Canvas Discussions

➢ **Purpose**
Discussions is one of the powerful built-in tools for fostering student engagement. This document will provide a rationale for using discussions as well as evaluating student contributions. Discussions are one method for creating active learning opportunities for students and can be the foundation for class participation [1]

➢ **Scope**
All instructors teaching online should consider using discussions in their classes. Discussion can be used at the beginning of a course and throughout the course to develop critical thinking skills relevant to the subject at hand.

➢ **Background**
Discussion is one strategy for shifting the classroom emphasis from instructor to students. Rather than being vessels into which you pour information, students become co-creators of knowledge and understanding [1].

Canvas Discussions provides an organized system for class discussions as interactive communication between two or more people. Discussions can be created as an assignment for grading purposes (and seamlessly integrated with the Canvas Gradebook), or simply serve as a forum for topical and current events. Discussions can also be created within student groups.

Instructions/Procedures

Discussion are created as either focused or threaded discussions. Focused discussions only allow for two levels of nesting, the original post and subsequent replies. Threaded discussions allow for multiple levels of nesting. Focused discussions are relatively short-lived interactions that may answer a question, while threaded discussions allow replies within replies and may last for an extended amounts of time.

Focused Discussions	Threaded Discussions
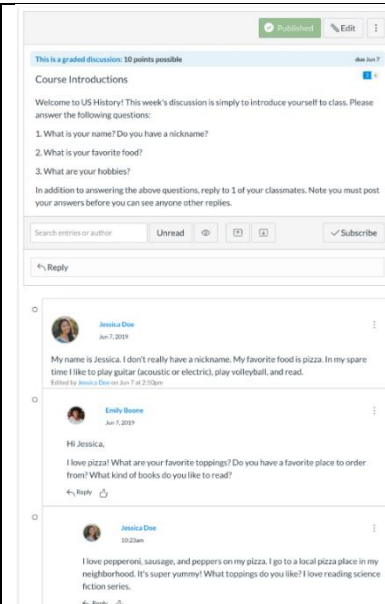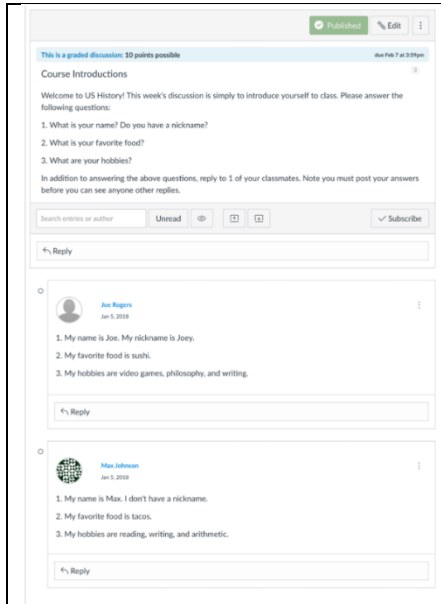
Focused discussions include one response and one layer of comment nesting. Focused discussions are relatively short-lived interactions that tend to disappear as the course progresses, such as a weekly forum for questions related to that week's activities. Use a focused discussion for single posts and related comments. One discussion leader typically posts a message and multiple learners comment on it. Participants may leave a side comment to a reply but cannot develop the conversation beyond two layers of nesting. focused discussions might also be used to: • answer a single question • share resources amongst peers • collect results from a simple research activity • share solutions to a single problem • correct misconceptions • clarify course policies • get feedback on a work in progress • share insights about a single reading [Canvas Guides: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10727-67952724152]	Threaded discussions include multiple layers of response nesting, allowing commenters to continue responding on a single nested thread. Threaded discussions lend themselves to the refining of complex ideas and thoughts that persist throughout an entire course.. Responses and different lines of inquiry that can be quickly navigated due to its hierarchical structure. Use a threaded discussion for multiple posts and related comments. One or more discussion leaders post a message and multiple learners comment on it with the freedom to create any number of related discussion topics and comments. Threaded Discussions might also be used to: • post and answer multiple related or unrelated questions • organize results from a complex research activity • share and iterate upon ideas shared by each student in the course • debate the pros and cons of a single issue or multiple issues • ask multiple questions of a single discussion leader • facilitate group discussions around multiple topics • explore at length the feasibility of different solutions to a complex problem

Crafting Effective Discussion Prompts

A good discussion prompt is vital for creating meaningful discussion. Well thought out prompts spark students' capacity for creative thinking and help them see the topic at hand in new and exciting ways. [Adapted from reference 2]

Conversely, a prompt that is too limiting can cause a discussion to quickly flounder. In this category fall prompts that have only one right answer, along with prompts whose sole purpose is to make students prove that they completed the assigned reading. If checking for reading completion/comprehension is your goal, a discussion thread may not be the best way to go; instead consider another method, such as a Canvas Quiz, or have students turn in an annotated copy of their readings.

Ways to make discussion prompts more effective include [2]:

Action verbs: Enhance your prompt with action words such as "Locate…" "Describe…" or "Contrast…" These clear-cut tasks encourage students to engage actively with the material focus the types of answers.

"**What-if" prompts** explore a hypothetical situation: for example, "What if the Pearl Harbor had not been attacked?" Such prompts are an excellent way to promote lateral thinking.

Role-play prompts: Students can immerse themselves in the role of a historical or contemporary character and debate from his/her perspective. Thinking themselves into the life of another person will pose unique and exciting intellectual challenges for your students.

Media prompts: Video and images can immediately engage your students with a visual orientation to the topic. The rich content editor, available to both students and instructors, allows quick insertion of media into posts. You can ask your students to react to the content of a video. Images can also be added at any point in the thread to illustrate a point.

Evaluating Discussions
For a Discussion Post to be complete, students must complete both an original post and two replies within the same discussion. Rubrics like the one below can be designed to set expectations for grading. Rubrics can be included along with the discussion directions.

	4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Acceptable	1 Incomplete
Relevance of Post	Posts consistently are related to discussion topic; brings readings into discussion; cites additional references related to topic	Posts are related to discussion topic; makes some connections with readings	Occasionally posts off topic; most posts offer no further insight into the topic	Posts topics which do not relate to the discussion content; makes irrelevant remarks
References & Support	Uses references to literature, readings, or personal experience to support comments.	Incorporates some references from literature and personal experience.	Uses personal experience, but no references to readings or research.	Includes no references or supporting experience.
Expression Within the Post	Expresses opinions and ideas in a clear and concise manner with obvious connection to topic	Opinions and ideas are stately clearly with occasional lack of connection to topic	Unclear connection to topic evidenced in minimal expression of opinions or ideas	Does not express opinions or ideas clearly; no connection to topic
Mechanics	Consistently uses grammatically correct posts with rare misspellings	Few grammatical or spelling errors are noted in posts	Errors in spelling and grammar evidenced in several posts	Utilizes poor spelling and grammar in most posts; posts appear "hasty"

Adopted from: http://www2.luthersem.edu/rnysse/OT2116-50/ParticipationRubric.htm and
http://www.udel.edu/janet/MARC2006/rubric.html

More information

Video-based Overview of Discussions:
https://yale.instructure.com/courses/2/pages/discussions?module_item_id=12702

How do I create a discussion as an instructor?
https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-13016-4152724374

How do I create a discussion in a group?
https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10694-421250009

References

[1] Class Participation
http://www.bu.edu/sph/faculty-staff/teaching-and-advising/assessing-learning/assessing-class-participation/

[2] How to hold a better discussion: Advice Guide
https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190523-ClassDiscussion

[3] Spark Effective Discussions with Canvas Discussion Boards
https://courses.uchicago.edu/2019/11/22/spark-effective-discussions-with-canvas-discussion-boards/

Appendices

Leading Class Discussions
https://www.bu.edu/sph/faculty-staff/teaching-and-advising/effective-teaching-strategies/leading-discussions/evaluating-the-effectiveness-of-class-discussion/

Psychology of discussions
http://facdev.e-education.psu.edu/blog

Assessment plans of action
http://melo.lsa.umich.edu/assessment/

Effectiveness of Using Online Discussion Forum for Case Study Analysis [Jonassen]
https://www.hindawi.com/journals/edri/2014/589860/

5 Ways to Ace Discussion Board Assignments in an Online Class
https://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2015/04/03/5-ways-to-ace-discussion-board-assignments-in-an-online-class