

Online Discussion Forum Planning Guide

This document contains questions you need to think about as you plan your online discussion forums.

1. Do you want to host entire class discussions, small group discussions, or a combination of both?
 2. How often will you host discussions (i.e. one per module, etc.)?
 3. What forums structure makes the most sense to students?
 - a. Do you want to have one forum with a topic for each unit (or module)?
 - b. Do you want to have one forum per unit (or module) with multiple topics in it?
 - c. Do you want to have one forum for the entire class and one forum for group work?
 4. What do you expect from your students (i.e. proper grammar, no profanity, etc.)?
 5. What will a good, quality post look like? Will you use a rubric?
 6. How often do you expect students to participate within the forums?
 7. How often will you involve yourself in the discussion?
 8. How often will you grade and/or provide feedback to your students?
 9. What are some topics students could discuss or debate?
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Best Practices of Forums Management

This document explains best practices of forums management in online classes.

1. Forums Structure

Plan the structure of your forums and topics out on paper before you start building in Isidore. This may save you some time and frustration later. Forums and topics need to be planned out and setup before class begins.

2. Expectations

Student expectations for forums participation need to be clearly articulated in the welcome letter, syllabus, and introductory module. If you're using a rubric to evaluate students' forums posts, then make sure they have access to a copy of it before they begin writing their posts.

3. Prompts

Discussion prompts need to be interesting and to promote higher-level thinking. These two characteristics are essential to having a good, quality discussion.

4. Instructions

Instructions need to be clearly articulated within the Forums tool. Instructions should contain both “how to” and assignment instructions. Students may need to be reminded how to post a new thread or reply to a thread.

5. Be Involved

Forums should be monitored frequently to make sure that students are headed in the right direction and are not confused. Sometimes it’s necessary for the instructor to shape the conversation. Finally, the instructor should share his or her expertise, as students are often eager to learn from their instructor’s experiences.

6. Grading & Feedback

As you’re reviewing students’ work, use statistics to do the “heavy lifting.” Let students know how they’re doing frequently & grade their work in a timely manner.