Using Canvas Discussion Forums[[1]](#footnote-1)

*On the next page, you will be asked to introduce yourself in an online discussion forum. As you go through the course design process, you may decide to incorporate discussion forums into your own course. The article below provides information on how to design successful discussion forums. We encourage you to read through it now or whenever you decide to consider the use of discussion forums.*

Designing Discussions for Learning

Many of the [same principles to facilitating in-class discussions.](https://sites.tufts.edu/teaching/teaching/discussion-based-teaching/facilitating-effective-discussions/) apply when creating online discussion forums.  However, maintaining connections and communications with students require more deliberate planning, thoughtful structure, and most importantly, instructor engagement with the discussions.  Remember that an effective online discussion will require:

* Clear directions for how, where, and when to respond
* Integration into the course (e.g., the prompts should clearly connect to the course)
* Open ended prompts that allow students to engage with a variety of ideas and find useful information in reading each others' responses.  In large courses, it might be more productive to group students into smaller discussion groups of 5-15 peers.
* Instructor presence! Students appreciate your participation. You can help push the discussion to the next level by asking leading questions, summarizing activity, and noting insightful ideas.
* Explicit instructions as to what the you are looking for and how participation connects to grading. Some example rubrics:
  + [**University of Central Florida**](https://topr.online.ucf.edu/discussion-rubrics/)
  + **Tufts: [ParticipationRubric\_Tech Tools 2017.pdf](https://canvas.tufts.edu/courses/25423/files/2268662/download" \t "_blank" \o "ParticipationRubric_Tech Tools 2017.pdf)[Preview the document](https://canvas.tufts.edu/courses/25423/files/2268662/download)**
  + [**University of Delaware**](http://www1.udel.edu/janet/MARC2006/rubric.html)

For more on discussions see:

* [**Engage students with online discussions (University of Minnesota)**](https://it.umn.edu/services-technologies/good-practices/engage-students-online-discussions)
* [**Maintaining connections with your students while teaching remotely (Teaching@Tufts)**](https://sites.tufts.edu/teaching/2020/03/31/maintaining-connections-with-your-students-while-teaching-remotely/)
* [**New approaches discussion boards (Inside Higher Ed)**](https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/03/27/new-approaches-discussion-boards-aim-dynamic-online-learning)

## Setting Community Norms or Ground Rules

Norms are essential for setting the tone and letting people know what to expect in themselves and of one another. Setting up guidelines for discussion can be even more critical online than in an in-person classroom.

Example:

As a class, we will adopt ground rules for our online discussions. Our goals in doing this are to create a welcoming environment that includes all members of the class and provides the best learning experience to foster thoughtful ideas and discussions.  I include a few here for you to consider. Feel free to use the box below to comment on these and to offer additional suggestions.

**1) Participate:** Everyone should contribute to the conversations. A shared learning environment is only effective if everyone involved shares and feels their ideas are welcomed and helpful.

**2) Help Others:**We are all facilitators of the learning within this course. No one is an expert in all-things, and we each draw on different ideas that we can contribute to the conversations.  Be advocates and educators for each other and help us all get up to speed.

**3) Writing for Your Audience:**A virtual classroom is a professional environment. Correct spelling, grammar, and style are expected in all scholarship and academic writing. This is not to say that you should lose your voice behind a series of jargon and citations. Your audience is your peers, so should write for them.

**4) Respect Diversity:**  We strive to create a brave space for all members of our class and acknowledge that we might have varied lived experiences. Our learning environment is enhanced by the variety of perspectives those of different races, genders, sexes, ages, sexual orientations, nationalities, religions, disabilities and socioeconomic statuses bring to the discussions. Comments that marginalize anyone are fundamentally unacceptable, and language that could be construed as offensive—should be avoided and defused.

**5) Critique ideas not individuals:**Criticism, although a central part of academia, must be constructive, well-meaning, and well-articulated. Consider asking questions to probe ideas, and sharing your own perspectives. Make sure you are being thoughtful when crafting your responses, and aiming disagreements at ideas and not individuals.

About the Discussions Tool

Canvas provides an integrated system for class discussions, allowing both instructors and students to start and contribute to as many discussion topics as desired. Discussions allow for interactive communication between two or more people; users can participate in a conversation with an entire class or group.

Discussions can be created as an assignment for grading purposes or simply serve as a forum for topical and current events. Discussions can also be created within student groups.

Discussion topics can be a focused or threaded discussion. Focused discussions are relatively short-lived interactions, while threaded discussions allow replies within replies and may last for a longer period of time. Focused discussions only allow for two levels of nesting, the original post and subsequent replies. Threaded discussions allow for infinite levels of nesting.

More detailed information on using the discussions tool as a student is available at the link below.

[**Canvas Guides: What are Discussions?**](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10727)

Participating in Discussions

Instructions on how to reply to a discussion activity as a student are available at the link below.

[**Canvas Guides: How do I reply to a discussion as a student?**](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10561-4212190706)

Video-based Responses

You can share a video that you have created in your discussion reply by recording directly from a webcam or uploading a video from your computer. Detailed instructions on how to share video in your discussion replies are available at the link below.

Please note that your instructor may have provided guidelines for the use of video content. If you are unsure of what policies may apply to your course, you are encouraged to refer to the syllabus and/or contact your instructor or TA before posting videos in a discussion reply.

Please review the links below for instructions on how you can upload or record your own videos and share them wtih other course participants.

## ****Step 1:**** [upload a video to My Media (Links to an external site.)](http://tuftsedtech.screenstepslive.com/s/18992/m/73355/l/810683-how-do-i-upload-a-video-to-my-media)

## ****Step 2:**** [embed a video from My Media in a Canvas Text box](http://tuftsedtech.screenstepslive.com/s/18992/m/73355/l/810685-how-do-i-embed-a-video-from-my-media-in-a-canvas-text-box)

1. From the Canvas Course Design Institute for Online Teaching, January 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)