



ONLINE FORUMS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Forums are topic-based asynchronous written conversations which allow debates, creative writing, etc.



Figure 1. Roman Forum

This DOTS activity explains how forums work and discusses points you will need to think about when you use them in your language classes to improve the language skills of your students. It is built in a modular format, so that you can use one or more of the sections, depending on your needs and the time you have available.

What can I do in this DOTS activity?	Where can I find the information? <i>(click on the link to go to the section)</i>
PART 1	
Find out more about forums and how people use them.	A. What is a forum?
Think about some pedagogical reasons why I would want to use forums in my teaching.	B. Why would I want to use forums in my teaching?
PART 2	
Learn about how forums work.	C. Some basic functions of forums
What do I need to keep in mind when using forums in my teaching? Explore some pedagogical issues and	D. Pedagogical considerations and sample activity



read one sample activity.	
Find out about some easy and more advanced technical steps to help me in using forums in my teaching.	E. Practical suggestions
PART 3	
Check my understanding using a quick and easy checklist	F. Check your understanding
Think back over what worked and what didn't work (in the DOTS activity and/or in my use of this tool)	G. Reflect!
Check out what other teachers do with forums. Discuss and evaluate ideas and activities in a DOTS forum. Create additional tasks and share them with colleagues online.	H. Explore and share!
Explore different settings of forums and consider the implications for students' privacy.	I. Protecting students' privacy
	J. References

PART 1

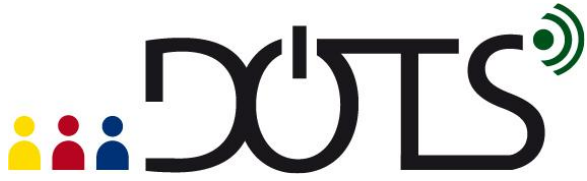
A. What is a forum?

In this section you will find out what online forums are and what they consist of.

Online forums or Message/Bulletin Boards are meeting sites for discussion by people using the Internet. Their main aim is to promote interaction and communication via questions, answers and discussion (publicly visible messages: 'posts' from participants) on a particular topic. Thousands of online forums exist related to a huge variety of contexts: academic, professional, political, media, sport, health, social networking etc.

Forums in educational contexts can be used by students as social meeting places, a contemporary version of the Forum Romanum (7 BC; see Figure 1 above).

However, forums are used most frequently in relation to topics or information posted by the teacher as part of the course students are doing. For language learners, forums are especially useful for developing different types of asynchronous written skills. These can be developed through completion of a task set by the teacher and/or via discussion in a whole class forum or in



smaller forums for groups of students working alone who then report back to the main class forum.



Forums usually consist of the following:

- Users/members who post messages ('posts') there.
- A moderator/teacher who manages/moderates the discussion and can edit or delete messages posted by participants.
- Lists of messages, each including the subject title, the name of the sender and the date sent.
- Threads: a collection of posts related to a particular topic, usually displayed from oldest to most recent.
- Written, audio or video files attached to participants' messages ('*attachments*')
- Separate folders to store or archive messages.
- FAQs (frequently asked questions)
- An administrator responsible for technical aspects of the forum.

In many cases, academic institutions set up online forums for teachers, who then integrate these into their own courses. You will need to check if your institution is able to do this for you. If not, students will need to be directed to a forum set up in Moodle by the teacher (see [Part B](#) for more details), or a similar open-source learning web application, where a forum can be created as part of the course being offered.

B. Why would I want to use forums in my teaching?

1. Forums are a **quick and easy** way for teachers to pass on information and receive queries from groups of students regarding things like course schedules, work assignments, exams etc

- Posting this information on a class forum ensures that all students have access to the same information e.g. about assignments, submission deadlines etc

2. Forums help **develop writing and communicative interactive skills** among students

- Students can draft, rewrite, and easily compare the original with subsequent versions. They can also see their peers' work and be encouraged to comment on it and compare it with their own work.

3. They are **flexible tools** which can be used at different stages of a learning task.

- See [section E: Practical suggestions](#) for an example.

4. They can be used for **whole class discussions** or for students to work independently in **small groups**, moderated (or not) by the teacher.



- Creating mini-forums for groups of students to work together to reach a common point of view for example, develops skills of collaboration and interaction.
5. They allow students **time to reflect** on and plan their posts and responses.
- Students have time to revise their work before submitting it, referring to grammar reference materials for example and using the Spell-Checker. This can lead to improved, autonomous learning.
6. They are a way of '**levelling out**' the **participation** of the more or less dominant members of a group.
- Shy students unwilling to participate actively in a face to face discussion can frequently feel encouraged to participate in an online forum discussion where they do not need to fight to get the teacher's or fellow student's attention.
7. They provide a **semi-permanent record** of what was said and by whom. This can be useful in providing back up evidence, for example, if students wish to review their own work later on.

PART 2

C. Some basic functions of forums

Forums vary but most will have some or all of the following basic features:

Central space for posting messages

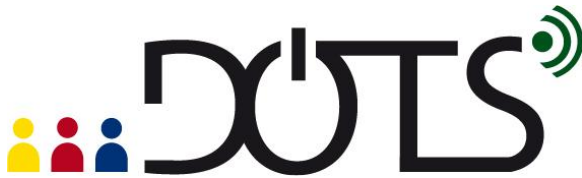
This is the main communication space where students will go to access information posted by the teacher and to discuss/reply to topics posted there.

Posting rights

Most classroom forums have a specific space ('Notice/Information board') where important general information is posted. This space is usually 'read only' for students. In the central forum space, students usually have free access to make posts and reply to other posts, start new discussion topics and also post replies to these.

Threads/Threading

A thread or threading is a collection of posts in a forum, usually displayed from oldest to most recent, which are related to the same topic. Threads are presented in a list, similar to a contents page. When someone posts in a thread, that thread automatically jumps to the top of the list as the latest updated thread. Threading makes it easier for participants to follow all the messages on the same topic.



ECML PPS101 2008-2012 Forums News forum Update this Forum

This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe or not
 Force everyone to be subscribed
 Show/edit current subscribers
 Unsubscribe from this forum

General news and announcements

[Add a new topic](#)

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Draft Agenda	Ursula Stickler	1	Mateusz-Milan Stanojevic Sat, 4 Dec 2010, 12:14 PM
Just so we don't forget	Ursula Stickler	0	Ursula Stickler Sun, 8 Aug 2010, 08:11 PM
Barcelona Workshop Agenda	Ursula Stickler	0	Ursula Stickler Mon, 5 Oct 2009, 11:31 AM
Adding a URL	Joe Hopkins	2	Joe Hopkins Sun, 5 Jul 2009, 11:12 AM
DOTS Workspace: Test message	Joe Hopkins	0	Joe Hopkins Sat, 13 Jun 2009, 04:42 PM
test message	Admin User	1	Mick A Thu, 4 Jun 2009, 02:35 PM
Agenda for 12 - 13 June	Ursula Stickler	7	Ursula Stickler Thu, 21 May 2009, 10:47 PM
Needs analysis questionnaire: results	Aline Germain-Rutherford	2	Martina Emke Tue, 14 Apr 2009, 02:57 PM
April Fool's Day	Ursula Stickler	0	Ursula Stickler Wed, 1 Apr 2009, 08:23 PM
Public Workspace Activity Planner	Martina Emke	0	Martina Emke Fri, 20 Feb 2009, 07:57 PM
Online Meeting?	Ursula Stickler	5	Ursula Stickler Wed, 28 Jan 2009, 07:00 PM
Annual Plan	Ursula Stickler	0	Ursula Stickler Sat, 10 Jan 2009, 01:41 PM
Graz workshop followup	Mateusz-Milan Stanojevic	4	Martina Emke Fri, 2 Jan 2009, 03:58 PM
Workspace areas	Ursula Stickler	1	Mateusz-Milan Stanojevic Wed, 3 Dec 2008, 09:38 AM
Annual Report	Ursula Stickler	16	Mateusz-Milan Stanojevic Mon, 1 Dec 2008, 04:12 PM

Message History

This facility allows you to see who has read each message posted in the forum and exactly when they read the message.

Subscription

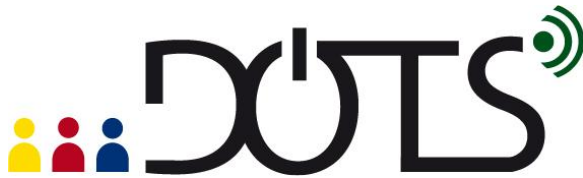
Subscription means that participants are automatically sent copies of every post made in that forum. Users can either decide independently whether to “subscribe” to a particular forum or teachers can decide whether or not to make this feature obligatory. It is a good way to ensure that all students receive (and hopefully read!) copies of what everyone has written.

Tracking

Tracking allows participants to see (track), at a glance, which messages they have or have not yet read in the forum. A red flag or something similar appears beside a message which has not yet been opened and disappears once it has been opened.

Folders

Teachers can create different folders in the forum where all messages related to each discussion topic are saved, once the main period of communication on the topic is over. This allows the principle forum space to be kept free for current messages and also allows students easy access to previous information.



FAQs

Most forums include lists of Frequently Asked Questions/answers (FAQs) to common queries about how the forum works. Students can be directed here when they have a query and this can save the teacher repeatedly having to answer the same questions.

FORUMS IN MOODLE

For more information on Moodle (a free, open source software, used for course management <http://moodle.org/>) you can look at the DOTS activity Using Moodle in class, available here: <http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/>.

Moodle is built with different modules (“tools”) that offer different functionalities for online teaching and learning. One of these modules is called the “forum module”. It has four basic forum types. See http://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Forum_module.

FIVE TYPES OF FORUMS AVAILABLE IN MOODLE

1. A standard forum for general use: useful for large discussions monitored by the teacher or for social interaction led by students

Moodle Features Demo Jump to...

Moodle Demonstration > Features > Forums > A Standard forum for general use

Options for forum members → This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe or not
Everyone can now choose to be subscribed
[Unsubscribe from this forum](#)

Introduction → This is a standard forum. The Administrator made one entry. It does not force an automatic subscription.

Add a new discussion topic

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
The first post	Admin User	1	Student Demo Thu, 17 Jul 2008, 09:40 PM

In this forum there are 2 main sections:

Introduction: this is where the teacher puts information such as the title of the forum; name of the person who set up the forum; number of replies; date of the last post.

Discussion: this is where the participants post their messages.

2. A single simple discussion: useful for short discussions where you want to keep students focused on a single topic



Moodle Features Demo | Moodle Demonstration > Features > Forums > A single simple discussion

Display replies in nested form

This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe or not
 Everyone can now choose to be subscribed
[Unsubscribe from this forum](#)

A single simple discussion
 by Teacher Demo - Thursday, 17 July 2008, 10:26 PM

How is the weather?

I will rate your posts. Refer to the [course information section resource](#) for the Standard Evaluation Guidelines using the 10 point scale.

[Reply](#)

Re: A single simple discussion
 by Student Demo - Thursday, 17 July 2008, 10:13 PM

The weather is super here in Franconia. I see it is cloudy and threatening freezing rain in Perth.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Maximum rating: 8 / 10

Introduction area (points to the first post)

Teacher rated this post (points to the rating)

Students see the text you have placed in the forum introduction setting as the first post of the discussion. Below you see the replies that have been posted.

3. Each person posts one discussion: useful when you want a balance between a large discussion and a short, focused discussion

Moodle Features Demo | Moodle Demonstration > Features > Forums > Each person posts one discussion

Jump to...

This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe or not
 Everyone can now choose to be subscribed
[Unsubscribe from this forum](#)

Introduction → Please post one discussion point about your favorite artist and attach a picture of their work.

This is for fun but your participation will count towards your grade.

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Andrew Wyeth	Student Demo	0	Student Demo Thu, 17 Jul 2008, 10:57 PM

This is basically the same as the previous forum but here students see the text the teacher has written in the 'forum introduction' space and, if there are any, the discussion topics that have been started by other people.

4. Question and Answer forum. This is useful when you have a particular question that you want all students to answer. In a Q and A forum, by default, students have to post once before they can see other students' postings



Moodle Features Demo Jump to...

[Moodle Demonstration](#) > [Features](#) > [Forums](#) > [Q & A forum](#) Search forums

This is a Question and Answer forum. In order to see other responses to these Questions, you must first post your Answer This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe or not
Everyone can now choose to be subscribed
[Unsubscribe from this forum](#)

Special instruction → This is a Question and Answer forum. The Administrator made one entry. It does not force an automatic subscription.

Introduction area →

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
The first post	Admin	2	Student Demo Thu, 17 Jul 2008, 09:54 PM

In the upper right corner of the forum screen (above the introduction), the student sees the options the teacher has set for 'subscriptions'. (When a person is subscribed to a forum this means they will be sent email copies of every post in that forum.) There is also a 'Jump to' field, enabling you to 'jump' to any part of the course.

5. News forum

In addition, if you decide to include your forum as part of a course in Moodle, the **News forum**, a forum for general announcements, will be automatically created on the front page of the Moodle site. Only teachers and administrators can add posts or reply to posts here.

MORE EXAMPLES OF ONLINE FORUMS

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Today's meeting	Ursula Stöckler	0	Wed, 27 Jul 2008, 08:00 AM
Workshop Description and Schedule	Ursula Stöckler	3	Wed, 16 Jul 2008, 03:04 PM
Video conference	Ursula Stöckler	7	Wed, 9 Jul 2008, 04:27 AM
Preliminary questions	Aline German-Rutherford	5	Wed, 9 Jul 2008, 01:02 AM
Report from First Meeting	Ursula Stöckler	13	Wed, 9 Jul 2008, 04:22 PM
Preparing the December Workshop	Aline German-Rutherford	1	Tue, 15 Jul 2008, 05:10 AM
Workspace tasks	Ursula Stöckler	0	Tue, 15 Jul 2008, 02:00 PM
Slides to do	Ursula Stöckler	0	Tue, 15 Jul 2008, 02:15 PM
Workspace areas	Ursula Stöckler	0	Tue, 15 Jul 2008, 04:12 PM



D. Pedagogical considerations and sample activity

In this section you can find tips and questions to prepare yourself for using forums in your teaching.

FIVE BASIC TIPS

1. DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

Make the guidelines (goals and expectations) of the forum explicit from the start. Before they start the task, make sure that students know exactly what they are expected to do and how their work will be evaluated. Also stress how participants can enhance their learning by interacting with others in the forum.

2. FORMATTING

Use formatting tools (large font size, **bold type**, **different colours for important information**, underlining), clear layout, spacing, bullet points etc to make your messages easier to read. Cramming too much information into a small space often makes it difficult for students to read and understand teachers' messages.



3. IMAGES

Images can make a message personal and lively. If you include images as part of your message, make sure to reduce the image size to web-use (approximately 100kb) to save students having to download large amounts of data.

4. NETIQUETTE

Basic rules need to be established about what is and is not acceptable behaviour in any online forum e.g. no insults; respect for others etc. Some teachers establish these rules themselves. Others develop netiquette rules with students. See <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html> for an example.

5. HUMOUR & SELF-DISCLOSURE

Use humour and self-disclosure in the forum (share selected details about yourself with your students). Let them see that there is a 'human behind the machine'!

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

What kind of learning activity is best suited to a forum?

Activities which require students to do the following:

- share their opinions with their peers, and compare/comment on these.
- consider/contrast their own opinions and those of their peers before submitting an individual or group piece of writing.
- practise the language of argument, negotiation.

How much of my time will it take to set up and monitor the forum?

forum discussions, like much e-learning, encourage learning that is not always teacher-centred. However, the role of the teacher is very important in helping create a sense of 'community' among participants, which encourages successful learning via interaction with others. In the initial stages of an online forum activity this is especially important and teachers need to be prepared to spend considerable time setting up the task and moderating the discussion.

Time will be needed to do the following:

- Decide on the task to be used and define its objectives.
- Set up the forum and ensure that all students have correct access to it (get technological help with this, if necessary).
- Post a 'welcome message' + detailed instructions for the task in the forum
- Establish and post guidelines for student participation and netiquette.
- Post your own messages in the forum once it is open to students i.e. 'moderate' the discussion. (See next section.)



- Incorporate content /issues from the online forum into face-to-face lessons. This helps students see the online forum as a part of their overall learning process.

What kind of messages should I post?

- Messages giving organisational information: instructions for the task; reminder about deadlines etc.
- Messages clarifying students' doubts/queries
- Messages praising the group or individuals for their work
- Messages of encouragement when participation is flagging
- Messages reorienting students to the topic being discussed if they have wandered off topic. Asking pertinent questions (sometimes playing 'devil's advocate') can be effective here
- Messages summarising a group of posts on one topic
- Messages giving your own opinions to encourage debate and also let students see that you are involved in the discussion
- Messages directly referring to a language error several students have made e.g. grammar, lexis
- Messages which model the type of language/layout that you want the students to use e.g. a letter, argumentation essay; summary
- Messages reminding students of netiquette i.e. appropriate online behaviour

Messages from the teacher in a discussion forum are the online equivalent of the teacher walking round the classroom and helping as she goes. They can be short or long, sometimes just saying: *'I am really enjoying reading your comments! Keep up the good work' or 'Bruno's comments are really interesting. I especially appreciated his idea that...'*. Other times they will need to be longer and more detailed.

Use a variety of message types: short, detailed, formal, informal. In general, keep messages as simple and to the point as possible so you do not overwhelm students with too much information.

How often should I post messages in a forum when students are carrying out a task?

This will depend on the purpose of the forum and the length of the forum task. The more often the teacher is present in the forum the better. For specific task forums, on average, teachers should post one or more messages at least every 48 hours but daily messages may be necessary in the early stages of a forum. For general or "social" forums, less involvement will be necessary.



How can I evaluate students' work in the forum?

- First, decide what, exactly, you want to evaluate: quantity or quality; accuracy or fluency.
- Initially, to encourage participation, students can be required to post a minimum number of messages (1? 2?) in order to receive a mark, irrespective of the quality of the language they use. Later on, they can be given a mark for quality.
- You can give individual marks for quality (and quantity) of messages posted or, if students are working in small groups in separate forums, you may want to give both a group and an individual mark.
- With more advanced students you can also establish that only messages containing a minimum number of words (e.g. 150) will be given a mark.

How should I give feedback to students in the forum?

- Provide a balance between individual, detailed feedback to students and general feedback to the forum, where all students can benefit from common errors and guidelines for improvement noted by the teacher.
- Ask students to correct common errors you have noted in students' work. It's better to provide only a few of these at a time (1-5) to encourage participation. More advanced students can be also asked to provide an explanation for the error.

SAMPLE FORUM ACTIVITY (2 versions)

Here is an example of a task that can be used in different ways in a forum. Option A is set up for individual work, Option B for group work.

Task: “What can be done to improve our school/college/university?”

Level: Intermediate and above





STEPS	LEARNER OBJECTIVES	CLASS ACTIVITY	FORMAT
INTRODUCTION (SAME FOR BOTH VERSIONS)			
<p>a) Students are shown 2 pictures of different schools (see above). They are asked to discuss/compare them.</p>	<p>Stimulate students' interest in the topic. Practise lexis related to different types of schools, education received by pupils, different expectations of teachers etc</p>	<p>Discussion in pairs (oral)</p>	<p>Pairs F2F</p>
<p>b) Students share their comparisons of the 2 pictures.</p>		<p>Whole class discussion (oral)</p>	<p>Whole class F2F</p>
<p>c) Students brainstorm areas that could be improved in their own institution, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic subjects • Teacher-student relations • Student-student relations • Facilities (building, classrooms, sports facilities, etc.) • Etc, etc 	<p>Students relate the general topic to their own educational context, developing relevant lexis.</p>	<p>Small group discussion (oral)</p>	<p>Groups of 4 (2 pairs from part 1 working together) F2F</p>
OPTION A (individual work)			
<p>1. Teacher creates a forum for the class and students have to post a composition of 200 words there on the topic: “How I would improve my school/college.”</p>	<p>Student orders points from oral brainstorming session into discursive essay.</p>	<p>Essay writing</p>	<p>Individual</p>



2. Teacher gives individual written feedback and highlights errors in each student's writing in the forum using Word correction tool.	Students focus on their own errors and try to correct them. They also try to incorporate teacher's feedback into a second version of text.	Error correction, redrafting.	Individual
3. Student posts second version of essay.	Teacher gives final, individual mark for each essay.		
(for the general introduction see above)			
OPTION B (group work)			
1. Teacher creates a separate discussion forum for each group and assigns one of the areas identified in the Introduction (step c) to each group. The same topic can be assigned to more than one group if necessary.	Students focus on one area of the general topic being discussed.	Individual student reflection, decision making and making 1 post in the forum (written)	Individual asynchronous writing
2. Teacher posts instructions in the forums explaining that each student must first post a message which includes two suggestions on how to improve aspects of their institution in relation to their assigned area.	Students reflect on ideas which have emerged from class, pair and group oral discussions and express these in their own words (in writing)	Group discussion in the forum	Small group asynchronous writing
3. The group discusses these ideas in the forum (not in class!) and decides on the 3 best proposals. The teacher revises language structures for agreeing/disagreeing with the opinions of others.	Students use the forum for discussion, reflection and negotiation with peers. They practise structures expressing agreement/disagreement.	Group discussion in the forum	Small Group asynchronous writing



4. Students elect a spokesperson for their group, who will report the group's conclusion to the rest of the class (see next step).	Students continue developing skills of discussion and negotiation.	Group discussion in the forum	Whole class written
5. The teacher creates a general forum for the whole class and the spokespersons of each group post a summary of their groups' proposals there. Other students post comments giving their opinions on the proposals of 2 other groups.	Students reflect on the opinions of their peers and compare them with their own ideas.		
6. Teacher gives 2 marks: one for individual forum post; one for participation in group discussion/writing.			
<p>Moderation by teacher During Parts 4, 5, 6 of the activity, the teacher monitors the messages in the forums but does not generally intervene unless she sees that the students are having major difficulties. She notes common errors in their writing and comments on these later in class and/or prepares relevant accuracy-based materials.</p>			

E. Practical suggestions

If you want to create a forum within a Moodle VLE you need to click 'Turn Editing On'.

From the dropdown menu labelled "Add an activity", select "forum". This will take you to the forum settings page titled "Adding a new forum" page. There are 4 sections in a forum's settings: "General", "Grade", "Post threshold for blocking", and "Common module settings".

Basic forum

If you are new to forums, you can just fill in the 2 sections at the top of the screen:



Post threshold for blocking

Time period for blocking

Post threshold for blocking

Post threshold for warning

2. Group mode + ID Number

This setting has 3 options:

- No groups: There are no sub groups. Everyone is part of one big community and all see the same forum.
- Separate groups: separate forums are set up for small groups of students and each group member can only see his/her own group, others are invisible.
- Visible groups: Each group member works in his/her own group, but can also see other groups.

Group mode

Visible

ID number

Setting an ID number is also a way of identifying the activity for grade calculation purposes.

3. Restrict Access

This setting determines the period of time in which students can access the forum activity via a link on the course page.

Allow access from Enable

Allow access until Enable

4. Grading



This setting allows the teacher to assign a rating to each post. Once you rate a forum post, Moodle can automatically assign a grade based on one of the options offered (e.g. it can average your ratings, count them, add them up, etc.). You can assign a number of points to the forum, and this grade will appear in the Moodle Gradebook.

To find out more go to

http://docs.moodle.org/en/Adding/editing_a_forum#Grade

START PRACTISING!

You can try out the basic functions of Moodle forums in a trial-and-error method. Click on the question mark in Moodle to open an additional help page, or go directly to the online user guides and tutorials that are available on the Moodle website.

General user guides are available in many languages at:

<http://docs.moodle.org/overview/>.

The Moodle forum guide can be found at :

http://docs.moodle.org/en/forum_module#Selecting_forum_type

The FAQ section http://docs.moodle.org/en/forum_module_FAQ is very user-friendly.

The special forum on Moodle forums:

<http://moodle.org/mod/forum/view.php?f=116> will help with any problems which arise. You normally get very quick responses from other users to any questions you post here.



PART 3

F. Check your understanding

	I can do this <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I would like to look at that again
Describe briefly to others (e.g. colleagues) what a forum is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click here
Give three reasons why forums are useful in language teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click. here
Describe the basic features of most forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click here
Explain at least three pedagogical issues I need to bear in mind when I use a forum with my class	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click here
Set up a simple forum in Moodle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click here
Design an activity which includes using a forum, similar to one of the two examples (A and B) shown here	<input type="checkbox"/>	Click here

G. Reflect!

Select the questions that are most relevant for you.

	
<p>- Has this worksheet given you enough information/confidence to try using a forum with your students, if you haven't done so up to now?</p> <p>- Will you be able to</p>	<p>Check with your colleagues to see what they know about forums. Go to the Explore and share forum available at: http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=40</p>



take this worksheet and implement the suggestions straightaway? If not, what information do you think is missing?

- Is the information on forums in this worksheet relevant for the courses you teach? Does it fit in with your teaching approach and aims?

- Can you think of any particular skills or activities which form part of the course you teach now in a face-to-face setting which you could transfer to an online forum? In what way(s) could this change improve the course for you and your students?

- Do your students already use forums for social networking? Would they need much training in using forums in their language classes (if they don't do so already)?

- What technical support would be required to use a forum in your institution? Is this easily available at your institution?

Access the [Explore and share forum \(http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=40\)](http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=40) to share your experience, and find out what other language teachers do.

Share these ideas with your colleagues.

Check this out!

* Credit for illustrations: fotographic1980/FreeDigitalPhotos.net



H. Explore and share

BEST PRACTICE AND SHARED DISCUSSION

There are lots of discussions about forum best use and forum assessment in the Teaching Strategies forum on Moodle. See <http://moodle.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=41>.

A useful discussion about forum assessment can be found here <http://moodle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=66008>.

You can see an excellent example of how a forum can be used as part of a language course here:

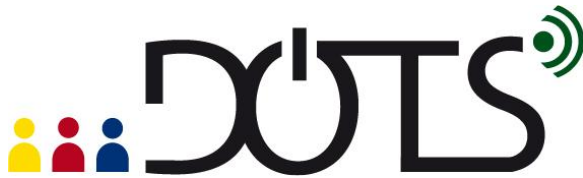
<http://cultura.mit.edu/> and http://cultura.mit.edu/answerArchived/index/exchange_id/274/archived/1

In this project, 2 groups of students (native speakers in their own language and also L2 learners in the language of the other group) worked in a forum to compare and describe the cultural differences and values of the culture whose language each was learning. The students used the forum to engage in and successfully carry out an authentic task, at a distance.

1. Write about your own experience with forums. Do forums fit in well with your teaching approach and the teaching aims in your institution? Share activities which have worked well for you and give others tips for best practice (Go to the [Explore and share forum](#) to do this, available at: <http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=40>)

2. Talk to your colleagues about forums. Do they use them in their classes? For which skills and activities do they find them most useful? Perhaps you can work together to build your own bank of favorite activities (+ lesson plans) to do in language class forums, and then tailor these to different settings and teaching environments. Share this in the [Explore and share forum](#): <http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=40>!

3. Talk to your students about forums. Do they use them in their private life? Have they posted any messages in different forums themselves? If you have several "expert users" perhaps they can do a demonstration for the entire class. Discuss why they use forums – you will learn more about the medium, and the learners will have a chance to share authentic information with each other and you. Bear in mind that, like with any open medium, forums with inappropriate content for the students you teach may appear. It is therefore a good idea to review any presentations beforehand.



4. Would it be difficult to integrate forums into your classes? If so, why? Would it be because of technological or pedagogical difficulties, or both? Where could you get help and support on technological issues?

I. Protecting students' privacy

When using forums, you may wish to consider their right to a protection of their privacy. Some privacy issues are discussed here:

<http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/resource/view.php?id=44>. For discussions of privacy issues you can go online to the Privacy forum available at: <http://moodle.dots.ecml.at/mod/forum/view.php?id=29>.

J. References

Photo of old fashioned school from:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jameswilkinsonphoto/4041389096/>

Photo of modern school from:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/woolner/4145447378/in/photostream/>



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