

DEVELOP

How to create discussions in blended learning

What is the goal of the discussion?

A discussion can be used for example to

Educational goals (for learning)

- Deepening the learning content
- Actively involving students in the learning content
- Reflection on own learning / opinion
- Prompting learners in the formulation of their own opinion, thoughts and argumentations

Goals (for relationships)

- Community building
- For students to get to know each other (online)

Within blended learning we make a distinction between discussion that do not happen in real time (a-synchronous) and discussions that happen in real time (synchronous) discussions.

Advantages a-synchronous discussion	Advantages synchronous discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to formulate thoughts and reflect on content • Time to internalise information • Remote contribution (time and space wise) from the learners' part • Remote contribution (time and space wise) from the lecturers' part 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility to add a personal touch • Just in time feedback for the personal learning process

Options

Multiple options are available for discussion purposes. Check which options are made available by your institution.

Some examples:

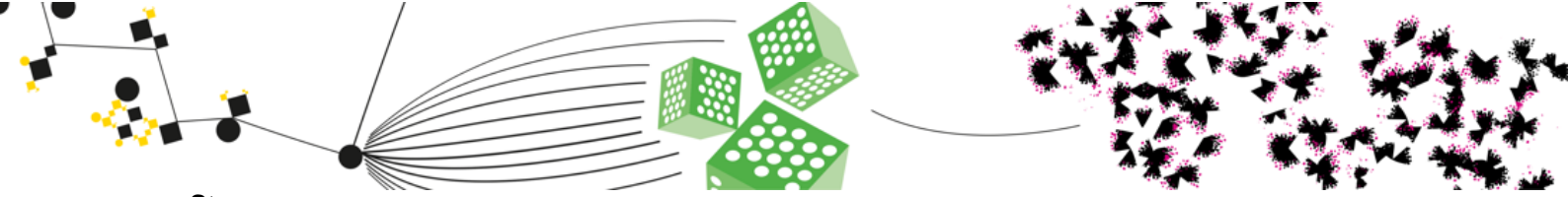
- Fora
- Comments to videos or other learning materials
- Annotating and providing feedback on learning materials
- Chats (can be both real time and non real time)
- Webinar / Skype

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Steps

- Decide on the goal you want to achieve through your discussion
- Think about the practical circumstances / conditions and decide whether you want it synchronous or a-synchronous
 - Tools available at University
 - Students and lecturers' time zones
 - Your teaching staff availability in terms of time
 - Available time to run the activity
 - Content that needs further deepening
- Choose a tool
- Decide whose involvement is needed for the activity (lecturer, moderator, student)
- Design the activity
 - Allocate specific time slots to each question (keep it dynamic)
 - Integrate and alternate learning content with discussion time
- Give responsibilities to the involved staff to keep the discussions alive

Some elements to consider

- Be very clear on what you expect from your students. Define for example that you'd like one response from a student for a question. Describe perhaps how many words you would expect. Be also clear on how often you will post yourself.
- Try to keep the discussion active by posting posts from lecturers and encourage students
- Make a good connection with the face to face part (in case of an online discussion)
- Think about why and how you would be rewarding the contributions of students. It might be very difficult to get the discussion going if there's no reward whatsoever for the students.
- If it is actually possible to have a real time face-2-face discussion make the most out of this opportunity and avoid doing it only online! A meta analysis shows no significant relationship between improved learning outcomes and real time computer supported discussions. However other reasons might apply (see relationship-related goals above), for instance online discussions can facilitate the creation of a more vibrant learning community.

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