Canvas Discussions: Overview

The Canvas Discussions tool provides instructors and students the opportunity to contribute and discuss asynchronously. The native Canvas tool can be used to coordinate topic-driven or open ended conversations which instructors can optionally link to the Grades area for grading purposes.

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Why use Canvas Discussions?

The Discussions tool allows the instructor to create discussion topics for students to contribute to in an asynchronous manner outside of class time. Instructors can use discussions as a way of encouraging students to think about and discuss topics in preparation for the in-class discussion, or they can be used to encourage collaborative reflection on a topic after it is presented in class.

The asynchronous environment can also be beneficial to students who are less likely to participate in live, real-time discussions (students who are typically more shy or prefer to have time to think and carefully craft responses). The asynchronous aspect of the Discussions tool also provides a platform where all students can share their opinions, which is typically not feasible with in-class discussion due to time constraints.

Use Cases for Canvas Discussions

Canvas Discussions are a great way to encourage student collaboration. Typical implementations of Discussions may include:

- **Pre-Class discussion**
- **Post-Class discussion**
- **Reflection / Opinion –** ask students to read and then reflect on forum.
- **Asynchronous Debates –** ask students to defend or refute arguments.
- **Peer sharing / Peer review assignments –** instructors can use Discussions for assignments that they would like to be openly available to classmates to view / comment on.
- **Group Collaboration –** discussion topics can be assigned to Canvas Group Sets when set up as "group discussions." Instructors set up a single discussion topic which is automatically duplicated to create one version of the topic for each group within the Group Set. The individual group topics are then set up so that only the members of the group can read, write, and reply to their fellow group members.
- **FAQs –** Instructors can encourage students to post their questions to an FAQ Discussion topic where instructors, TAs, and other classmates can reply.

How do I use Canvas Discussions in my course?

Instructors and TA level users can always access the tool to create activities, but the tool can be hidden from students if desired. To learn more about how to use Canvas Discussions to facilitate your online course work, please reference:

- [Creating a Discussion Board](#)
- [How do I grade a graded discussion in the Speedgrader? (Vendor Guide)](#)
- [Due Dates versus Display Dates](#)

> 💡 If needed, you can set up multiple due dates for each activity. This may be useful if you have Discussion Sections that meet on different days and the due dates should match accordingly or if an individual student(s) needs a different due date.
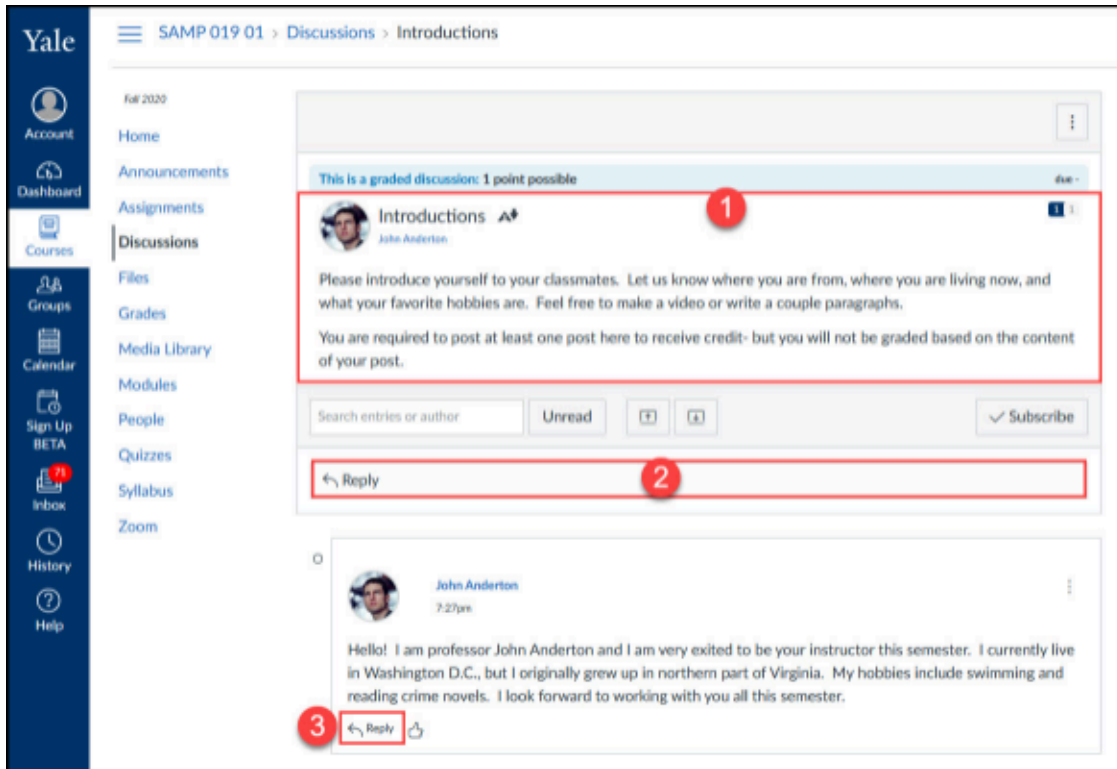>
> **For students who are in different time zones, have personal obligations that conflict, or experience technical difficulties, you can use the additional due dates to help accommodate their unique situation.**
>
> - [How do I assign a graded discussion to everyone in a course?](#)
> - [How do I assign a graded discussion to an individual student?](#)
> - [How do I assign a graded discussion to a course section?](#)
> - [How do I assign a graded discussion to a course group?](#)

What will my students see?

The actual view your students see will depend on the settings you set on your discussions. Below you can see what a student would see for a normal discussion topic.

1. The instructor's Discussion Board "**Description"** is providing the discussion prompt / instructions. This may also be thought of as the initial post in the Discussion.
2. The "**Reply**" button to the initial Discussion Board prompt set forth by the instructor.
3. A "**Threaded Reply**" button to a user's (instructor or peer) post already made in the Discussion.

Group Discussions

Group Discussions allow instructors to create a single discussion topic, which is automatically duplicated to provide one separate version of the topic for each group within the Group Set. For instructors and TAs who want to review the discussions, they will go to the Discussions tool and click on the group discussion topic.

Once viewing the discussion topic, instructors will see a list of group discussions and will need to click on the specific group discussion they want to review. Students, however, will only see one discussion topic—the version of the discussion topic that is assigned to their group.

Instructor View of Group Discussion

When the instructor goes to the Discussions tool and then clicks on the group discussion topic, they will be taken to a master copy of the topic. They will see a list of links to the individual group topics at the top of the page. To view the submissions for a group discussion, they will need to first click on the group, and then they will see the posts created in that group topic.

Student View of Group Discussion

When a student goes to the Discussions tool and then clicks on the group discussion topic, they will be taken to the discussion topic for their specific group. Students will not be able to view and/or post in any other groups' discussion topic.

Additional Resources

Faculty Resources

- Discussions (Vendor Guides)
- Implementing Online Discussions
- How do I use the Discussions Index Page?
- How do I reply to a discussion as an instructor?
- How do I attach a file to a discussion reply as an instructor?
- How do I like a reply in a course discussion as an instructor?

Student Settings

- How can I require students to reply to a course discussion before they see other replies?
- How do I edit or delete student discussion replies in a course?
- How do I allow students to attach files to a course discussion?
- How do I allow students to edit and delete their own discussion posts in a course?

> 💡 For more help, please contact canvas@yale.edu.