating / up vote options
  - Student experience
  - See rating scores via Statistics
- Explore an “Ask Your Instructor” forum/topic
  - Enable anonymous post option
  - Student Experience
- Explore a “Coffee Shop” discussion area for students

# WORKING WITH FORUM & TOPIC AVAILABILITY

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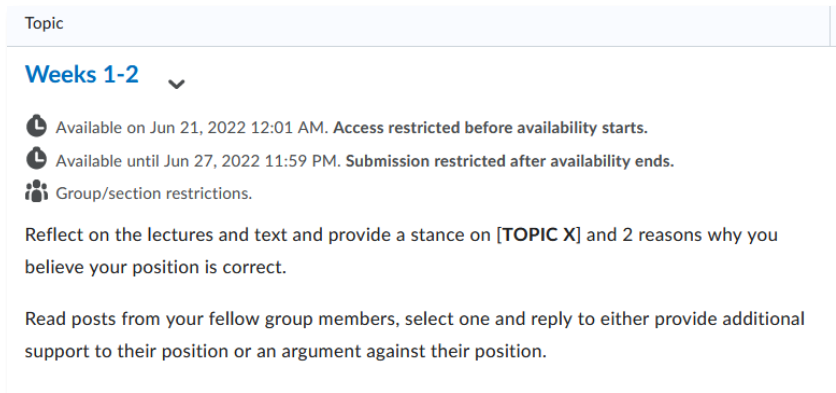
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# FORUM AND TOPIC AVAILABILITY: WHAT IS IT?

**Availability** determines when discussions topics:

- Are restricted to students (shows only title/access dates)
- Will allow posts from students (new threads/replies)
- Are hidden entirely from students



Topic

Weeks 1-2 ▾

🕒 Available on Jun 21, 2022 12:01 AM. Access restricted before availability starts.

🕒 Available until Jun 27, 2022 11:59 PM. Submission restricted after availability ends.

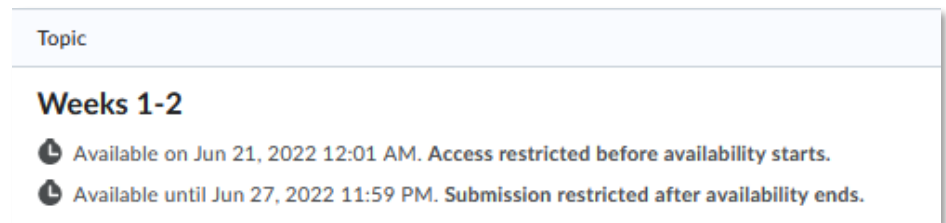
👤 Group/section restrictions.

Reflect on the lectures and text and provide a stance on [TOPIC X] and 2 reasons why you believe your position is correct.

Read posts from your fellow group members, select one and reply to either provide additional support to their position or an argument against their position.

← **Instructor/TA View**

**Student View** →



Topic

Weeks 1-2

🕒 Available on Jun 21, 2022 12:01 AM. Access restricted before availability starts.

🕒 Available until Jun 27, 2022 11:59 PM. Submission restricted after availability ends.

# FORUM AND TOPIC AVAILABILITY: HOW DO IT WORK?

## Availability Start Dates and End Dates

- Accessed from a forum's/topic's **Restrictions** tab
- Choose to enable a start date/end date
- Set when an availability setting should begin/end/change
- Select what happens before (start) or after (end)

Availability

Has Start Date

6/21/2022 12:01 AM

Visible with access restricted before start ?

Visible with submission restricted before start ?

Hidden before start ?

Has End Date

6/27/2022 11:59 PM

Visible with access restricted after end ?

Visible with submission restricted after end ?

Hidden after end ?

# FORUM AND TOPIC AVAILABILITY: COMMON USE 1

## End Date

- Lock a topic after a specific date and time (due date)
  - Enable “Has End Date” and set a date/time
  - Select “Visible with submission restricted after end”
  - As of that date/time no new posts can be added
  - Students can still view what was posted/see rubrics

Weeks 1-2 ▾

🕒 Available until Jun 20, 2022 11:00 AM. Submission restricted after availability ends. 👤 Group/section restrictions.

☆ [Subscribe](#)

Reflect on the lectures and text and provide a stance on [TOPIC X] and 2 reasons why you believe your position is correct.

Read posts from your fellow group members, select one and reply to either provide additional support to their position or an argument against their position.

← No “New Thread” Button

Filter by: [All Threads](#) ▾

Sort by: [Most Recent Activity](#) ▾

**Discussion Post Example 1** ▾

CourseLink Student 01 posted Jun 20, 2022 9:09 AM to [Group 1](#) ☆ [Subscribe](#)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Cras porttitor placerat laoreet. In egestas nunc maximus commodo mattis. Nulla malesuada tortor

▾ more

4	4	0	?	Last post 2 hours ago by
<a href="#">Unread</a>	<a href="#">Replies</a>	<a href="#">Views</a>		CourseLink Student 01

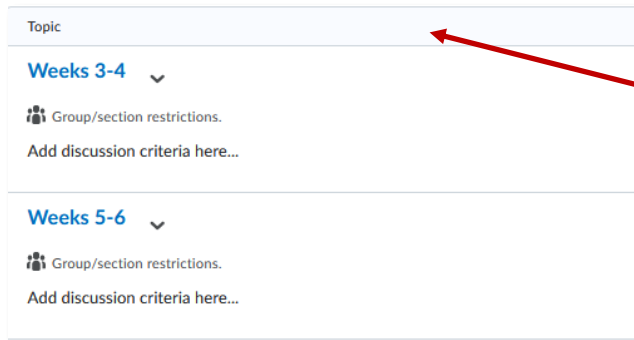
< 1 / 1 >



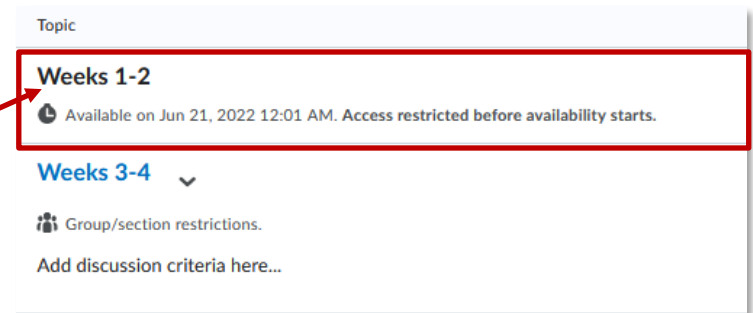
# FORUM AND TOPIC AVAILABILITY: COMMON USE 2

## Start Date

- Hide a topic / keep activity “secret” until it begins
  - Enable “Has Start Date” and set a date/time
  - Select:
    - “Hidden before start” (hide it entirely)
    - “Visible with access restricted” (hide description)



**Topic not visible to students**



**Topic title visible to students,  
but no description until date**

# DEMO

- Use Availability settings to:
  - Prevent a discussion topic from allowing new posts after a due date (Has End Date)
  - Hide a discussion topic from student view until a specific date (Has Start Date)

# BONUS DISCUSSION TIPS

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# QUICK DISCUSSION TIPS:

## 3 OPTIONS YOU MAY NOT BE USING (BUT COULD)

### 1. Pin Threads

- Select threads and make them appear at the top
- Great for highlighting important/excellent posts

### 2. Post to All Groups

- Used for group-restricted discussion topics
- Allows instructors to post the same message to all groups at once

### 3. Enable Moderation

- Posts from students do not become public until approved by the instructor/TA
- Can be toggled on when discussions get too heated

# DEMO

- How to pin a thread
- How to post to all groups at once
- How to enable moderation

# DISCUSSIONS TOOL SUPPORT

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# DISCUSSIONS TOOL SUPPORT

CourseLink Support can provide timely assistance for how-to questions about the Discussions tool.

## **CourseLink Support**

**Email:** [courselink@uoguelph.ca](mailto:courselink@uoguelph.ca)

**Phone:** X. 56939

## **Hours:**

Mon-Fri. 8:30 AM-8:30 PM, Sat. 10 AM-4 PM, Sun. 12-6 PM

CourseLink Support also has a resource page for Discussions:

<https://support.opened.uoguelph.ca/instructors/courselink/tools/content/grades>

# ITS ASSISTANCE & DISCUSSIONS SESSIONS

If you are looking to make significant adjustments to your current discussions or starting from scratch, the ITS team offers consultations.

## Contact the Instructional Technology Specialist (ITS) Team

- Email: [insttech@uoguelph.ca](mailto:insttech@uoguelph.ca)
- Consultation Request Form:  
[https://uoguelph.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_03zMVhZjuVsXL5H](https://uoguelph.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_03zMVhZjuVsXL5H)

## Previous Discussions Tool Sessions (Recorded):

- Next Level Discussion Options  
<https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/rethink-your-assessments-for-remote-environments-with-ed-tech#Discussion>
  - Includes more information on using rating systems and bonus grades
- CourseLink Discussions Tool (Online Assessments with EdTech)  
<https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/winter-2022-programming#Discussions>
  - Includes more information on performing assessments in Discussions