Create a GENERAL Discussion & FEEDBACK Forum
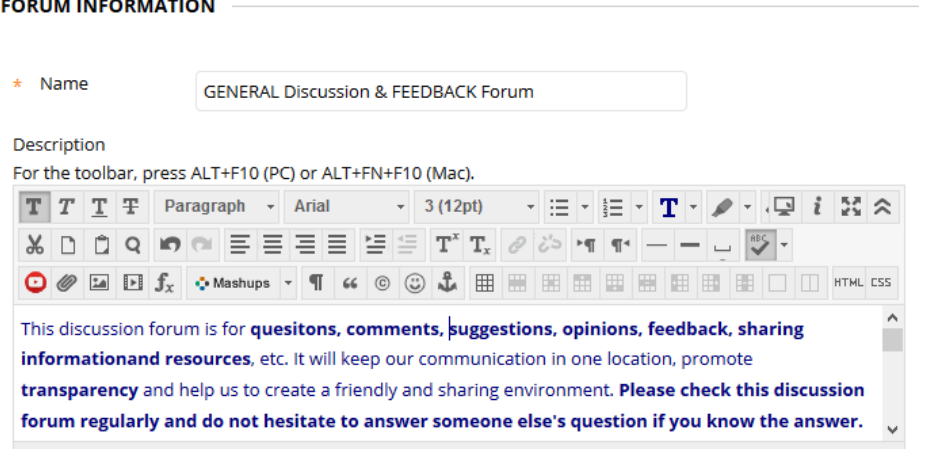
Do you receive emails from students between your face to face sessions? If you do, it is very likely that you find yourself having to answer the same questions over and over again. Apart from taking a lot of your time, this situation is not fair on those students who have not asked and so would not benefit from your answers.

Another one of the issues typical for learning and teaching is that students do not understand feedback and tend to think that the only feedback they ever receive is what's written on their assignments.
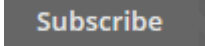
The best solution for both of these issues is an ongoing **GENERAL Discussion & FEEDBACK Forum** inside your Blackboard course. Evidence suggests that just having the word "Feedback" in the forum title and posting some general feedback (once again, entitled "Feedback") to the forum at appropriate times helps students to understand that feedback comes in many shapes and forms.

STEP 1 – CREATE A FORUM

1. Go to the **Discussion Board** section of your Blackboard Course and click on **Create Forum**	Discussion Board → Create Forum
2. **Forum Information:** Name your forum (make sure to keep the word "Feedback") and give a description in the text box. Please see text example on the right.	**FORUM INFORMATION** * Name: GENERAL Discussion & FEEDBACK Forum Description For the toolbar, press ALT+F10 (PC) or ALT+FN+F10 (Mac). This discussion forum is for **quesitons, comments, suggestions, opinions, feedback, sharing informationand resources**, etc. It will keep our communication in one location, promote **transparency** and help us to create a friendly and sharing environment. **Please check this discussion forum regularly and do not hesitate to answer someone else's question if you know the answer.**
3. **Forum Availability:** This will be an ongoing forum so you do not have to worry about the dates. The **Yes** under Available is ticked as a default, so you can leave this area as is.	**FORUM AVAILABILITY** Available: ● Yes ○ No Enter Date and Time Restrictions: ☐ Display After ___ 📅 ___ 🕐 *Enter dates as dd/mm/yyyy. Time may be entered in any increment.* ☐ Display Until ___ 📅 ___ 🕐 *Enter dates as dd/mm/yyyy. Time may be entered in any increment.*
4. **Forum Settings:** **View** and **Grade**. Once again, this forum will have a default settings of a Standard View and No Marking in Forum.	**FORUM SETTINGS** *If a Due Date is set, submissions are accepted after this date, but are marked 'late'.* Viewing Threads/Replies: ● Standard View ○ Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum. *If participants are required to create threads in order to view other threads in the forum, they cannot delete or edit their own posts, and cannot post anonymously. Those options will be set for you automatically.* Grade: ● No Marking in Forum ○ **Grade Discussion Forum:** Points possible: 0 ○ Grade Threads

5. **Forum Settings**: **Subscribe**. Please keep a default Subscribe option as pictured on the right, to give all users an option to subscribe.	Subscribe ○ Do not allow subscriptions ○ Allow members to subscribe to threads ● Allow members to subscribe to forum ○ Include body of post in the email ● Include link to post
6. **Forum Settings**: **Create** and **Edit**. Please make changes here by putting the ticks in "Allow Author to Delete Own Posts" (with no replies) and "Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts" options, as shown on the right.	Create and Edit ☐ Allow Anonymous Posts ☑ Allow Author to Delete Own Posts ○ All posts ● Only posts with no replies ☑ Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts ☑ Allow Members to Create New Threads ☑ Allow File Attachments ☑ Allow Users to Reply with Quote ☐ Force Moderation of Posts
7. **Forum Settings**: **Additional Options** and **Submit**. Ignore Post Tagging (it adds metadata, but will slow down the loading). Allowing members to rate will let students give up to five stars to the posts of others (anonymously). Make your choice and **Submit**.	Example of Rating: **Overall Rating:** ★★★☆☆ Additional Options ☐ Allow Post Tagging ☐ Allow Members to Rate Posts *Click **Submit** to proceed.* Cancel Submit

STEP 2 – DECIDE WHETHER TO SUBSCRIBE TO YOUR NEW FORUM

Subscribing to a forum will ensure that every time that someone made a new posting you will get an email notification. It could be a good option for small classes, but perhaps not so much for larger ones. If you decided to subscribe, simply go inside your new forum (by clicking on its title) and click on **Subscribe**:   Subscribe
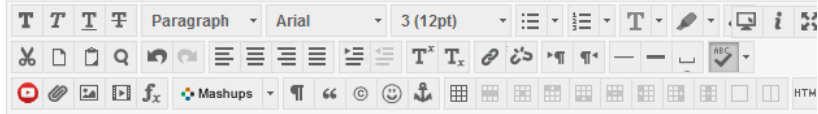
Once subscribed, the button title will change to Unsubscribe (so that you can unsubscribe if the flow of emails is overwhelming).

Ask your students to subscribe to this forum even if you do not subscribe yourself.

STEP 3 – DECIDE ON YOUR AVAILABILITY AND CREATE THE FIRST THREAD

You have to establish clear and transparent guidelines on what the students can expect from you: for example, you can promise to check this forum twice per week – on the day of the lecture (so that you can address their concerns in class, if needed) and on one other day that suits you. Encourage and motivate the students to help each other in between your scheduled visits.

1. While you are inside your new forum, click on Create Thread.	**Create Thread**

2. **Message**: Give your message a **Subject** and type the message itself inside the Text box. Please see text example on the right.	**MESSAGE** ★ Subject [My Availability] Message For the toolbar, press ALT+F10 (PC) or ALT+FN+F10 (Mac). *[formatting toolbar]* Hi everybody, This forum is the place to post any questions that you have about the material we cover or the assessments, as well as to share any resources that you have found. Please have courage to ask, as every time you do so you are also helping others who may be too nervous or shy. You can expect me to provide feedback in this forum on **Mondays and Thursdays**. In between those times, please help each other and answer the questions that you can. I am looking forward to working together.
3. **Attachments:** This message will not have any attachments, but do use this area in your future postings – just click on Browse My Computer and follow the prompts. **Submit** once done.	**ATTACHMENTS** Attach File [Browse My Computer] [Browse Content Collection] *Click **Save Draft** to save a draft of this message. Click **Submit** to submit the post. Click **Cancel** to quit.* [Cancel] [Save Draft] [Submit]

Once you decided on your "forum days", book this time into your diary so that you never fail to deliver. You can go into the forum more often if you have a chance (or found something interesting to post for your students), but never less. Make sure that you post something every time you are checking the forum, even if it is a short note (for example, drawing students' attention to a lecture material that was posted earlier or thanking someone for their posting).

STEP 4 – ADVISE YOUR STUDENTS

Let your students know that you have established this special forum as the one area where they can post all their questions, comments, queries, suggestions, opinions and feedback. Ask them to also share information and resources, and most importantly – to answer each other's questions if they know the answer.

Explain that this is the best way to promote **transparency and fairness** and to make sure that everybody is on the same page and nobody misses out. Ask that your students only send you an email if it is private and personal and that from now on every email with course-related questions will be sent back with the request to post the questions to the GENERAL Discussion so that you can answer it there.

Make sure you refer to the forum regularly during your lectures, especially if you posted something interesting or simply to thank the students who were engaging and sharing resources. Be firm about **not answering questions in emails** and have a pre-prepared copy-paste text thanking the sender for the question and asking them to post it in the GENERAL Discussion (citing transparency, fairness and the benefits to their learning community).

This forum will help you to manage student expectations, open an additional **two-way** communications channel (so that your students can reply – something they cannot do with content or announcements), better engage students by tapping into peer review and feedback mechanism and also use your time more efficiently.

You will also be creating a handy database of student questions for the next run of the course, and will be able to re-post some of your answers and to offer feed-forward, a very effective future-oriented form of constructive guidance, when you teach your course next time around.

STEP 5 – USE THE FORUM REGULARLY

If you use the forum, your students will do as well. Consider posting here any additional information that you would put in announcements (and send an announcement about your new posting in the GENERAL Discussion), jut to give your students an opportunity to reply. It is a great place to provide **general feedback** (such as mark distribution and averages after each assessment, with some general remarks – or a promise of more feedback in class) and feed-forward (if you marked similar assessment in the past, let your students know what were the typical errors). You could also use it to share any additional resources that you may have just-in-time, during the week that you are covering the topic. Finally, make a point of thanking the students who participated and helped each other in order to keep your class motivated.

IF YOU HAVE NEVER USED BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION BOARD BEFORE

The example of a Discussion Board view is on the left, and the view on the right is inside the very first forum listed on the main view ("test DB Forum") after its title was clicked to open it:

It is also possible to only open "Unread posts" or "Replies to me" by clicking on the **blue circle** (and provided there is at least 1 post). Only the messages you have not seen before will be displayed on the screen.
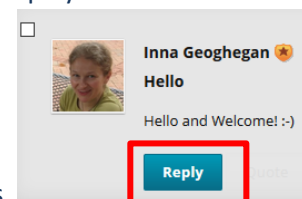
To reply to someone's post, click on its title, hit Reply and follow the prompts.

Note that your **Avatar** (such as a photo of you) will be displayed in your Discussion Board postings (see above). If you have not created your Avatar yet, please refer to the Quick Guide in the **Course & Content** quarter of our **Blackboard, Turnitin and Beyond (TEL)** webpage. Instructions for academics are posted in **Personalise Blackboard** section, and the ones for your students are in **For Students**.

Would you like to know more about using Blackboard or Turnitin tools better?
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