

Using Discussion Boards in the Classroom

A discussion board is an online forum that allows students to interact with classmates and the instructor outside the classroom. Having discussion in this forum gives students access to the conversation at any time as long as they can connect to the Internet. Successful online discussions can provide the same cooperative interaction as an in class discussion, in which students build on one another's perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the materials.

Student participation with an online discussion board can be beneficial in a number of areas:

- Class preparation- identify topics that need clarification or that have captured the interest of your students
- Differentiate instruction for those students who may not have verbal communication strength.
- Discuss sensitive, controversial, or personal topics that may be difficult for some students to discuss face-to-face.
- Learners can be exposed to multiple perspectives and “hear” about the topic from the perspective of others.
- Unstructured problems that may be complex and ambiguous can be examined - constructive thinking.
- Continue in-class discussions, students can write what they didn't get to say in class.
- Provides an opportunity for the instructor or students to offer links to helpful articles, websites and files that support the conversation.
- Students can get feedback from peers on posted work to help with self-evaluation.
- Resonates with our students who are digital natives. Folks, they do online discussions every day- this is very familiar territory!

Let's Get Started...

1. **Choose a Forum-** Find directions for each of these discussion boards on the following pages.

SWIFT

- Easily add a discussion tab from the teacher's SWIFT homepage.
- Student accounts are not necessary
- With each topic or “thread” created you can choose to approve (and edit) each reply before being posted or have replies automatically posted to your site.
- Teacher's can post replies to student replies to keep the dialogue going.
- Does not allow 24-7 student access **when the teacher moderates** or allow for files to upload to the discussion tab.

NiceNet

- With some directions can easily be set up by the teacher. Teachers need to register for an account.
- Teacher has control over content and group members. Students can easily navigate between various “classrooms”. Students must be registered.
- Create your own private, threaded conferencing on topics you make for the class or opt to allow students to create their own topics. Gives a time stamp as well as known author.
- Allows for the following options; Create an associated Conferencing Topic, Restrict students from editing their documents after on-line submission, Allow only teachers to view submitted documents.
- Attached files/documents need to be TEXT ONLY (unformatted) Students can post an assignment on-line, give their peers feedback on published work and receive a teacher's comments.

Go Post

- Organize boards into multiple discussion areas both threaded and unthreaded
- Students can create a profile and include an avatar to represent themselves
- Students and teachers can see who is currently online
- Instantaneous posting and replying- however, messages cannot be stopped by the moderator before posting.

- Allow non-UW accounts access to your board and send email invitations to your board
- Students and teachers can include files (You can exchange and post ANY kind of file i.e. websites, Keynotes, movies, pictures, audio files etc.) or images with your messages
- Teachers can view participation reports.

2. Start with a Question

Coming up with a great question can make or break whether or not kids will respond in a thought reflective way. The goal of the discussion question should be to promote thinking. Research for promoting higher order thinking in class discussions can be similarly applied to online discussions. Hunkins (1972) recommends the following procedure for formulating effective questions:

- Analyze the educational situation
- Consider the goals and objectives
- Consider what question types meet those goals and objectives and the needs of the students
- Write or select questions
- Judge the effectiveness of the questions

Examples:

Here are some categories of discussion questions (with examples) as designed by Gary D. Borich (Borich, 1996):

- **Interest getting and attention-getting.** "If you awakened in the year 2399, what is the first thing you would notice?"
- **Diagnosing and checking.** "Does anyone know Senge's five principles of a learning organization?"
- **Recall of specific facts or information.** "Who can name the main characters in Moby Dick?"
- **Managerial.** "Did you request an extension on the assignment due date?"
- **Structure and redirect learning.** "Now that we have discussed the advantages of, and limitations to, formative evaluation, who can do the same for summative evaluation?"
- **Allow expression of affect.** "How did you feel about our online guest's list of ten things trainers do to shoot themselves in the foot?"
- **Encourage higher-level thought processes.** "Considering what you have read, and what was discussed in the posts this past week, can you summarize all the ways there are to overcome obstacles to effective teamwork?"

3. Monitoring Student Participation

As a teacher you will need to decide what your role, as monitor will be. Will you be screening participants' responses? Will you be a participant in the discussion? Or will you be replying to student responses with other probing questions? At the very least you will need to be checking in as the monitor of the discussion. Make sure you know how to remove inappropriate student responses to the discussion and tell the student to restate their views using more appropriate language. You may also need to tell students to stick to the point of the question when they veer off the discussion topic. Hopefully, the introduction of a rubric will take care of most of those who might be tempted give an out of place response.

4. Evaluation of Student Participation

Having a rubric available to your students will indicate the level of quality that you expect in the discussion comments. Try to provide at least two or three criteria on which you will base the participation grade. Below are some sample rubrics and links to other rubrics that may help guide you.

http://www.edtech.neu.edu/teach/use_blackboard/managing_your_course/documents/sample_rubric.pdf

4 Level

- The participant consistently posted insightful comments and questions that prompted on-topic discussion.
- The participant consistently helped clarify or synthesize other group members' ideas.
- If disagreeing with another group members' ideas, the participant stated his or her disagreement or objections clearly, yet politely.

3 Level

- The participant was notably lacking in one or two of the items listed for A-level participation.
- The participant consistently had to be prompted or coaxed to participate.
- The participant usually, but not always, expressed herself or himself clearly.

2 Level

- The participant was consistently lacking in two or more of the items listed for A-level participation.
- The participant was extremely reluctant to participate, even when prompted.
- The participant rarely expressed himself or herself clearly.
- The participant frequently attempted (success is irrelevant) to draw the discussion off-topic, even if the participant's participation otherwise conforms to a higher level on the rubric.

1 Level

- The participant was rude or abusive to other course participants.
- The participant consistently failed or refused to participate at all, even when specifically prompted or questioned, even if the participant's participation otherwise conforms to a higher level on the rubric.

<http://www.bridgeport.edu/include/pdf/SOC102-FA05.htm>

	10 (Excellent)	9 (Good)	8 (Fair)	7 (Poor)
Contribution to the Classroom	Posting is insightful, thorough, and interesting.	Posting is thorough and interesting.	Posting is interesting but lacks insight and depth.	Posting is uninteresting and/or too brief for the assignment.
Inspires Reply Postings from Other Students	A serious effort is made to frame the discussion posting in such a way as to encourage others to reply. Posting generates questions and opens up new avenues for discussion.	A serious effort is made to frame the discussion posting in such a way as to encourage others to reply.	Some effort is made to frame the discussion posting in such a way as to encourage others to reply.	No effort is made to frame the discussion posting in such a way as to encourage others to reply.
Demonstrated Understanding of the Reading Assignment	Posting demonstrates a thorough understanding of the reading assignment and is substantiated by several examples from the textbook and/or companion website.	Posting demonstrates an understanding of the reading assignment and is substantiated by at least one example from the textbook and/or companion website.	Posting demonstrates an understanding of the reading assignment but is not substantiated by examples from the textbook and/or companion website.	Posting demonstrates very little understanding of the reading assignment.
Grammar, Mechanics, Spelling, and Sentence Structure	Posting is highly polished; no grammar or spelling errors.	Posting is polished; maximum of one grammar or spelling error.	Posting is adequate; maximum of two grammar or spelling errors.	Inadequate posting; more than two spelling or grammar errors.

Other Rubric Resources:

- http://www.edtech.neu.edu/teach/use_blackboard/managing_your_course/documents/sample_rubric.pdf (very good)
- <http://www.bridgeport.edu/include/pdf/SOC102-FA05.htm> (scroll down to the bottom of the page. attached .jpg also)- very good
- <http://www.ucsb.edu/~glassman/rubric.html> (university level but a TIS can adapt it for a high school level on a 1-4 scale)
- http://www.bvu.edu/departments/academicaffairs/tltc/workshop_materials/mccomb.asp
- <http://edg5250-85.fa01.fsu.edu/assignmentgroup1.htm#65>
- http://mason.gmu.edu/~ajaju/teaching/online_discussions.html

5. Conclude the Discussion


Know when to close down your discussion and make sure your students are aware of when they may be participants. Some discussions may be ongoing throughout the year while others have time constraints for curricular reasons. Another question to ask yourself is if you want a closed discussion available on a read-only basis with a limited window of time for participation. Will you as an instructor have discussion closure/wrap up online or will it be in the classroom itself?

Credits:

<http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/muilenburg.html>
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~webteach/articles/discussion.html>
http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr00/reinventing_box.html

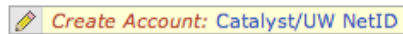
<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/37.4/lyons.html>
http://www.edtech.northeastern.edu/learn_new_skills/learn_technical/workshopmaterials/managing_online_discussion

Directions for GoPost

1. Access the Internet through **FIREFOX** 
2. Log in to DLC Educators Digital Tools. Then **Discussion Boards EPost and GoPost**.
<http://www.learningcommons.org/educators/tools/>
3. **If you have a Password** then Select **EPost and GoPost**. Then Get Started **GOPOST**
4. Type in your UW netID and Password **HINT: starts with dlc**

- **Haven't registered yet for a password?** Then choose **Tools Accounts** and then **Create Account: Catalyst/UW NetID**

- Choose the button on the bottom of the page that says:



- Type in your school access code then continue

Shorewood: PVBZA

Shorecrest: UDAVD

Einstein: VBFSC

Kellogg: KOTOE

Room Nine Community School: MURZQ

- Fill out required information – continue
- Type your UWNetID # on a stickie (Note: Copy this exactly because when entering your UWNetID# it will be case sensitive.)

Catalyst/UWNetID Account Sign-Up

Note: You are not done yet. Please click "Continue."

Your UWNetID is:

dlc06758

Please write this down for future reference.

Continue to Password Screen

Continue to set up your password, email forwarding, and secret questions.

- Create a password by using your Shoreline login password followed by the first letter of your name
- Continue with 3 security questions - next
- Select I don't have an email address – next
- Finish

5. In the home page of GoPost, select **Create New Board**.

6. Put in your name as the creator of the board. In the description box, discuss the purpose, rules and instructions for students to follow when posting their conversations. You are limited to 512 characters.
7. Next *choose how to organize your board*. Look at the examples to see what you would work best for you. Then click SAVE.
8. You will now be at your manage page. Your discussion board has been created but you can now change the settings of the board name and description, who is it that will be participating, availability of the board. This page will also allow you to delete the board. Most importantly it will give you the url **e.g.**
<https://catalysttools.washington.edu/gopost/board/dlc06405/1008/>
9. Copy and paste this board URL into the Links section of your SWIFT page.
10. When you are satisfied with your settings, click the save button at the bottom of the page.
11. You will then be taken to the Manage window. You have already set up Name and Description that are on top so move to Security if you are satisfied with name and description.
12. Under **Participant Access and Roles** you will find the following:
 - a. **Participant Access:** This will show who is allowed to access your message board. For security reasons, never select Anyone-Anyone with UW NetID is fairly secure due to the fact that it's a limited audience who has UW NetIDs. If you choose specific group, you must create a group and input your class's specific DLC numbers. Our recommendation: Choose anyone with a UW NetID and No to allow visitors to view the board without logging in. Click Save.
 - b. **Roles:** Next decide if you want anyone beside yourself as a moderator or administrator. If so Edit the Roles.
 - c. **Screen Names:** The default setting for screen names is to allow participants to choose their screen names. Our Recommendation: Allow this, but remind them to use their real first names so you know who has posted at a glance.
13. Move onto **Availability**. Click Open to make your message board available to students immediately. Click Save.
14. The **Statistics** link will take you the Statistics of your board that show how many days your board has been up, the total number of posts and participants who have posted.
15. Students who have a UW NetID will access the board by merely clicking on your link and then installing the message board into their account. Make sure your students are registered with a UWNetID before giving them access to the board. A Technology Specialist can come to your room and do this with your class in 15-20 minutes.
16. **NOTE:** This first time a student enters the Class tools they will need to go to YOUR ACCOUNT (dlc-----) at the top of the page. They will then click on Manage Profile. They should check to see if their first and last name and email are entered.
17. Students will click PROFILE on top of the page and then click EDIT PROFILE. Under screen name they will need to put in their REAL name.
18. When a student is ready to post, they will click on the Start a new conversation button.
19. In the Subject box, students should include their last name in the title of their post so users can quickly identify who is posting. Write the post in the message box. Students can edit their message using the tool bar (Wizziwig) above the box.

20. If necessary, students may attach a file to their post. This can be a Word file, audio file, jpeg file, etc. QuickTime movies can be attached as well, but take time to upload and shouldn't be undertaken at the last minute. When a student is satisfied with their conversation, click Post to submit to the message board.
21. The student will automatically be taken back to the home page of the message board and will see their conversation post with username and time posted.
22. Users double-click on conversation to read the post and open attachments if any. To respond to a conversation, they can scroll down to the box called Add to this Conversation.
23. If you want to change the Profile so you can see the user's name rather than their DLC number, here's how. In the home page of the message board, click on the author's name. Click on Edit profile. In Edit profile, they can add a picture and type in their name for preferred screen name.

Directions for NiceNet.org

<http://www.nicenet.org/>

1. If you have never used Nicenet before begin with the New User Button> *Teachers: Create a Class*. Fill in the required information then click on *Create a Class*.
2. If you have a Username and Password then log in with the username you have previously registered as.
3. From the menu, go to **Classes>Create** and name it. Click *Create the Class*.
4. Each class you create is assigned a class key. Write this down. It will also be sent to your email address, keep this email! Click the *Finish Class Creation* button
5. From the menu on the left you can choose a class discussion board to edit. Click **Change Class** or simply choose the class you want from the drop down menu.
6. Go to **Class Administration**. Choose your class to administer. You can now Delete Specific Users, Change the User Types, Change conference Preferences and Link Sharing Preferences, and Edit the Class Name (the name of the bulletin board). You can also view your class information including the number of logins and messages posted.
7. The **Conferencing** link from the menu on the left will take you to where you can add topics and post messages.
8. **Link Sharing** will allow you to post links for students to access. You can also relate topics for a series of links similar to SWIFT
9. The **Documents** link is where you can put Text. You cannot add an actual file. They recommend that you type your document in another program and then copy-and-paste it. You can use HTML code.
10. The **Class Schedule** gives you a place where you can list events similar to SWIFT.
11. **Class Members** allows you to see a class Roster, Sort by last name and send a personal message if an email has been provided.

New Users Start Here

Students:
» [Join A Class](#)

Teachers:
» [Create a Class](#)

Current Users Log In

Username:

Password:

[\[Forgot Your Password?\]](#)

Personal Messages :
[View](#) | [Send](#)

Classes :
[Join](#) | [Create](#) | [Drop](#) | [Delete](#)
[Class Administration](#)
[Edit User Profile](#)
[ICA FAQ](#)

Choose a Class:
 |

PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY:
[LOG OUT](#)

testing

[Conferencing](#)
[Link Sharing](#)
[Documents](#)
[Class Schedule](#)
[Class Members](#)

Personal Messages :
[View](#) | [Send](#)

Classes :
[Join](#) | [Create](#) | [Drop](#) | [Delete](#)
[Class Administration](#)
[Edit User Profile](#)
[ICA FAQ](#)

Enter New Class:
 |

PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY:
[LOG OUT](#)

For Students

5. At the login prompt, select **Join a Class** and enter the **class key** (*this is the code the teacher gives them*), then hit **Join the Class**.
6. You will need to decide whether students will enter the username and password themselves or if you will do it for them.

TIPS:

- Keep in mind that it can take a long time if everyone tries to join the class all at once.
- If you establish a username for them, they can begin to log in immediately, thereby staggering their access to the page so it doesn't become overwhelmed.

- You may want to stick to a standard username (such as first initial followed by last name) and password (the students 6 digit ID number) in the beginning.
7. Once students are logged in, you can print a list of class members from the class administration page and keep this on file (in case someone forgets!). You may need to drop a student from the class if a name appears twice, or is listed as "anonymous." Students will have to login again.

WATCH OUT FOR:

- A username that's not unique. Names like Lee or Smith need to use their full name, to avoid the error message about someone else already having the username that they want.
- If students are logging on for the first time and one of them has a screen that includes Course Name, they're in the wrong place. Have them go back to the page where they enter the class code, then click on the **Join a Class** button.
- Students joining a class more than once, or joining a second class when they already have a Nicenet username and password. If they do this, they'll certainly get the "non-unique username" error message -- they're already in the database.
- Students (or teachers) forgetting a password. Have them check their email for the message from Nicenet that confirms their username and password. If worst comes to worst, they can always join again with a new username, and you can delete the duplicate from your class list within Nicenet's Class Administration options.

Directions for Using SWIFT's Discussion Tab

1. From your **PROFILE** page make sure that you have the discussion tab ON
2. Next choose the **Discussion** tab.
3. Type in your new Thread Topic
4. With each topic or "thread" you create you can choose to approve each reply or have replies automatically posted to your site. Approving each reply gives you the ability to view, edit or delete each reply before visitors to your site see it.
 - TIP: Approving each reply is strongly suggested because Internet spammers may attempt to post unwanted links as replies to your discussions in order to improve their ranking in search engines like Google. These links often contain inappropriate material for children, including pornography. In addition, approving each reply will keep you involved in the discussion, which means topics, have more potential for creating learning opportunities. You can also post your own replies to student replies to keep the dialogue going.

Active sections:		
Announcements	On	Off
Contact	On	Off
Discussion	On	Off
Documents	On	Off
Grades	On	Off
Events	On	Off
Homework	On	Off
Image Gallery	On	Off
Links	On	Off
Practice Quizzes	On	Off

Thread topic:

Approve each reply: Yes No [HELP: Why should I approve each reply?](#)

5. Use the tool bar to format the text or insert pictures.
6. Click the **Post Thread** button at the bottom
7. Edit or Delete your previously posted Topics by clicking on the little pencil next to the topic title.

Threads	Replies	Last Updated
What staff development would you most like to see this month at Syre	0	October 21, 2005 at 12:39pm
What do you think of our intensive typing month?	4	October 17, 2005 at 1:30pm

8. Edit or delete a posting by clicking on the topic title then clicking the Edit or Delete button next to the posted comment.

Discussion

<p>D Instructor Last updated on September 28, 2005 at 12:44pm</p> <p> What do you think of our intensive typing month?</p>	<p> EDIT DELETE</p>
<p>D jenny Last updated on September 28, 2005 at 12:57pm</p> <p>I like it!</p>	<p> EDIT DELETE</p>
<p>D Tom Last updated on September 28, 2005 at 4:02pm</p> <p>I sure am getting faster</p>	<p> EDIT DELETE</p>