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TEACHING & LEARNING: GUIDE TO ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS Checklist

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INTRODUCTION



PURPOSE



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FACILITATION



**ASSESSMENT &
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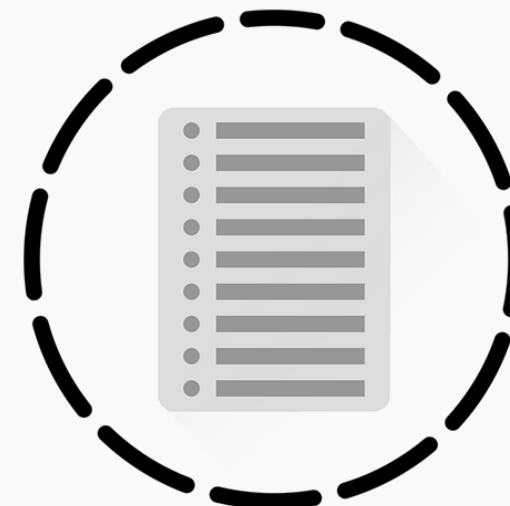
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Teaching Matters

Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching

General 'checks'

- › **Purpose.** Decide your purpose(s) and goal(s) for the discussions board and ensure these are clearly and explicitly communicated to students and facilitators.
- › **Learning design.** Ensure purposes/goals align with your learning and assessment plan. Ensure group sizes and allocation are planned. Ensure discussion topics/threads can be easily located and navigated. Decide whether to set up an informal discussion board and provide models of posts, including any referencing that is required.
- › **Netiquette and academic honesty.** Include an information sheet about expectations and rules of conduct for posting. Follow the University of Tasmania rules for online communication (<http://www.utas.edu.au/mylo/staff/staff-resources/general-advice/guidelines-for-online-communication>). Include issues such as plagiarism in posts. Draw the attention of students and facilitators to the rules at the beginning of the unit and throughout. Consider involving students in the development of rules. Have strategies to intervene where students: dominate the discussion, do not post, are social loafers, over-share, or post inappropriately. (Refer to netiquette/rules exemplars in [Section 4 of this guide](#)): e.g. (University of Tasmania, 2014, Guidelines for Participating in Discussions. MyLO document for the unit HSP105).
- › **Engagement.** Prepare fully with topics, questions, activities, and contingency plans to ensure that students can easily contribute, are supported in a group setting, and stay motivated. Keep students at the centre and encourage active roles such as peer reviewing. Provide clear channels for asking questions and expressing concerns, both on and off the board. Take time to establish the social environment before embarking on unit content.
- › **Facilitation.** Provide training or at least clear guidelines for the roles of staff participating in discussion boards as tutors or facilitators. Decide on the level of 'presence' and ensure consistency between facilitators. Communicate to students the specific times facilitators will be online and how they will respond to posts.
- › **Assessment.** Decide whether to assess discussions, and if so, how. If assessing, include a rubric/CRA sheet before the discussion board is launched, so expectations are evident to facilitators and students. Consider peer



assessment. Ensure rules for length, style and referencing are made clear.

(Refer to rubric exemplars in [Section 6 of this guide](#)):

e.g. <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/heridan-center/teaching-learning/course-design/learning-technology/designing-online-discussions-key-questions>;
<http://www.uwgb.edu/catl/files/workshops/business/samplerubrics.pdf> ;
<https://www1.udel.edu/janet/MARC2006/rubric.html>)

- › Summarise discussions regularly, and redirect or reorganise threads that get out of hand.
- › Save posts to review, act as a springboard for further activities, and to generate topics or model posts for your next discussion board.
- › Encourage feedback and evaluation from students and [facilitators](#) as part of the discussion board activity. Use it to improve learning design and inform future students.

Tips

- › Ensure that you regularly check your [unit discussion boards](#);
- › Only use a discussion board as an assessment tool if it fits with your [unit learning outcomes](#);
- › Clearly articulate all student expectations of the use of discussion boards in the [unit](#);
- › Utilise online activities that are engaging and enhance learning;
- › Link discussion boards to specific topics or weeks of the [unit](#);
- › In blended units, ensure that online discussions are linked to face to face teaching and learning activities where appropriate;
- › Have a general Q-and-A discussion board where students can ask you questions;
- › Save model discussion posts to a Word file for future use in the [unit](#);
- › Ask students to summarise their perspectives of discussions in the [unit](#) as part of your [unit review evaluation](#).
- › Create and build an ongoing FAQ page that your students can access the next time you teach using discussion boards
- › Set a task for your students to summarise what new things they learnt from discussions. You could use this as the basis of a wiki that your students can own and leave as a legacy for the students who follow them!

Time management

- › Set aside specific times to read and respond to discussion boards in your [unit](#);
- › Communicate to students how regularly you will be checking discussion boards in the [unit](#);

- › Use discussion boards to make regular announcements and provide specific information to students about the unit;
- › Use the discussion forum to deal with global feedback on student performance or to clarify assessment tasks or activities
- › Develop a FAQ discussion board where you can post questions from students in the current unit or previous deliveries of the unit which may be of relevance to the current cohort;
- › Assist students in the first week of semester to navigate the discussion board area of your unit;
- › Discourage student emails when they could be posting their questions to the whole group; this is particularly important in relation to questions about assessment tasks in the unit;
- › Transfer posts that are frequently asked questions to a separate file for use in an online FAQ.; particularly useful for assessment questions;
- › Design an activity where students submit a compendium of their best posts to you for assessment;
- › Devise a peer-review assessment strategy for online discussions;
- › If you do receive an email from a student with a question relevant to the whole group, post the question and your answer on the appropriate discussion board in your unit.

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We acknowledge the palawa and pakana people upon whose lands the University of Tasmania stands

