How to Set Up Moodle Forums

I. Forum Overview

The Forum activity in Moodle is essentially an online discussion board. All messages stay posted in the forum for participants to read and respond to at any time — or within a time frame that you stipulate when you create the forum.

Forums can be graded or ungraded. If a forum is graded, there will be a corresponding column in the gradebook, and grades you assign in the forum will be transferred to the gradebook.

You can also apply groups to a forum, in which case forum activity will be separated for the groups. (See Group Mode under Common Module Settings below.)

“Subscribing” Students to a Forum

Students must log in to Moodle and click on the forum title to read and post messages, unless you create a forum to which students are “subscribed.” If a participant (instructor or student) is subscribed to a forum, Moodle will send the participant an email message containing the content of each new message posted to the forum. (See the description below of General settings for creating a forum.)

The “30-Minute Rule”

Both instructors and students have 30 minutes after posting a message to a forum to edit the message. After 30 minutes, the final version of the message is sent to whomever is subscribed.

II. Types of Forums

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When you create a Forum in Moodle, you can select one of these four types. A Standard forum for general use is created, if you don't change the Forum Type setting.

1. **Standard forum for general use**
This is the default forum type, when you create a new forum. Discussions in this type of forum are organized into **Topics**. Anyone can create a topic. No one can post a message until someone has created a topic. When you use this type of forum, you should do one of the following:

a. After creating the forum, create topics within the forum to organize the discussion.

b. Give students instructions to create a topic (click the ‘Create a New topic’ button) before posting their message.

2. **A single simple discussion**

This type of forum is equivalent to a single topic in the standard forum and is best for discussing a single subject. You cannot create topics in this type of forum. Users can post messages directly, without selecting or setting up a topic first.

3. **Each person posts one discussion**

This type of forum is a cross between the first two: each student can create **one topic** (and only one), but can read and post messages to any topic. This type of forum is useful for activities such as class introductions and peer-reviewing written work.

4. **Q and A forum**

In this type of forum, you can post a single question. Students can respond to your question and to each others' answers, but they can not view other students' responses until they have posted one response themselves.

**Note:** Moodle only hides other students' responses, if they are replies to a single post. Therefore, you should post your question as a new message, not in the forum summary, and ask students to answer the question by replying to your message. See the MoodleDocs Tips for Q & A forums.

**News Forum**

The News forum is a special type of forum that appears only in the top (general) section of a course. It is intended for important course announcements. Students cannot post to this forum. The default setting for the News forum is that all participants are forced to be **subscribed** (i.e., they will receive all posts to the forum in their email).

You cannot create this type of forum. It is created automatically when a new course is created, and it always appears in the top (general) section of a course. You can, however, change the forum name to something that might be clearer, such as "Important Course Announcements."

This forum is very useful for sending important course announcements to students. Students will not receive the announcements, however, if they don't have their correct email address entered in MyWeb. (While you can change your email address in Moodle, students must change it in MyWeb. If they change it in Moodle, it will be overwritten by what is in Datatel.)

**III. Adding a Forum to Your Course**

1. Locate the section (week or topic) to which you want to add a forum.

2. From the **Add an activity** menu in that section, select **Forum**. The screen for setting up a new forum will open.

**General Settings**

3. Enter a **Forum name** and select a **Forum type**. (See the description of forum types above.)
4. Enter a Forum introduction, which will display at the top of the screen when the student clicks on the link to the forum. If you want students to create a topic before posting to the forum, it's a good idea to include that information in your introduction.
   - In a Single simple discussion forum, students cannot create a separate topic.
   - In a Q & A forum, you should instruct students not to create a new topic when they answer your question, but to click on Reply instead.
   - In the other two types of forums, students will first need to click on the Add a new discussion topic button, and then create their message, unless you have organized the forum into topics beforehand.

5. Force everyone to be subscribed? — If you change the subscription setting to 'Yes, forever,' students will receive an email containing a new forum post each time anyone posts to the forum, and they will not be able to unsubscribe. This is not advisable for any forums except the News Forum. If you select 'Yes, initially,' students will receive posts in their email, but they can unsubscribe themselves from the forum.

6. Read tracking for this forum? — 'Read tracking' allows participants to track whether they have read the messages in a forum or topic. The choices for this setting are Optional, Off, and On.

NOTE: To be able to distinguish visually between read and unread messages, you need to do the following:
   a. Turn On Read Tracking in this setting when you create the forum.
   b. Change the Forum Tracking setting in your profile to Yes. (In your profile, click on Edit Profile, change the Forum Tracking setting to Yes, and click on Update Profile at the bottom of the screen.) Students must also change this setting, if they want to track read and unread messages.
   c. Use the threaded view for the forum — not the nested view. (The nested view displays the contents of each message on one page; therefore they have all been viewed, as far as the web browser is concerned.)
   d. Do not subscribe to the forum. If you are subscribed, each message will be emailed to you and considered read, regardless of whether you have read the email.

7. Maximum attachment size — You can reduce the maximum file size, but you can't increase it.
Grade Settings

8. **Aggregate type.** If you want to grade a forum, you first need to select how the ratings you assign to forum posts will be handled in the gradebook.
   a. Select **No ratings**, if you are not grading the forum.
   b. Select **Average of ratings**, if you want the grade for the forum to be the average (mean) of the ratings you assign to individual posts.
   c. Select **Count of ratings**, if you want the total number of rated posts to be the student's grade for that forum.
   d. Select **Maximum rating**, if you want the forum grade to be the highest rating that the student received for posts to that forum.
   e. Select **Minimum rating**, if you want the forum grade to be the lowest rating that the student received for posts to that forum.
   f. Select **Sum of ratings**, if you want the student's grade for the forum to be the total of all of the ratings for the forum that you assigned to that student.

9. **Grade.** Next, select how you will grade the postings. You can select a point value (1-100), or an existing grade scale to use, such as 'Outstanding-Satisfactory-Not Satisfactory,' or you can first create your own scale from the Administration menu and then select it here.

10. **Restrict dates.** You can specify that messages posted to the forum can only be graded, if they are within a particular date range. You cannot, however, restrict access to the forum, unless you completely hide it.

Blocking Students from Posting to Forum

11. If you have students who are over-posting, you can block them from an excessive number of posts by using the **Post threshold for blocking** setting.

Common Module Settings

12. **Group mode.** As with other activities, you can assign groups to forums. The options are:
   a. No groups
   b. Separate groups — Students see only the forum for their group.
   c. Visible groups — Students see all the forums, but can only post messages to their own.

   **NOTE:** To create the groups, click on **Groups** in the **Administration** block.

13. **ID number.** If you add an ID number, you can use the number in grade calculations. (You can also set the ID number in the gradebook.)

14. **Grade category.** If the forum is graded, select the gradebook category to which the forum should be added. (You need to set up the categories in the Gradebook. It's best to do that before adding activities you plan to grade, but you can assign the forum to a grade category later.)

15. When you've completed the settings, click **Save and return to course.**
16. To make changes to the forum, click on the Edit icon next to the forum title on the homepage.

Created by Jane Rice. Updated March 2010.
For further information, see the Forum Module section in MoodleDocs.