ETUDES-NG DISCUSSION TOOL
HOW TO CREATE ONLINE DISCUSSION

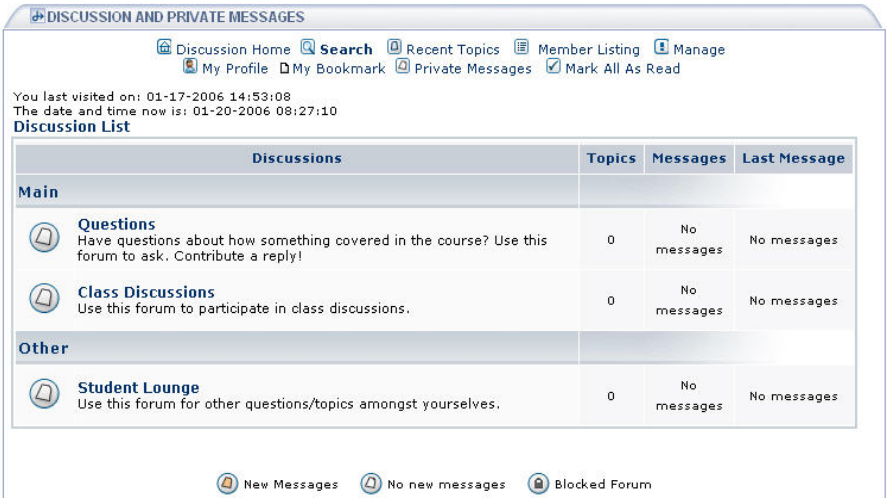
To organize your discussion you may want to reflect on how you expect your students to approach the content under study. For example, if this week I will be discussing the International Monetary System (the theme of chapter 10 in my course), there will be some key aspects of the International Monetary System theme I want my students to engage in discussing. One question I could ask would be, "Discuss the pros and cons of Fix versus Floating Exchange Rates. Give at least one example." This question entails that my students have a good understanding of how the International Monetary System works in order to engage in discussing fix versus floating exchange rates. Therefore I would expect to see students engaging in "critical" discussions concerning this question and consulting their resources such as textbook, websites, provided case studies, and the like.

To help you craft appropriate questions for online discussion please review Part 2—Crafting Questions for Online Discussions (Bloom's Taxonomy).

Part 1

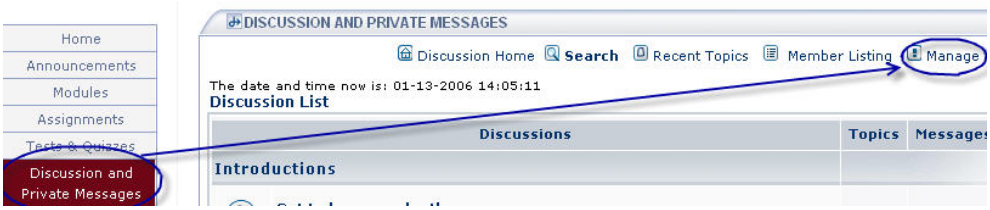
Creating Discussion Categories and Forums

This is the default Discussion and Private Message tool. You should make changes to its categories and forums according to how you wish to organize your discussions around your course content.

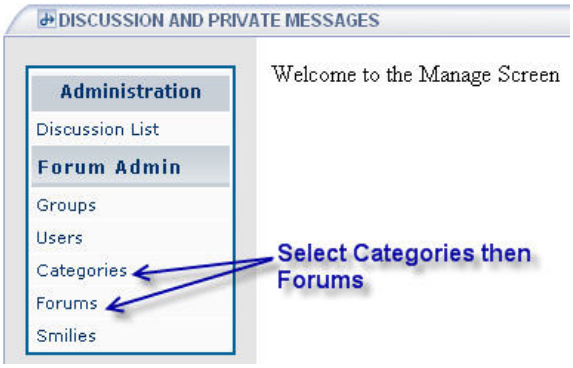


A. Setup your Categories

1. Click on the link *Discussion and Private Messages.* Then click on *Manage*



2. To Create or Rename your Categories, click on Categories



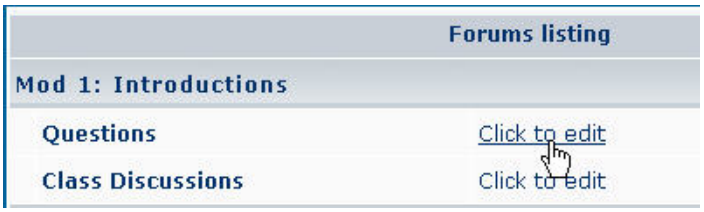
"Click to edit" to Rename the Main category or click "Insert new" below to create a new category.

Delete "Main" and type in your new name.

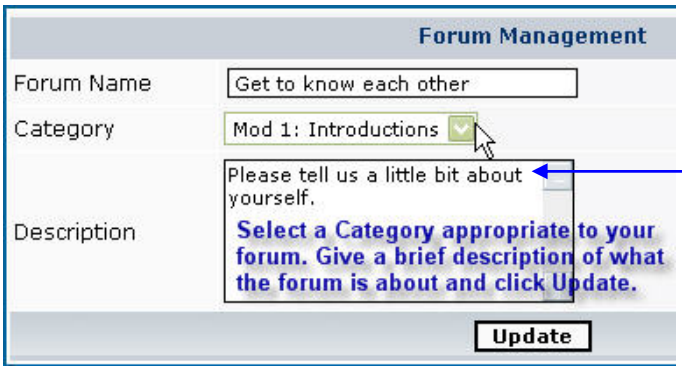
Click "Update" to finish.

B. Setup your Forums

1. From the Forum Admin tools select Forums



2. Click to edit to make changes



3. Give your Forum a short but meaningful name.

4. Select the appropriate Category for your Forum.

Notice, what you type here appears there.

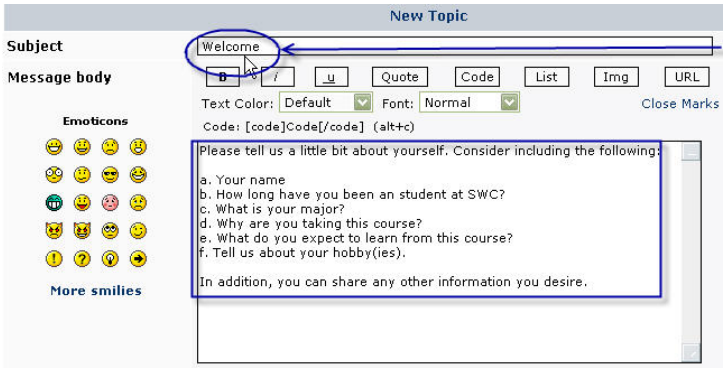
5. Click on the Jiffy Lube button to return to the Discussion main page.

C. Create Discussion Topics

Now we need to add discussion "topics" to the forums we created.

1. Click the forum name you wish to add a topic or questions.

2. Click the new topic button.



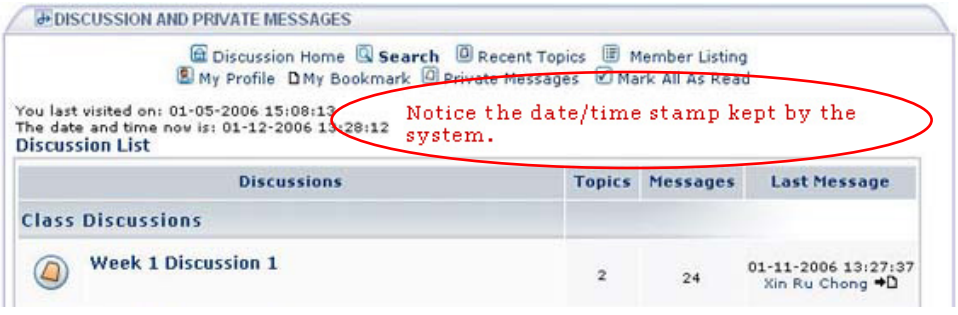
3. Add a subject and in the text window add you question or statement.

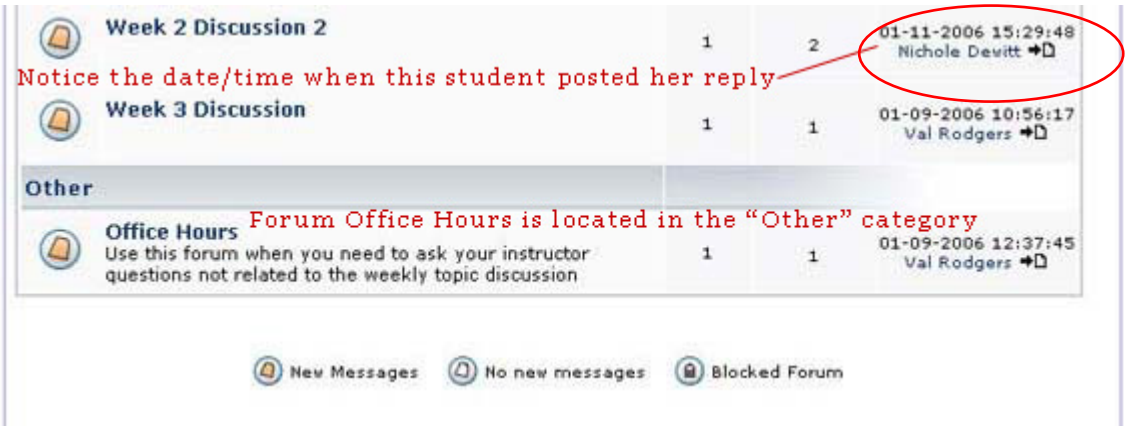
Click the **Submit** button located at the bottom of this window.

Below is an example of a completed Discussion list.

Discussion List

Discussions	Topics	Messages	Last Message
Introductions			
Get to know each other Please tell us a little bit about yourself.	1	1	01-13-2006 10:46:36 George Bonilla
Office Hours			
Questions, concerns? Office Hours are your opportunity to ask me questions that are not of a private nature. This way, the entire class can benefit from my answers. I will check this board daily and will respond within 24 hours except for weekends.	0	No messages	No messages
Student Lounge			
Cyber Hangout Cafe This is where you can talk with each other about course or non-course related issues. It is basically a teacher free zone, though I will occasionally drop in to say hello. I encourage you to drop by the cafe often.	0	No messages	No messages
Module Discussions			
Mod 2: Managers and Managing Chapter 1	2	2	01-13-2006 13:26:37 George Bonilla
Mod 3: Chapters 2 and 3 Chapter 2: The Evolution of Management Thought Chapter 3: The Manager as a Person: Values, Attitudes, Emotions, and Culture	0	No messages	No messages
Mod 4: Chapters 4 and 5 Chapter 4: Ethics and Social Responsibility Chapter 5: Managing Diverse Employees in a Multi-Cultural Environment	0	No messages	No messages




Week 2 Discussion 2
1
2
01-11-2006 15:29:48
Nichole Devitt
Notice the date/time when this student posted her reply
Week 3 Discussion
1
1
01-09-2006 10:56:17
Val Rodgers
Other
Forum Office Hours is located in the "Other" category
Office Hours
Use this forum when you need to ask your instructor questions not related to the weekly topic discussion
1
1
01-09-2006 12:37:45
Val Rodgers
New Messages
No new messages
Blocked Forum

Great Job!

Crafting Questions for Online Discussions

(Based on Bloom's Taxonomy)

Have you ever run out of time just when a class discussion became interesting? Want to hear from the quiet students who get lost in the crowd? Consider the advantages of moving some class discussions online. This discussion will acquaint you with strategies, ideas, and examples to help you craft online discussion questions. Investigate how to use these questions to achieve specific learning outcomes, guide the discussion process, and provide meaningful feedback to your students. Bring some discussion questions to the seminar. We will use your examples to see how they can translate to an online learning environment.

Outcomes of Questioning

Through the use of online questions and strategies you can expect the following benefits:

- More productive in class discussions
- Deeper and more reflective student responses
- Improved participation and accountability (everyone has an opportunity to participate and be heard)
- All members of the class benefit
- An easily accessible record of the discussion thought processes
- Time for more personal student contact

Types of Questions

How to ask the right type of question in order to elicit the information you want.

Well defined questions and their appropriate use can not only help students understand content on a basic level, but can also guide them in elaborative and critical thinking about content. The following questions can help you define what kind of learning environment you would kike to create for your students. Types of questions:

- Questions that extract factual knowledge
- Questions that query a student's understanding
- Questions that ask a learner to apply his/her knowledge and understanding
- Questions that ask the learner to analyze information
- Questions that challenge the student to synthesize information
- Questions that have the learner evaluate content

Questions that extract factual knowledge and information

Frame these questions to target factual information needed for recall or restatement of concepts. The student is NOT asked to compare or relate material or make any inductive or deductive leaps.

- Use

Use this type of question to draw out factual answers; test recall; or recognize critical information.

- Key Crafting Words

who; what; why; when; where; how; match; select; describe; define; choose; omit; which one; what is the best one; how much; what does it mean; cite; label; list; state; recall…

- Technology and Rationale

Factual recall implies immediate dexterity with information so your online strategy should be synchronous in nature. (e.g. create on line quiz, short answer or matching test; or a Q&A in a chat room…).

These online techniques can help students review on line for a test; help students stay updated on reading assignments; or gauge student preparation/understanding of text information.

Questions that query a students understanding

Frame these questions when you want the learner to be able to translate information, extrapolate ideas, or interpret information. The student is asked to be literal in his/her thinking.

- Use

Use this type of question to have the student identify pieces of content information. Ask them to translate that information into a new form which displays their understanding of the material.

- Key Crafting Words

state in your own words, what does this mean, give an example, condense this paragraph, state in one word, what expectations are there, what are they saying, which statements support, translate, judge, classify, select, match, explain, represent, is this the same as, is it valid that, demonstrate, what would happen if...

- Technology and Rationale

Comprehension of material suggests that students be asked to convey their perception of the information. Depending on the level of student knowledge you want to target, you can use either synchronous or asynchronous techniques that allow the learner to demonstrate their understanding of the content. Chat, discussion, e-mail…

For instance ask students to paraphrase the important concepts of an assigned reading via e-mail or chat to 'prepare' students.

Questions that ask a learner to apply their knowledge and understanding

Frame these questions to present problems that approximate real life situations. The idea is to enable the learner to practice the principles they have encountered.

- Use

Use these questions to explore knowledge to explain or problem solve. Allow a learner to deal with content information as a whole. This type of question allows the learner to use his/her knowledge in a new and practical way.

- Key Crafting Words

Predict what would happen if, choose the best statements that apply, judge the effects, what would result, tell how, when, where or why, identify the results of, select, tell what would happen, tell how much change there would be...

- Technology and Rationale

These questions ask the learners to act on the knowledge they possess. Have the students apply what they know to a new or different situation. Depending on the depth and detail of response you wish to obtain, you may wish to use synchronous or asynchronous techniques.

Questions that ask the learner to analyze information

Frame these questions to target relationships among concepts, ideas, and information.

- Use

Use these questions to make the learner conscious of his/her learning process and know the 'rules' which allowed them to reach a valid and true conclusion.

- Key Crafting Words

Distinguish, identify, what assumptions, what motive is there, what conclusions, make a distinction, what is the premise, what ideas apply, what's the relationship between, what's the main idea or theme, what literary form is used, implicit in this statement is, what is the function of, what statement is relevant, what does the author believe or assume, state the point of view, what inconsistencies or fallacies, what persuasive technique...

- Technology and Rationale

Analysis asks the student to break information down into its parts, and identify patterns and rules. It requires that students form assumptions and identify relationships. E-mail, chats, and discussions provide online opportunities to examine student analysis skills and model them to others.

Use these online strategies to allow all students the opportunity to actively participate, contribute and be heard.

Questions that challenge the student to synthesize information

Frame these questions in a way that encourages students to engage in creative and original thinking.

- Use

Use these questions to ask the learner to incorporate integrated knowledge and combine elements into patterns not clearly visible before.

- Key Crafting Words

Create, tell, make, do, choose, develop, how would you test, propose an alternative, solve the following, plan, design, make up, compose, formulate, how else would you, state a rule...

- Technology and Rationale

Synthesis requires that students consider alternative possibilities and create new solutions. Technology can provide students with an educational environment that encourages their thought processes and exposes them to their classmates' ideas.

Use websites, listservs, and discussion spaces to share ideas and opinions, respond and reflect on ideas. These experiences can serve as a catalyst for student creativity.

Questions that have the learner evaluate content

Frame these questions in a way that targets assessing information. Ask the learner to appraise and defend information.

- Use

Use these questions when you want the student to evaluate information according to a set of criteria and justify his/her belief.

- Key Crafting Words

Appraise, judge, criticize, defend, what fallacies, consistencies, or inconsistencies appear, which is more important, moral, better, logical, valid, or appropriate, find the errors, compare...

- Technology and Rationale

Evaluation requires that the student have time to reflect and gather resources to supports his/her opinions. (e.g. online forums can give a voice to all students who may not necessarily be heard in the traditional classroom). Discussions can also be heated and emotional; an online environment can help defuse potentially argumentative discourse.

Responding to and Facilitating the Query Process

Actively engaging in critical thinking is at the heart of the questioning process. To foster this process, we must guide and support the learners' critical thinking. There are two basic types of critical thinking strategies: those that enhance the focusing of ideas and those that extend patterns of thought.

- **Strategies for Focusing**

By identifying the direction that was taken during a class discussion, you can assess the conversational thread. Evaluate the flow of conversational and identify the central and divergent themes in order to:

- Refocus and redirect divergent dialogue back to discussion points by citing or paraphrasing other student comments
- Interconnect a 'divergent' thought and discuss how this idea is connected and related to the discussion thread through the use of alternative perspectives.
- Summarize conversations

Act as a clearinghouse to sort and prioritize thoughts and points through:

- Using metaphor or analogy
- Using narrative dialogue to provoke thought
- Modeling response/discussion techniques
- Identify Main Points
- Point out how student comments have touched on key issues

- Point out the areas that were not covered completely and need to be discussed further.
- Compare/contrast response points
- Make replies meaningful and personal

Strategies for Deepening Discussions

Question for Inquiry

- To probe more deeply, question assumptions and push thinking
- To investigate ambiguity
- To explore opinions and understand the author's perspective
- To support thinking outside the box

Connect points in order to gain a more global view

- Refrain from judgment and suspend belief/disbelief
- Offer new ideas that challenge mainstream thought
- Remain neutral when searching for solutions or causes

Encourage multiple points of view

- Search for different points of view and validate differing opinions
- Model solicitation of alternative perspectives and opinions
- Challenge thoughts that appear to be one sided through the use of alternative points of view.

Considerations

- Time factor for students and professor

Remember out of class assignments involve time commitments from you and your students. It's a good idea to make a chart of the semester and indicate in class and out of class assignments. This allows you to clearly see what is being asked of your students. Conversely it allows you to see how your assignments are distributed throughout the course.

Some students tend to procrastinate; make them aware of deadlines and grade dependence. For example, as part of the assignment, students could be required to make two responses a week.

- Managing the discussion

Praise students for quality responses--via e-mail or to the discussion group
Acknowledge students by name (see facilitating)

Structure the assignments so that all students come online during the same time period (not necessarily asynchronous). This allows the discussion to remain current.

Be sure to connect what is discussed during the online discussions and interactions during class.

Build into your questions some guidelines to help formulate student response (e.g. ask the learner to explain their reasoning or position, provide examples, make sure the discussion fills a 'need' for the course).

- Difference between online discussions and face-to-face discussions

Online discussions are primarily text-based. Discussions may lack immediate responses and significant points that are indicated through vocal emphasis or body language.

Allow time for reading and responding to discussion threads

Make clear the response or turnaround time for discussion and collaboration

- Knowledge of/learning the tool/technology

Make sure students have access to the tool before the assignment starts. This allows you to avoid problems once discussions have started.

Allow for an 'easy' introductory assignment to prepare the students for future discussions. This could be a simple introduction and/or posting.

Have resources available for students who might like documentations/explanations of the tool.

- Groups

Establish groups and allow students to work together to post a final revised response (fewer messages for you to read).

Consider size and number of groups. Try to have no more than 7 students in a group

Create clear guidelines for collaborating online and working in groups

- Contact

Online discussions allow for various types of contact:

Professor to students, students to students and students to professor.

Strategies

- Have students synthesize prior week's responses

- Have students take sides on an issue and defend their position. Use the polling section of Course Talk to take a poll on a particular question or issue. Then have students support their positions in the threaded discussion area.

- Post a number of questions relating to a chapter or unit of study. Have students work in small groups on these questions. Each group will post their final results to the discussion list.

- Use online chat to hold a review session.

- Post a weekly discussion question related to course readings prior to the in-class discussion. You can use comments from the online discussion to generate in-class discussion. Students will be more prepared for the face-to-face discussion.

- Place preview or review questions or concepts in the online discussion area. Have students submit a response in their own words (not a quote from the book). This allows you to see the students' level of understanding.

- Have students generate discussion or review questions. Students can submit one question to you via e-mail. Select a few questions and post them to your discussion area. You could even have the students who submitted the question be the moderator for that question.

- Have students identify what parts of the assignment are the most confusing to them.

- Assign a group to be the experts on a topic or section. Have them post a question for that week's discussion and 'lead' the discussion. Towards the end of the class discussion, have the discussion leaders summarize and combine points for their classmates.

- Have a student start the discussion on a topic or chapter.

- For individual assignments, have students review postings from the discussion forum and outline the points and themes that were discussed. Have individual assignments sent through e-mail. Select a few good examples and post these for the class.

- Post a model answer to the discussion as a conclusion to your discussion thread.