

STRATEGIES FOR USING DISCUSSION FORUMS, BLOGS and WIKIS

There are a variety of tools to facilitate conversation and collaboration between instructor and student and among students. These tools also allow students to communicate from a distance and provide a more comfortable method of communication for some shy students. Common tools include discussion boards, blogs, and wikis. There are a variety of programs that offer these tools. Please take a look through our resources available on the FIC website and in the [Canvas](#) Instructor's Guide for UT-Austin.

BEST PRACTICES

Some suggestions for how to use these communication tools effectively include:

- Teach students appropriate, safe, and respectful behavior as online authors and readers. If you use tools other than Canvas (which is FERPA compliant), for safety purposes, ensure that students do not reference their identity, contact information, or information about their location.
- Create prompts/questions that reinforce understanding of instructional goals and objectives.
- Create open-ended questions that invite diversity of response.
- Create questions that are at a medium level of difficulty. If questions are too easy, it does not lead to student learning and if the questions are too challenging, students have little to contribute to the discussion.
- Provide clear expectations including deadlines and information about writing quality. One way to clarify expectations is to provide a model of a good post. Providing a rubric to your students can also be helpful. You may want to consider adapting available rubrics (e.g., [Rubric for Discussion Boards](#), [Rubric for Blogs 1](#), [Rubric for Blogs 2](#), [Rubric for Wikis 1](#)). If you use these tools commonly in your class and have limited time for providing feedback, you may want to select random posts to grade. For example, you might grade all students' discussion board posts during weeks 3, 7, and 14 of your class.
- Encourage/require peer review and feedback. You will want to clarify expectations for students around responding to their classmates. This may involve modeling a good response. Receipt of feedback via blogs, wikis, etc. allows students to receive feedback from a wider audience than one's instructor and can help create a collaborative classroom climate.
- Regularly participate.
- If you teach a large class, organize assignments so that not too many students respond to each discussion board thread, blog, etc. Have no more than 20 students responding to each thread, blog, etc. This allows students to read their classmate's posts without being overwhelmed. It also increases the likelihood that they will have a unique contribution to the discussion.

