Best Practices for Using the Forums Tool

Overview
Before creating a Forum, it is important to have a conceptual understanding of how discussions are organized within the Forums Tool.

- **FORUM** – Represents the top level of the discussion hierarchy (e.g. Week One, Unit One, etc.) and can be thought of as the room you might reserve to hold a discussion.

- **TOPIC** – Represents the mid-level in the discussion hierarchy (e.g. Chapter One Questions) and be thought of as the questions you would write on the board for the group to discuss.

- **CONVERSATION** – Represents the lower-level of the discussion hierarchy (e.g. My Answer to Chapter One Questions) and would represent the conversations that take place around each topic by members of the class.

Setting up Forums

1. Click the “New Forum” button at the top of the Forums Tool.
2. Enter in a Title for the Forum. Use a title that best represents the “top level” of your discussion (e.g. Week One, Unit One, etc.)
3. Leave the Short and Full Descriptions boxes EMPTY, as text in these boxes confuse students and clutter up the Forums screen.
4. Make any desired changes to the Forum Posting and Permission settings.
5. Scroll down and click on the “Save Settings and Add Topic” button.
6. Enter in a Title for the first Topic. Use a title that best represents the topic of this discussion (e.g. Chapter One Questions).
7. In the Short Description box, type in “Please read full description below...”
   **NOTE:** This is helpful as it prompts students to click on the link to expand the full description. You can stop entering in this text once students get the hang of the system.
8. In the Full Description box start by typing in: **INSTRUCTIONS:** To post, click the Topic title (e.g. Chapter One Questions) to access the topic and then click the “Start a New Conversation” button.
   **NOTE:** You can stop entering in this text once students get the hang of the system.
9. After the instructions, type in the question or issue you wish the students to respond to or comment on (e.g. Please share some facts about yourself and why you are taking this course).

10. Scroll down, make desired changes to settings and then click the “Save” button.

11. Click “New Topic” to add a topic to the forum. Without a topic, students cannot start new conversation to post their messages.

12. Once you have created a new topic, you have a few setting options.

   **NEW FEATURE:** You now may allow anonymous posts in the forums. This setting cannot be changed after topic creation.

13. To continue setting up more forums and topics in the same format, you can use the “Duplicate” feature.
   
   a. At the forum level, Click on the “More” button. Click on “Duplicate Forum.”
   
   b. The next screen will display the Forum title with the word “Copy” attached to it. It will also display the short and full description of the Forum to be duplicated.
   
   c. The Forum will be duplicated and will include any topics that were created for that Forum.
   
   d. Duplicating Topics follows the same steps.

   **NOTE:** Topics can only be duplicated within the same Forum.
Group Access to Forums

Group discussion is a good way to maximize individual presence and to increase participation in an online learning environment. Creating group-aware forums is a two-step process. First, groups must be created in the Site Editor tool. Then, the groups must be associated with specific Forums (or topics).

Step 1: Create Groups in Site Editor

1. From the “Site Info” tool bar, click “Manage Groups,” then click “Create New Group.”

2. Give the group a name (Title).

3. Select students from the Membership – Site Member List to add to the Group List (highlight more than one student by holding the Ctrl key), and use the single arrow to move students into the group. You do not need to add yourself to these groups; as an instructor you have permission to access all forum posts.

   NOTE: The tool is designed so that you can add a student to more than one group. If you are creating exclusive groups, you should keep a hard copy of your groups to ensure that each student is only added once. After you have added all students, you can view the groups through the Site Roster tool.

4. When you have chosen the students, click Add. You will be brought to the Group List page. The “size” is the number of students in each group.

5. Now you will see these groups listed as an “Access” option in most iLearn tools.

   NOTE: Once created, groups can be used in the following iLearn tools: Announcements, Assignments, Calendar, Forums, Messages, Resources, Tests & Quizzes, and Gradebook.
Step 2: Associate Groups with Forums or Topics
You can allow group access in a forum or a topic. The directions are the same for both.

1. Click Forum Settings or Topic Settings.
2. Scroll down to Permissions.
3. Click the dropdown menu to select the permission level for each group of participants. The default permission level for instructor is Owner.
4. To assign one forum/topic to one group (i.e. Group 1), select None for Students, and then Contributor for Group 1. This removes access from the generic student role and makes this forum or topic only accessible to Group 1.
5. Click Customize button to set up custom permission level for that group.

Recommended Steps for Viewing and Grading Forums
- To view student postings, choose a conversation to view all messages. Alternatively, you can view all messages of one conversation on one page by clicking “Display Message Content” button on the top.
- To grade forum messages, you need to link the forum to a gradebook item first in Forum Settings.
- When the forum or topic is linked to a gradebook item, there’ll be a “Grade” button under a student message title. Click “Grade” to enter grade points and comments for that message.
- Alternatively, you can also view and grade all messages authored by a single student or under a single topic at once. (Please see the Statistics and Grading Section Below)
Using the Statistics and Grading Tool in Forums

1. Click on the Statistics and Grading button.

   **WARNING:** If you have a fairly large course roster or very active forums, this may take a few seconds to load.

2. You will see your class roster with the forum statistics listed.

   ![Class Roster with Forum Statistics](image1)

3. Click on the “Statistics & Grading by Topic.”

   **WARNING:** If you have a fairly large course roster or very active forums, this may take a few seconds to load.

   ![Statistics & Grading by Topic](image2)

4. Click on one of the “Forum Title.”

   ![Forum Title](image3)

**SELECT a Gradebook Item:** Click on this to choose the gradebook item associated with that particular forum for grading. When you choose from the drop down box, you will be able to enter grades and comments for that specific discussion for students who have completed that discussion.

**Details:** Click on the “Details” to see the messages authored and read by that specific student.

**Grade:** Click on the “Grade” to get the grading dialogue box. (See below)
5. **Grade Group Forums**
Follow steps outlined above. Then click on “Filter by Group.”

You can enter grades for a group of students.

**NOTE:** Forum settings can be complicated. If you have any questions, please contact Academic Technology for a consult.
The “Watch” Feature in Forums

The iLearn "Watch" feature allows you to receive email notifications when forum responses are authored in a particular course. You can choose options to receive notifications on all threads, no threads, or just those threads in which you have authored a post.

1. Click Watch at the top of the Forums tool.
2. Select one of the options, and click Save when done.