


Activities within your Course – Communication Tools

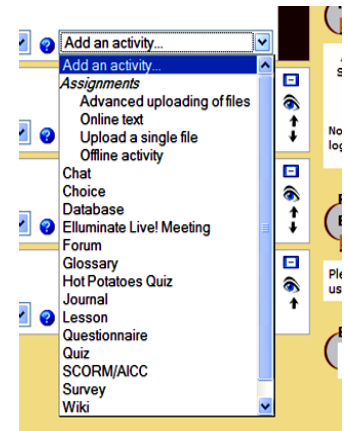
Activities enable your students to interact with you and with one another using Moodle as their learning management system. Some of these activities can be classified as communication activities and will be covered in this handout. The remaining activities can be classified as interactive activities and will be addressed separately. All activities are added to your course through from the “Add an activity...” menu found in each section (center column) of your class. The instructions provided will allow you to experiment with the most commonly used Moodle communication tools so that you can later consider which of the tools and their options will meet your course needs.

To begin adding Activities to your course, click the "Turn editing on" button near the top right corner of your window. This toggle switch shows or hides the editing controls that allow you to customize your course. (Participants in your class do not have the "Turn editing on" button--it's only available to the Teacher, Course Creator or the Moodle System Administrator.)



As you build your course, you will be adding course *Activities* to the main page in the topic or weekly sections.

To add a new activity, you would go to the section where you want to add it, and select the type of activity from the dropdown menu that appears in that section. Then select from the options for customizing the activity. For instance, the picture here shows the first step in adding a new Activity to a content section of your course.



Communication Activities covered in this handout. Interactive Activities will be covered in the next handout.

Communication Activities

Forum

This activity is where you can facilitate discussions amongst your students. Effective and engaging forums are motivating for all students involved and stimulate good, substantive discussions. The instructor decides the settings of the forum, such as whether or not students can create new topics and reply to existing topics or whether the student can only reply to existing topics, or perhaps only the instructor can create discussions and post replies. Your class can have as many forums as you want. Groups can also use forums. You can hide old forums and create new ones.

When you add a new forum, you choose from four different types:

1. **Single simple discussion:** entire forum appears on one page; used for short, focused discussions.

2. **Standard forum for general use:** Teachers and students can create a topic and reply to existing postings; this is a general-purpose format. You will create a Help Me! forum on the next page.
3. **Each person posts one discussion:** Students can create one and only one new topic; everyone can reply to every topic.
4. **Q and A:** This type of forum posting opportunity among all students, thus encouraging original and independent thinking. In a Q and A forum, instructors post the question and students are required to respond before viewing other students' postings. After the initial posting, students can view and respond to others' postings.

The Q and A restrictions only apply to the content of a thread. It does work well, but requires a bit of extra setup. First, you add your forum as usual (except with instructions, not the actual question to be discussed). Save changes. Once created, click on the forum name on the course front page to access it and finish the setup.

In the instructions, ask the students to click on the discussion to access the thread and reply to your question (instead of adding a new thread, in which case they will not see the question). Then, you need to post the first question (thread) with the subject/content of you want students to address. When they access the thread, they will see your question and this message instead of other's posts:

Subject (hidden)

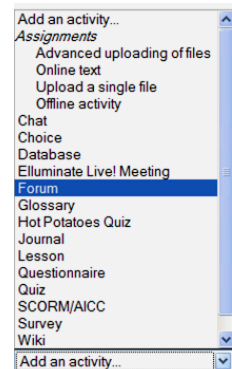
Author (hidden)

This post cannot be viewed by you, probably because you have not posted in the discussion yet.

After they submit their reply, they will be able to see other people's posts content.

Sample Forum - Adding a standard forum (Help Me!) for general use:

1. Once you have logged into your course, click the **Turn editing on** button.
2. Go to the section in which you want to add a simple-topic discussion and click **Add an activity...**
3. Click **Forum** option as shown. The following window appears:



4. In the Forum name text box, type **Help Me!** This will provide a forum that students can use when/if they have questions or need clarification about the course, an assignment, Moodle basics, etc. Students are encouraged to help one another, as there are many of them and only one of you!
5. Leave the default “Standard forum for general use” as shown in the Forum type.
6. **Click** in the textbox below “Forum introduction” and **type** in a sentence or two that describes this forum as a place for students to ask each other questions and learn from one another. Include a sentence that lets students know that you will monitor this forum.
7. The next item “Force everyone to be subscribed?” has the following options:

The screenshot shows a dropdown menu for the setting "Force everyone to be subscribed?". The menu is open, showing the following options: "Yes, initially" (selected), "No", "Yes, forever", "Yes, initially", and "Subscriptions not allowed".

If a student is subscribed to a forum, they will be sent email copies of every post in that forum (posts are sent about 30 minutes after the post was first written). Students can choose whether or not they want to be subscribed to each forum unless the instructor chooses to force the subscription. If you choose to force subscription then all students will be subscribed automatically. The News forum would be a good example of a forced subscription.

If you choose the option "Yes, initially" then all current and future students will be subscribed initially but they can unsubscribe themselves at any time. If you choose "Yes, forever" then they will not be able to unsubscribe themselves.

Click on Yes, initially option to force students to subscribe to this option initially.

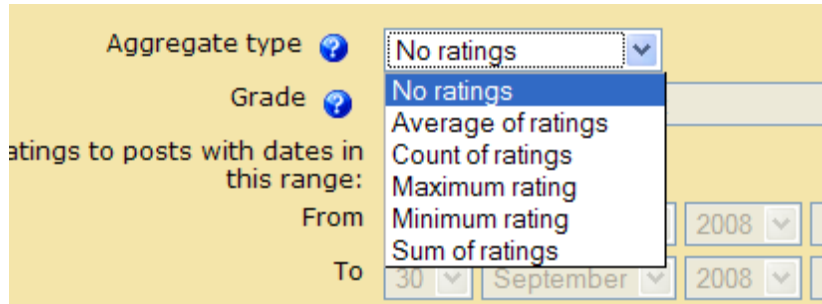
8. The next option “Read tracking for this forum?” allows students to keep track of their read and unread messages by selecting On (always on) or Optional (Student can turn on or off). This won’t reflect the posts read via email, however. If “Off” is selected, tracking is always off. Leave this defaulted as “Optional”.
9. The next option allows students to either upload a file or not. As the instructor, you decide whether you think students will want/need to upload a file for the forum you are creating. In this case, let’s allow students to upload a document, if needed, in the Help Me! forum but limit its size to course limit size of 64MB.

The screenshot shows a dropdown menu for the setting "Read tracking for this forum?". The menu is open, showing the following options: "Optional" (selected).

The screenshot shows a dropdown menu for the setting "Maximum attachment size". The menu is open, showing the following options: "500KB", "64MB", "50MB", "20MB", "10MB", "5MB", "2MB", "1MB", "500KB", "100KB", "50KB", "10KB", "Course upload limit (64MB)" (selected), and "Uploads are not allowed".

Click on the drop-down arrow and select the size of the upload. We do recommend only allowing a maximum of 5 MB for file upload to control the size of your course contents and facilitate download times/bandwidth usage.

10. Under the Grade section you will see Aggregate type, Grade, and other options. Because the Help Me! forum is not a graded forum, you will not change the default “No ratings”. However, if your forum is to be graded, then you have the following aggregation types which define how the ratings to posts (each post and the entire forum activity) are combined to form the final grade:



- Average of ratings (default): The mean of all the ratings given to posts in that forum. This is especially useful with peer grading when there are a lot of ratings being made.
- Count of ratings: The number of rated posts becomes the final grade. This is useful when the number of posts is important. Note that the total cannot exceed the maximum grade allowed for the forum.
- Max of ratings: The highest rating is returned as the final grade. This method is useful for emphasizing the best work from participants, allowing them to post one high-quality post as well as a number of more casual responses to others.
- Minimum of ratings: The smallest rating is returned as the final grade. This method promotes a culture of high quality for all posts.
- Sum of ratings: All the ratings for a particular user are added together. Note that the total is not allowed to exceed the maximum grade for the forum.

11. The next section “Post threshold for blocking” is a useful tool for instructors who find that a student is posting continuously in forums. As the instructor, you can prevent this by blocking students to no more than a certain amount of postings in a given period of time. Students will be given a warning as they approach their limit. Leave the default “**Don’t block**” as shown in the Help Me! forum.

12. The final section in the adding a forum activity is the common module settings as shown below:

Common module settings

Group mode ?

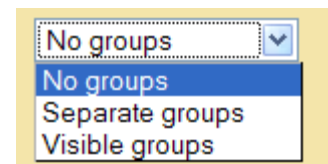
Visible

ID number ?

Grade category

There are required fields in this form marked*.

You will not be changing the default of “No groups” for the Help Me! forum. However, if you’ve decided to have groups in your class, you can set your forum for group mode by clicking on the drop-down arrow next to Group mode. Your options are as follows: No groups - there are no sub groups, everyone is part of one big community; Separate groups - each group can only see their own group, others are invisible; or Visible groups - each group works in their own group, but can also see other groups.



The group mode can be defined at two levels:

1. Course level: The group mode defined at the course level is the default mode for all activities defined within that course. If the course is set to "force group mode," (the group mode is "forced" at a course-level, and is applied to every activity in that course) then the setting for each activity is ignored. If the course setting is left at “No groups”, then groups can only be applied to certain activities.

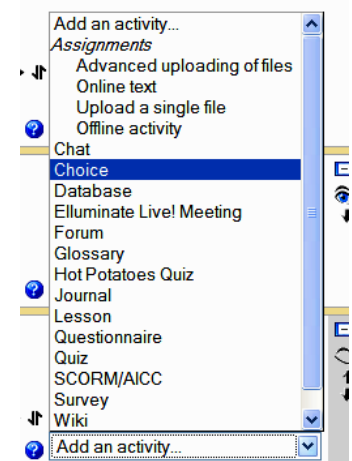
2. Activity level: Each activity that supports groups can also define its own grouping mode.

Choice

A choice activity is very simple - you ask one question and specify a choice of responses. The choice is used for activities such quick polls, voting, gathering consent from students or selecting group membership. Students can make their choice, and you can choose a variety of reporting formats, including allowing students to see detailed results of the poll. This is a good way to get simple feedback from your students! These quick polls can be hidden until you are ready for the students to see them or can be created as you move along in your course.

Complete the following steps to add a choice to your course:

1. **Turn editing on** in your course.
2. **Click** in the section you want to add your choice.



3. Click on **Add an activity...** and select **Choice**

4. The window above appears. **Type** in a name for your choice, such as “Homework Poll”.
5. **Click** in the Choice text box and type in the instructions or information for students about this choice, such as “**How many hours did you spend working on this class last week?**”
6. The next section allows the instructor to limit the number of students that can select each particular option. **To do this, you need to enable this option.** Once limits have been enabled, each option can set a limit. When the limit is reached then no-one else can select that option. A limit of zero (0) means that no-one can select that choice. If Limits are disabled then any number of participants can select any of the options. For homework choices, the limits should be disabled.
7. In each of the Choices boxes, **type** in number(s) to represent homework hours, such as **1-3, 4-6**, etc.

8. The remaining sections allow you to restrict the time period in which students may answer, change how the poll is displayed and who sees the results, whether choices can be updated, and allows group mode. Leave these as defaulted.
9. **Click on Save and display** to view your choice poll.

