

Facilitating Discussions Online

1. Engage, Engage, Engage!

Engage with your students. Make time to engage in the discussions regularly. If students feel you couldn't be bothered to participate in the online discussion, why should they?

2. Wait before answering students' questions

While you may feel compelled to give immediate responses to student questions, it is often worthwhile to hold back, and provide an opportunity for other students to respond. Guide the discussion, correct any misunderstandings, but allow students to learn from one-another. Not only does this benefit the student asking the question, but also the students who respond.

3. You don't always need to 'give' the answer. Promote self-discovery

Online discussion forums need not always be a Q&A. Answering a question with a question or providing hints to a solution helps to promote self-sufficiency in learners, and a sense of achievement when they figure something out for themselves. Of course use judgement and gauge your students' emotional state. Someone who is really struggling will not respond well to a question answered with question.

4. Communicate expectations of yourself and your students

Be clear about what students can expect from you in terms of engagement in the online discussion. Communicate when and how often you will respond to student posts. Be open about some of the techniques you plan to use in facilitating discussions online (such as tips 2 & 3). Communicate your expectations, including adherence to the [University's online code of conduct](http://tinyurl.com/66zbcpt) (<http://tinyurl.com/66zbcpt>).

5. Ensure a safe and open environment for discussion

Students will have altercations from time-to-time in online spaces, just as they do in physical spaces. Be there to interject when necessary and counsel students on expected behaviours in line with the [University's online code of conduct](#).

6. Stimulate discussion

If the online discussion has stagnated, consider ways to stimulate discussion by posting links to articles in the media on relevant events to your topic; presenting a problem and asking students to solve it; or make a controversial statement to engage students in a debate.

7. Don't let the technology drive you.

Let the pedagogy drive technology choice. Consider technology to suit the context of your course, and your students. Use [this chart](http://tinyurl.com/2vgtjjk) (<http://tinyurl.com/2vgtjjk>) to help align your pedagogical purposes with the tools available in Moodle. Of course Moodle isn't the be-all and end-all of learning (see next tip).

8. Experiment with technology - is there a more effective way to discuss online?

Consider what is beyond the four walls of Moodle. Be open to new technologies and consider alternate approaches to engage your students in online discussion. Online social web services are abundant. Try one, but take heed of tip 7. Contact the [Education Development Team](mailto:ed-dev@cqu.edu.au) (ed-dev@cqu.edu.au) for advice.

9. Chatroom/Web-Ex/Elluminate (synchronous) vs. Moodle Forums/Email (asynchronous)

Synchronous interactions are real-time and allow for spontaneous discussion and quick turn-around of feedback. Asynchronous interactions are more flexible and provide time for reflection before engaging in discussion. Consider which approach best suits the purpose of the discussion, the course and your students. Familiarise yourself with the technology before introducing it to your students.

10. Engage all cohorts in online discussion, not just distance students

Embrace student diversity at CQUni. Encourage all your students to engage in online discussion, not just distance students. Exposing students to diverse thinking can enrich their learning experiences, and further develop their cross-cultural awareness.