Set up a Forum in Moodle

Overview

Forums are sites within an online course that facilitate two-way discussion between you and your students, and among your students.

There are two types of forum activity, forum and Moodlerooms forum (previously referred to as Advanced forum). View the table Comparison of Forum and Moodlerooms Forum in the Step By Step Instructions below to help you decide which forum activity better suits your needs.

Staff and students can set their "Automatically mark forum posts as read" in their personal Moodle preferences to 'Yes' or 'No'.

If yes, just visiting a discussion thread in a forum activity will mark each visible post as being read automatically. As it occurs automatically, the button to mark a post as being read is not visible.

If no, visiting a discussion thread in a forum activity will have no effect on the read status for each visible post. As a user needs to complete this manually, the button to mark a post as being read is available.

This page tells you how to set up a forum and how to assess students' participation in a forum.

When to use

A News forum is automatically created for each Moodle course, and displays at the top of the course home page. Place general news and announcements relating to the course in this forum.

You can also create 5 different types of discussion forum within your Moodle course—see Benefits and What kind of forum do you need? below.

To help you decide whether to use a blog, a wiki or a discussion forum, visit the page Blog, wiki or forum—which should you use?
Benefits

The 5 different types of discussion forum lend themselves to 5 discussion structures you can set up with your students:

- **A single simple discussion** is useful for short, focused discussions. It allows for a single thread, which displays on a single page. If an instructor attempts to create further threads, when submitted these new posts will be hidden from view, although they will be listed on the course home page as unread posts. For a format allowing multiple threads, select one of the **Standard** options.

- In a forum where **Each person posts one discussion**, each participant can only post one new discussion topic, although they can all reply to each others’ topics. This is useful when you want each student to, say, reflect on the week’s topic, and everyone else to respond to their reflections.

- In a **Q and A Forum**, a question is posed in the initial post of a discussion. Students must reply to this question with their own answer before other students' replies will be visible to them.

- The **Standard forum displayed in a blog-like format** works like the **Standard forum for general use**, but displays differently. Only the first post of a new topic displays on the forum page (the most recent topic first, as in a blog); users click **Discuss this topic** on that post to view and join in the discussion.

- In a **Standard forum for general use**, any participant can start a new topic at any time. All topics and their replies display at once, with the user's chosen layout (in nested form, if no layout is chosen).

For more information on the different options and their features, see the **Step by step instructions** section of this page, or visit the moodle.org **Using Forum** page.

Guide

Step by step instructions

- **Comparison of Forum and Moodlerooms Forum**
- **What kind of forum do you need?**
- **Set up a forum**
- **Set up access to all forum and individual forum digest settings**
- Change forum subscription mode
- Resource for students, about forums
- Assess student participation in forums
- Print a discussion
- View anonymous users

## Comparison of Forum and Moodlerooms Forum

The following table compares the two different types of forum activity - forum and moodlerooms forum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Moodlerooms Forum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All five forum types are supported</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users can search for posts in the discussion</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users can sort posts in the discussion based on the sorting options</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users can change the display of replies in a discussion to either threaded, nested or flat display</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users can anonymously post in a forum</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum posts can be set to be automatically marked as read</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum posts and attachments can be exported</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff can view/edit forum subscribers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff can view/edit subscribers of a specific discussion in a forum</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff can stop users from making new discussions and posting outside of a date range</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What kind of forum do you need?

The 5 different types of discussion forum are listed in the Forum type drop-down list on the Adding a new Forum page:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum type</th>
<th>Suitable for...</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Sample use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A single simple discussion</strong></td>
<td>a short focused discussion of a single topic</td>
<td>Students can reply to the posted topic, or to another student’s response, but they cannot start a new topic of discussion. If an instructor attempts to create a further threads, when submitted this new post will be hidden from view, although it will be listed on the course home page as an unread post. For a format allowing multiple threads, select one of the Standard options. If you set up a single simple discussion, you cannot use separate groups within it; all members of all groups will see all posts. We suggest you use a standard forum, copying and pasting the same discussion topic for each separate group. If you need to, you can set a permissions override to prevent students from starting new discussions.</td>
<td>Set up a single simple discussion for each topic on the course home page, to facilitate the discussion of the week's topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each person posts one discussion</td>
<td>a forum that's not as free as a standard discussion, but not as controlled as a single simple discussion</td>
<td>Each participant can only post one new discussion topic, but can all reply to each others' topics, as many times as they like.</td>
<td>An introductions forum on the course home page where external students post an introduction and view other students' introductions. Each student posts a reflection on the week's topic, to which everyone else responds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q and A forum</td>
<td>when you have a question and you want all students to contribute to answering it</td>
<td>Students are required to post a response to a question before they can view other responses. After their initial posting, students can view and respond to others' postings.</td>
<td>Facilitate a group activity during tutorial. Each group must post a response to the tutor's question before seeing other groups' responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard forum displayed in a blog-like format</td>
<td>same as Standard forum for general use, but displayed differently. Only the first post of a topic displays on the forum page (the most recent topic first, as in a blog); users click Discuss this topic on that post to view and join in the discussion.</td>
<td>Students can start their own discussion thread at any time and/or reply to other threads.</td>
<td>Discussion of an assessment task, general questions about the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard forum for general use</td>
<td>large discussions that you intend to monitor/guide, for social forums that are student led. All topics and their replies display at once, with the user's chosen layout (in nested form, if no layout is chosen).</td>
<td>Students can start their own discussion thread at any time and/or reply to other threads.</td>
<td>Discussion of an assessment task, general questions about the course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*With thanks to Macquarie University for permission to adapt their iLearn resources.*

For more information on the different options and their features, visit the moodle.org [Using Forum](https://moodle.org) page.

**Set up a forum**

1. On the Moodle course home page, in the relevant section, click **Add an activity or resource**, from the activity
chooser select **Forum** and click **Add**.

2. On the *Adding a new Forum* page, click **Expand all**, then in the **General** section:
   - Enter the **Forum name**.
   - Provide a **Description**. This should contain: the stimulus material to get your students posting (video, reading, scenario etc.), a description of the forum's task and purpose, your expectations about how much time they should devote to participating and, if the class is inexperienced in forum use, rules of netiquette and a link to their student guide.

If you expect students to contribute to the forum in video form, include instructions for [uploading YouTube](#) videos.
If you are copying text from a Microsoft Word document, follow the instructions on this page, "[Copy text from Word to Moodle](#)".

- Choose the **Forum type** (see "[What kind of forum do you need?](#)" above).
3. Under **Attachments and word count**, select:
   - the **Maximum attachment size** for attachments to forum posts
   - the **Maximum number of attachments** that can be made to a single forum post
   - whether you want to **Display word count** of each forum post.

4. Under **Subscription and tracking**:
   - Select the **Subscription mode** from the drop-down list:
     - With **Optional subscription**, users must go into the forum and choose to subscribe.
     - With **Forced subscription**, users are automatically subscribed and cannot unsubscribe themselves. You might want to use forced subscription for the **News forum**, or for forums you create at the beginning of the course, when users may not know that they can subscribe themselves.
     - With **Auto subscription**, all enrolled users are initially auto-subscribed for a short period, after
which they can choose to unsubscribe

- With Subscription disabled, subscription is not allowed.

○ At Read tracking, select whether you want to enable participants to track read and unread posts in the forum and in discussions. (Forum tracking must also be enabled in the user's profile settings.)

5. Under RSS:

○ If you want to enable an RSS feed for this activity, select either Discussions or Posts to be included in the feed.

○ Select the Number of RSS recent articles (either discussions or posts) to include in the RSS feed. Between 5 and 20 is generally acceptable.

6. Under Discussion locking and Post threshold for blocking, place any necessary limitations on forum posts:

○ Lock discussions after period of inactivity—Select a period of inactivity after which discussions cannot be posted to

○ Allow discussion postings within this range—Select a date range which users may post to the forum

○ Time period for blocking—Select a period within which users can be blocked from posting more than a given number of posts

○ Post threshold for blocking—Enter the number of times any individual may post before they are blocked from posting further.

○ Post threshold for warning—Enter the number of posts at which system will warn the user of the approaching threshold.

In the example shown below, individuals are warned that they are approaching the threshold when they post 6 times in a week. Once they have posted 8 times in a week they are prevented from posting further.
7. Make other selections as desired in the remaining page sections, and click **Save and display**.

8. On the new forum’s home page, click **Add a new discussion topic**.

9. On the *Your new discussion topic* page, enter a **Subject** and **Message** as text, audio or video. It's good to specify here whether students are to only reply to the topic you've posted, or are free to add new discussion topics themselves. Add any necessary links, images or text files.
If you tick the **Mail now** check box, the announcement email will be sent to everyone who is subscribed to the forum, without the usual delay to allow for possible editing of your forum post.

Selecting the **Mail now** check box will only result in subscribers being notified immediately if, in editing their student profile, under **Email digest type**, they have selected **No digest (single email per forum post)**. If they have selected **Complete** or **Subjects**, they will be notified of this forum post along with the remainder of their daily digest notifications.

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10. Click **Post to forum**.

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Set up access to all forums and allow users to choose individual forum digest settings

For easy access to the main forum page, where you can see all the forums listed and subscribe to or unsubscribe from forums, add an **Activities block**
Change forum subscription mode

The options for subscription mode are:

- **Optional subscription**—Participants can choose whether to subscribe or not.
- **Forced subscription**—All course participants are subscribed. They cannot unsubscribe.
- **Auto subscription**—All course participants are subscribed initially, but they can choose to unsubscribe at any time.
- **Subscription disabled**—Subscription is not allowed.

Changing the setting from **Auto** to **Disabled** will not unsubscribe existing users; it will only affect those who enrol in the course after the date of the change. Changing from **Disabled** to **Forced** will only subscribe users enrolling later.

1. On the course home page or the forums page (to access the forums page, in the **Activities** block select **Forums**
1. ), click the forum name.

2. On the forum page, in the Settings block, click Subscription mode. The list of modes displays, with the
current mode highlighted and the three other modes as links.

3. Click the mode you want to change to. A confirmation message displays briefly, then the forum page redisplays.

4. Repeat step 2 to check that the forum is now in the correct mode.

Resource for students, about forum use

Resources for students can be found on the Student Website page Your Moodle Student Profile and Manage Forum Subscription

You might want to suggest to students that when posting to a forum, if they wish to submit a lengthy post they should compose it in Word, Notepad or a similar text program and copy and paste it into the Moodle text editing box. This removes the risk of the system timing out and deleting their work if they stop and think while writing.

If they copy from Word, before they paste into the Moodle text editor they should click the Paste From Word button to retain most of the formatting of the original text.

Assess student participation in forums
For some courses, students' participation in forums plays a significant role in determining their final mark. In Moodle, you cannot generate a report on how many times a student has posted to discussion forums in aggregate, for the purposes of creating a baseline for a participation mark. Reading each forum to determine each student's contribution can be prohibitively time-consuming, too.

However, if you have been following the discussions, you should be able to bring to the following procedure an accurate general sense of how sophisticated and relevant each person's discussion posts have been, and combine it with the recorded student forum activity to award an appropriate mark.

To obtain a quick scan of posting activity by students within a course, for the purpose of awarding a participation mark:

1. On the course home page, in the Settings block, click Reports > Logs.

   ![Settings block](image)

   1. On the Logs page:
      - Select All groups, All participants, whether you want to include suspended users, and All days.
      - In the All activities drop-down list select the name of the forum.
      - In the All actions list, select Add.
      - Click Get these logs
3. Scroll down to the bottom, and click Download.

4. In the File Download window, click Open. Microsoft Excel launches and the report displays as a new workbook.
5. In the Excel workbook:
   - Select all the rows containing data.
   - Sort the worksheet by the **Action** column.
   - Delete unneeded rows for actions unrelated to forums.
   - Select the remaining rows and sort them by student name.

![Excel spreadsheet image](image)

6. Each student's forum activities are now listed alongside their name; you can see at a glance when and how often they posted to forums and created new discussions, and whether they created or contributed substantially to discussions that you know to have been fruitful.

**Print a discussion**

To print a discussion thread within a Moodle forum:

1. Open the thread.
2. Ensure that **Display replies flat, with oldest first** is selected in the drop-down box at the top of the page.

![Display replies drop-down box](image)

3. Print the page using your usual method. You can obtain a neater-looking print job if you **dock** all the blocks on the page, then print from your browser's menu.

**Print part of a discussion**
To print a selection of posts in a thread:

For PC users:

1. Click and drag your mouse pointer to highlight the selection.

2. Press **Ctrl + P**.

3. In the *Print* window, under **Print range**, select **Selection**, then click **OK**. The selected posts print, with the forum name and URL in the page header.
For Macintosh users: Press **Command + Shift + 4**. A selection box will display where you can specify an area to copy, then save it as a file to your desktop.

**View Anonymous users**

Go to the advanced forum activity you want to view anonymous posters for and follow these steps:

1. Within "settings" click the "logs" button
2. Create a filter like the one below, specifying activity logs for the advanced forum

```
| JAMIESANDPIT | more | All participants | All days | Activity name here |
```

3. Find the post you are looking for, these logs will show you who the posted the article or comment.

```
18 Nov, 11:40 Jamie Murtha as Dummy01 - Advanced Forum: Advanced Forum Advanced Forum Forum discussion created
```

**Advanced guide**

- Create a private student online space, using forums
- Create a private space for tutors, using forums

**Additional information**

**External resources**

This YouTube video, "Moodle Orientation—Discussion Forums", is recommended, especially for students who are new to online learning. It demonstrates how to use discussion forums, and how to post appropriately to them. You might like to distribute this link to your students before you begin any work in forums.

**Further assistance**

If you experience technical or other issues, consult the Where to get help page.