

Connect

Discussion Board Guide



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WHAT IS A DISCUSSION BOARD?

A discussion board is an area where students, TAs and Teachers can contribute collaboratively to a centralized location that is specific for a course. The Discussion Board can be a very important resource for students, but ultimately it is up to you, the instructor to make this tool effective.

Connect Discussion Board allows members of the class to communicate with one another while not requiring all members to be online at the same time. All conversations on the Discussion Board are logged and organized. Conversations are grouped into threads that contain a main posting heading and all related replies. Generally you will create a forum on a specific topic. You will access the topic by clicking on the forum, reading the posts, and posting your reply. A series of posts within a forum is called a thread. You may reply to a thread or you may begin a new thread.

WHY CHOOSE A DISCUSSION BOARD?

Connect Discussion Board give students a place to voice their concerns and provide peer-to-peer instruction. It is recommended that it a place where participation is not counted, and that it is unmoderated unless it is defamatory or offensive. This allows students to have a safe area to voice their concerns, their peers answer each other's questions, a place where students can collaboratively come to a solution, and finally for you to see where your students are getting stuck at.

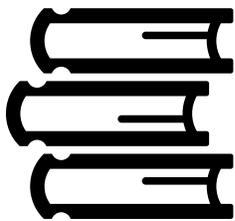
HOW TO RESOURCES

Explore Discussion Board
Resources at:
[elearning.ubc.ca/
connect/resources/](https://elearning.ubc.ca/connect/resources/)

Create & Organize Discussions
Manage & Grade Discussions

STRATEGIES

Strategy #1 Prior Knowledge



Student's prior knowledge can help or hinder learning as they do not come into courses as blank slates, but rather with a multitude of knowledge gained through other courses, daily life and experiences. This knowledge spans a broad range and consists of an amalgamation of facts, concepts, models, perceptions, beliefs, values and may or may not be accurate, complete or even inappropriate in your course context. It would be most ideal if students come in ready to build on a foundation of robust and accurate prior knowledge, forging links between the old and new. However, students may not be able to immediately draw those connections, or their prior knowledge is insufficient or inaccurate for the task at hand.

One way you could reveal prior knowledge is to have students in groups conduct brainstorming activities. Have the students post in a group their beliefs, associations and assumptions (“What does the concept of climate change mean to you?”), procedural knowledge (“What would you begin researching if you were to do a project on cellular reproduction?”) or contextual knowledge (“what tools and methodologies would you employ to research this”). Encourage your students that there is no right or wrong answer and that being truthful on the Discussion Board can be helpful for them as it is for you as it gives you a baseline on where the students are and allows them to learn where they are as well.

At the beginning of the term, it is important for you to transition your students into the course and help them activate their prior knowledge. Completing activities, and asking specific questions to students to help trigger recall, or design activities to help them recall concepts from their past courses is useful. Have the discussion board as a free space to build a peer support network where students who forget specific concepts can receive help from their peers. Chances are, if one student has the question, so will others.

STRATEGIES

Strategy #2 Developing Mastery



According to Ambrose, “mastery refers to the attainment of a high degree of competence within a particular area” (Ambrose 95). Whether the area is broad or narrow, knowledge in a domain is extensive. In order for students to achieve the same set of skills, they will require practice until these skills can be confidently used and with a good degree of automaticity with knowledge of when to apply these skills.

As a master in your discipline, these skills are of second nature to you. However, for students that have not gained the unconscious expertise and do not make connections in your knowledge to the same degree. Being an expert in your domain is important when you are working within your domain, but they can serve as an obstacle to effective teaching. Because you (the instructor) is well versed and chunk knowledge together, it can be difficult to decompose your skills in a way that is clear to students. Furthermore, shortcuts and efficient methods gained through years of practices while great for the discipline, may lead students astray. This overestimation of student ability can lead to a disconnect between the instructor and students.

With the discussion board, while it is not foolproof, students asking questions often highlight (perhaps implicitly) the areas of knowledge they are struggling with that you (the expert) find trivial. This is a key time to reassess your teaching to see if there is additional bridging you will need to complete before moving forward in new material. Reflect upon the time that you were taught the material and recall if there were places you found challenging and now you take for granted. Given that courses are sometimes scheduled to occur at a rapid pace (especially so in the summer), it is important to allow students to take steps for students to master your domain.

STRATEGIES

Strategy

#3

Self Directed Learning



In the Book, *Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, Ambrose et al highlight the need to develop metacognitive skills. Metacognition refers to “the process of reflecting on and directing one’s own thinking” (National Research Council, 2001, p. 78). If students do not accurately assess their own learning and performance, and they fail to adapt their approaches to learning with the current situation, their learning and hence their performance will

suffer.

Ambrose emphasises that “to become self-directed learners, students must learn to assess the demands of the task, evaluate their own knowledge and skills, plan their approach, monitor their progress, and adjust their strategies as needed” (Ambrose 191)

Given the diverse nature of the classroom, whether it is a large or small class, students have a variety of learning methods. Some students enjoy pre-studying, some like the last minute pressure. Some appreciate and thrive in the flipped classroom, while some prefer the traditional method of lecturing. Whichever method students prefer, students need to be self-directed learners and may have different questions at different times. Students who are ahead can ask questions they are having trouble with in the Discussion Board. When other students reach the same problems, instead of having to repeat the answer, the question is already on the Discussion Board for their use.

TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION BOARD

A Discussion Board starts off in a blank slate ready for conversations to be generated. While it is pretty straightforward to use and maintain, here are some strategies that you could consider when using the tool.

#1

Be Prepared

- Prior your class begins, set up the board for your students to have various areas, such as categorizing by units, test, quizzes, etc, so students can post their questions in a relevant area allowing other students to find the resources quickly.
- Familiarize yourself with the discussion board, and be prepared to dedicate some time every week using it. Preferably, have yourself, or a TA available for some time daily to answer questions that are posted.

#2

Active Participation

- A discussion board lives and dies on participation. Without active participation, the discussion board is a ghost town and not a helpful resource for students. Encourage your students to take advantage of this resource! For example, if important questions are asked in office hours, make sure either you or your student posts the answer on the Discussion Board too. You should also make sure you or a T.A. is actively participating because if students can observe that an instructor is actively participating and responding to questions, it greatly encourages their use and contribution as they can see the value in using the tool.

#3

Free Space

- The Discussion Board should be encouraged to be a space of exploration and a peer space. While it doesn't mean you do not participate required, having a hands-off approach can have many benefits.
- Ground rules can be established before the start of term to give guidelines to students, but remember that it is their space after all.

TIPS (CONTINUED)

#4

Step in if required

- A instructor or TA presence makes the board much more useful, as students generally like to have an authoritative voice to comment and give guidance from time to time.
- If the discussion gets out of hand, make sure you step in to be the guiding hand and to moderate content if and only if required.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambrose, Susan A. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010. Print.
- Nagel, I. (2013, April 15). *Ian/Nagel/How Learning Works*. Retrieved June 20th, 2013 from http://wiki.ubc.ca/Sandbox:IanNagel/How_Learning_Works.
- Page 4: Stack of Books designed by Jeremy J Bristol from The Noun Project