

always add or remove these at any time, but once they are place within the structure, it's impossible to move them up or down a level.

For details on building and creating the forums, refer to the built-in Scholar Help at <https://scholar.vt.edu/xsl-portal/help/main>.

Using Forum Topics and Threads

Clarify expectations for student participation

Netiquette

Include a section in your syllabus that outlines how students should behave in the Forum and how they are expected to complete forum activities. Provide clear instructions for internet etiquette (called "netiquette") and remind them that their answers are archived and are seen by instructors and classmates.

Student Postings

Make it clear to students that they are to post their messages in the appropriate topic area. One best use of a forum is to create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) forum and encourage students to post questions (and reply to each other with answers) within there. This will reduce repetitive emails of the same question and provides students opportunities to share knowledge. You can also reuse these questions for future iterations of the course.

To keep off-topic "chatter" from distracting others, create a "Student Lounge" forum. Encourage students to post non-class related questions or event announcements to that area. Doing this creates a feeling of community and makes it easier for you to grade forums, for others to follow and reply to discussions, and helps keep the commentary on-time and on-task.

Participation Expectations

Consider defining exactly how forums will affect their overall performance or grade in the class. State how often you expect them to read posts. How often do you expect them to post messages? How many discussions must they initiate? Must they reply to other students' posts? Do posts have to be a minimum (or under a maximum) length? Do they need to link to or include attachments of resources or articles they reference? Provide direction on how to criticize another person's ideas, but not the person. Do you require students to summarize the entire discussion by a certain day or time? How long will the forum topic be available? Is there a follow-up activity (such as a quiz, assignment, or class discussion) they need to complete after participating in the forum? The more specific you can be the fewer organization questions, confusion, and hesitation they will have in posting questions and responses.

Provide your participation estimations

Explain to your students your role and participation within the forums. Informing students of your participation makes them aware of your intent. This helps them feel involved and connected with you despite the physical and time difference that forums may create. State how many times you will read or respond to forum topics per day/week. Are you planning to

be online a lot via email, forums, chat room, or in some other manner? Will you be calling on people to answer, reply to, or clarify posts? What role will you be playing? Will you be the Devil's advocate or act as a facilitator for discussion? Will you be the moderator for a forum debate? Will you be an observer and will summarize the closing discussion forum to be discussed in class?

What's the next task?

After students have participated in forums, reiterate the learning objectives once more and perhaps mention the learning outcomes to follow. *Tell them what are they expected to do next.* Will you have them journal their thoughts about their classmates' discussions in the Blog tool? Do you want them to complete a quiz online or in class? Are they to use the wiki to begin drafting their group papers? Do you have readings or questions for them to complete? Will there be an in-class discussion summarizing the online discussion? Provide students with a clear direction of what and where to go upon finishing a particular topic discussion.

Summary

Provide clear learning objectives for students. What do you want your students to have learned upon completion of the discussion? Check for alignment between the learning objective you've set, the topic you propose they respond to, the activities or discussion they will do, and your desired learning outcomes. Modify the learning objectives or the topic or lesson as needed.

Reiterate specific participation expectations for each forum discussion. While you may have outlined these within your syllabus, providing it again within the topic itself reinforces the expectations and encourages higher-quality responses from all participants.

For each and every forum discussion:

1. Post a welcome message and an overview of the expected session.
2. Provide students with clear participation expectations. (See *Participation Expectations* above.)
3. Explain how you will participate in the sessions. (See *Provide your participation estimations* above.)
4. Outline the learning objectives. (What will students learn or be able to do upon completion of the discussion forum?)
5. Provide the forum question or discussion prompt.
6. Adhere to your outlined participation.
7. Monitor the discussions to keep students on track, to maintain student engagement, and to balance discussions by toning down dominant posters and prompting silent participants to post.
8. If you've chosen to provide commentary or regular feedback (which may or may not be graded), post questions, replies, or summaries to check for student understanding.

9. Don't leave the discussion forum "hanging." Provide closure by asking students to summarize the entire discussion or by summarizing the discussion for them. Ask them to comment or clarify thoughts, if necessary.

Reviewing Participation Statistics

Scholar Forums offers a *Statistics* link that allows you to quickly and easily see who has authored posts, messages, or replies within discussion forums. You can also see how many postings they have read, how many of the posts are unread, and a percentage of read posts per individual student. This numbers alone cannot quantify the quality, breadth, or depth of an individual's postings, but can act as gauge of interaction between students.

General Tips and Tricks

1. Post interesting, relevant, open-ended questions for the course/chapter/activity.
2. Make the first Forum assignment be a low-risk, high-engagement activity: Have students create and post Autobiographies. Have each student create an autobiography with a photo of their choosing to share with the class.
3. Select the best posting(s) within a topic and explain why it is a good posting.
4. Pose a Pro/Con issue and have half the class post pro responses and the other half post con responses. Ask students to argue and defend their assigned position statements.
5. Have students role-play and respond to questions from a particular perspective, character, or ideology. Ask them to state the perspective as part of their response, or consider having them respond and ask other students to guess that perspective (or character) the original poster had.
6. Have students grade themselves by compiling their three best postings accompanied by their reflection or explanation as to how the postings support their selected grade.
7. Create a Student Area so they can have conversations of their own. (See image.)

