

SFU

Unlocking Online Engagement:

Digital Literacy Strategies for Effective Discussion Boards

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2026.05.15



Acknowledgement

Simon Fraser University respectfully acknowledges the unceded traditional territories including, the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and x^wməθk^wəy'əm (Musqueam) Nations, on which SFU Vancouver is located.

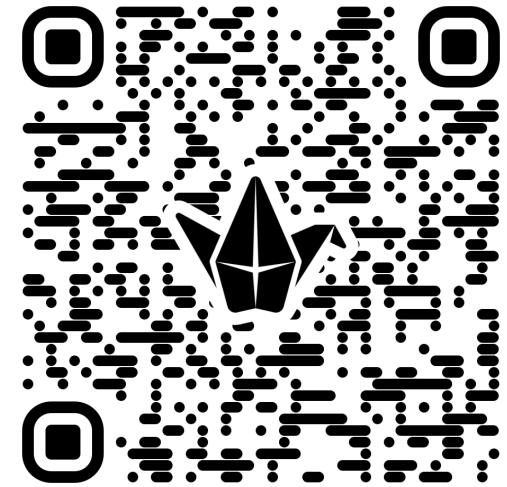
Objectives

- Describe and foster the importance of digital literacy for online learning
- Identify a digital tool for fostering meaningful online interaction
- Explore strategies to improve digital literacy
- Share and co-create solutions with peers

What is Digital Literacy ?

Reflection

Take a moment to think about what digital literacy means to you as an instructor or learner in the context of your work.



"Digital literacy is a person's **knowledge, skills, and abilities** for using digital tools ethically, effectively, and within a variety of contexts in order to **access, interpret, and evaluate information**, as well as to **create, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others**"

- Digital Learning Advisory Committee

Why Digital Literacy



Essential skill for adapting to digital learning environments



Enhances engagement and meaningful contributions



Builds confidence using digital tools



Expands critical thinking and communication skills



Enables knowledge access beyond the classroom

Asynchronous Online Discussion Forum

First Impression

When you think of online discussion forum,
what comes to mind?

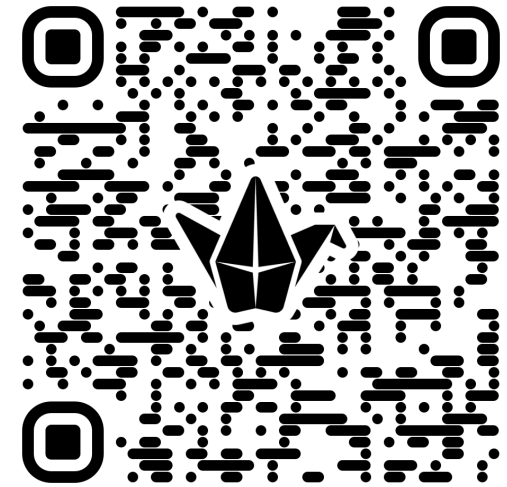
Quick Poll

Discussion forums are most useful for:

- A. Learning
- B. Engagement
- C. Both

Reflection

Have you ever used discussion forum in your
online courses?
What worked well? What didn't?



Challenge

Students

- Cannot navigate LMS and online discussion
- Unsure how to respond to peers and instructors effectively
- Submit incomplete or off-topic posts
- Lack confidence in online communication

Instructors

- Unaware of LMS discussion features
- Unable to give timely, targeted feedback
- Limited strategies to monitor participation
- Struggle to design engaging prompts

This is not just an engagement issue—it's a digital literacy issue.

Discussion Forums: Underused or Misunderstood?

✘ How It's Often Used

- Post once, never return
- Generic prompts with no structure
- Graded on quantity, not quality
- Students feel it is busy work

✔ What's Actually Possible

- Asynchronous dialogue that deepens over time
- Peer learning and collaborative knowledge-building
- Equal voice for diverse learners
- Evidence of higher-order thinking

When Designed Well, Discussion Forums Foster ...

Interaction

Students and instructors engage in a back-and-forth, not just broadcasting their own ideas in isolation.

Collaboration

Peers build on each other's thinking, challenge assumptions, and arrive at understanding together.

Knowledge Construction

Dialogue becomes the mechanism for learning, not just a record of what students already knew.



When supported by digital literacy → discussion boards become powerful learning spaces, not just graded tasks.

In the Context of Discussion Forums, Digital Literacy Includes:

- Tool Fluency** → Navigating threads, replying, attaching files, finding peer posts
- Communication** → Writing clearly for an online audience, using appropriate tone and detail
- Critical Thinking** → Evaluating peers' ideas, building arguments, asking deeper questions
- Collaboration** → Seeing the forum as a shared space for knowledge-building, not a solo task
- Digital Citizenship** → Understanding norms, privacy, and respectful online participation

Digital Literacy & Online Engagement

Improving digital literacy changes how students and instructors show up in discussion forums.

Confidence

→ *more*

Participation

When students know **how** to post, they actually do. Fear of the platform disappears.

Clarity

→ *better*

Interaction

When expectations are explicit and prompts are scaffolded, responses go deeper.

Skill

→ *deeper*

Learning

When students can navigate dialogue, they move from summarising to constructing knowledge.

Strategies

- Offer support and resources
- Provide targeted training for students and instructors
- Set clear guidelines for expected participation and interaction
- Empower instructors:
 - Leverage forums effectively for assessment and communication
 - Foster instructors' confidence in using digital tools

Real-World Examples

Before

<p>⋮ Introduce Yourself! 12 12 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Jan 16, 6:46 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 1: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 2 2 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Jan 27, 2:04 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 2: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 4 5 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Jan 19, 10:26 AM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 3: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 4 5 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Jan 24, 11:07 AM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 4: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 6 7 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Feb 6, 11:15 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 5: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 4 5 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Feb 6, 11:20 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 6: Share your Thoughts on the Readings 3 3 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Feb 14, 9:21 AM</p>
















After

<p>⋮ Introduce Yourself! 15 15 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Sep 14, 2:01 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 1: Discussion 21 21 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Sep 14, 1:46 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 2: Discussion 70 70 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Sep 23, 10:50 AM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 3: Discussion 22 22 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Sep 28, 1:57 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 4: Discussion 36 36 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Oct 5, 1:57 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 5: Discussion 20 21 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Oct 18, 5:47 PM</p>
<p>⋮ Week 6: Discussion 30 30 ✓ 📖 ⋮</p> <p>All Sections Last post at Oct 20, 4:17 PM</p>

Before

<p>⋮</p> <p>Week 1: Share your Thoughts on the Readings</p> <p>All Sections</p> <p>Last post at Jan 27, 2:04 PM</p>	<p>2 2</p> <p>✓</p> <p>🔖</p> <p>⋮</p>
<p>⋮</p> <p>Week 2: Share your Thoughts on the Readings</p> <p>All Sections</p> <p>Last post at Jan 19, 10:26 AM</p>	<p>4 5</p> <p>✓</p> <p>🔖</p> <p>⋮</p>
<p>⋮</p> <p>Week 3: Share your Thoughts on the Readings</p> <p>All Sections</p> <p>Last post at Jan 24, 11:07 AM</p>	<p>4 5</p> <p>✓</p> <p>🔖</p> <p>⋮</p>

After

 Week 1: Discussion All Sections Last post at Sep 14, 1:46 PM	   
 Week 2: Discussion All Sections Last post at Sep 23, 10:50 AM	   
 Week 3: Discussion All Sections Last post at Sep 28, 1:57 PM	   

Student Engagement Pattern



Real-world Example 2



Expectations

Overview

Briefly explain the purpose of this activity

Instructions

Outline what learners are expected to post in their response to the prompt

Example:

- Demonstrate engagement with course materials and concepts
- Advance a claim or position supported by evidence and/or examples
- One full paragraph or more (approximately 250-300 words)

Outline what learners are expected to post in their comments to other learners. Example:

- Be respectful to the poster and the rest of the community
- Relate to the original post and discussion prompt and advance the discussion

Resources

Provide resources to support learners

Example:

- Instruction on how to use the discussion tool and how to find rubrics
- Outline writing expectations

Timelines

Provide a clear timeline for posting.

Example:

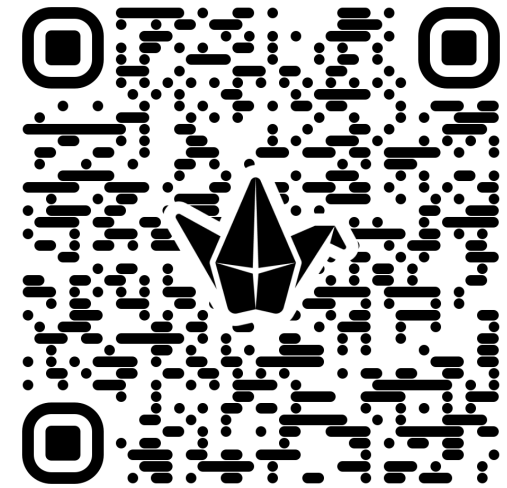
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Substantive Comments					Deadline for posting Substantive Comments		
Responsive Comments							Deadline for posting Responsive Comments
Instructor Facilitation							Instructor summarizes discussion themes (to present the following week)

Sharing Success Stories

What tool have you used for students to engage online?

How have you used it to increase online engagement?

Why have you chosen to use it?



Take Aways

- Digital literacy is essential for meaningful online engagement
- Online discussions can be a powerful tool for building interactions and constructing knowledge
- Practical strategies can bridge the digital literacy gap
- Continuous support led to better student engagement

Questions?

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Thank you

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