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HOW TO INCORPORATE THREADED DISCUSSIONS IN YOUR WEB COURSE
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This guide will provide you with the instructional tips on developing threaded discussions for your course.

What are Threaded Discussions?

Threaded discussions are a form of asynchronous communication. These text-based conversations help learners organize and follow conversations without getting lost in numerous postings. They also give students a chance to take turns leading and participating in the conversation. In Sakai, the Forum tool is used for online discussions.

How are Threaded Discussions Organized?
The instructor or student creates a topic and in responding to that topic, subtopics may be created. Subtopics are branches or threads of the main topic. Generally, the topics are displayed in a nested structure, making it possible to organize the discussions.
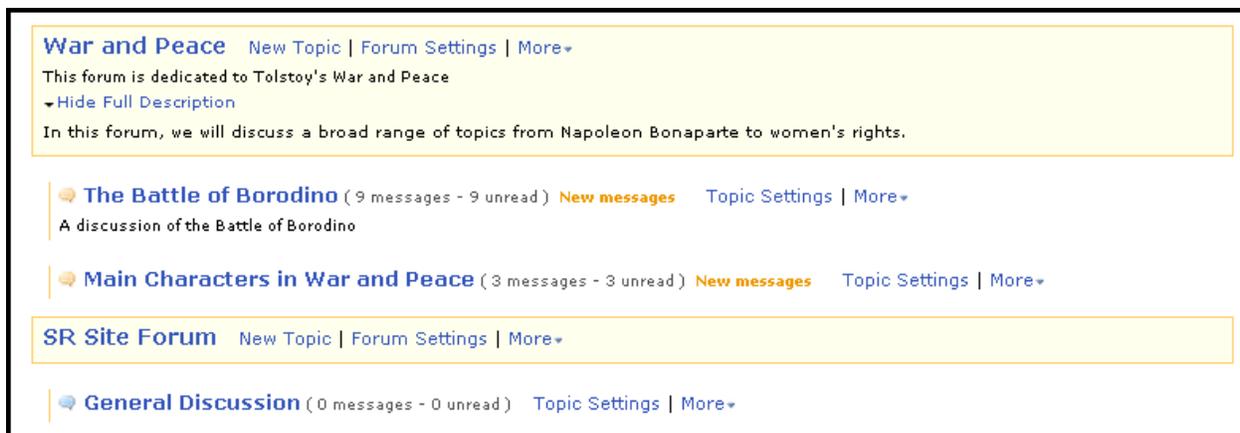

Figure 1. Sakai Forum for Threaded Discussions

As students respond to the message, their responses are sequentially linked to the original message. Students can read or respond to any of the messages in a thread. There can be more than one threaded discussion within a unit.

What are Some Advantages of Threaded Discussions?

Threaded discussions provide learners with time to reflect on postings and to prepare their responses. Learners generally feel that they get to participate in the online conversations, in contrast to face-to-face classrooms where a few students could dominate discussions. Another advantage is that learners do not miss any conversations because they are available in the course Forums for review at their convenience. Moreover, students are motivated to do their readings in order to participate fully in the topics of discussion. Threaded discussions create a community of learners because students make connections with their peers and instructor via feedback, shared interests, and inquiry.

What are Some Tips for Leading Threaded Discussions?

1. Place one question in an individual message as opposed to several questions in one posting. When questions are presented individually, they are easier to respond to.

2. Form groups in the class and assign different questions for different groups.

3. Formulate questions that can be applied to personal experience or topic preferences.

4. Vary the strategies. For example, use a case study to ask students how they would solve the problem. Also, you could ask students to respond to a threaded discussion with a video or podcast response. Another strategy is to use some type of real world application.

5. Engage learners by having them post one original response on the topic and two or three thoughtful replies to other students' messages.

What are Some Tips for Managing Threaded Discussions?

The instructor can:

1. Lead the first discussion in order to set the tone for the class.

2. Keep the discussion focused on the topic.

3. Ensure that all necessary material is addressed and that different parts of each discussion follow a sequence that is conducive to learning a particular topic.

4. Manage discussion etiquette.

5. Avoid dominating the discussion, but make sure you answer students' unanswered questions.

6. Allow for students to disagree and take a position without interfering.

7. Provide a rubric or explicit instruction for how the Forum will be graded if it is included in the students' overall course grade.

How Can I Encourage Students to Have Meaningful Discussions?

For the discussion to be more valuable, advise students to:

1. Stay on the topic and be focused.

2. Allow for honest and open discussions from classmates.

3. Critically reflect on the discussion.

4. Moderate and regulate their own learning (use metacognitive strategies).

5. Be respectful to classmates by providing a "praise sandwich" of a response. Start with positive comments, provide meaningful suggestions or a critique, and then close with a proactive statement.

6. Find out what research in the specified area says and apply it to the responses.

7. Reflect on changes in understanding from their general gut reaction prior to reading the assignments.

*For further assistance, contact the Innovation in Learning Center at (251) 461 - 1888.