6. GETTING STARTED WITH ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Other Moodle guides can be found under '*Information / IT Support / IT Information*' on the main menu, then under '*Using Moodle*'.

6.1 Identifying Discussion Forums

Once you have logged into Moodle and entered your course's Moodle site, you will see different topic areas and many different options. All discussion areas are represented by the ⬜ image; you can see clusters of these in the screenshot below, from an actual Moodle site (see number 1). To add a message to an online discussion, you must first click on the relevant title of the discussion area. Discussion forums are typically named after a particular exercise that appears in your study guide, or are else clearly linked to particular lessons.

In the screenshot below you can see the menu option "This course" (see number 2). Selecting this will allow you to choose the option "Forums" which will take you to a list of *all* discussion forums used in that course.

6.2   Reading Discussion Threads

A discussion 'thread' is a separate line of messages within a discussion forum. In the example below, you can see that there are many threads in the discussion forum. Moodle helpfully tells you how many replies there are in each thread, and informs you as to who posted the latest message and when.

To start a new discussion, click on the 'Add a new discussion topic'. To read a discussion thread, click on the title of the discussion. Clicking on a person's name will show their Moodle profile, not the message they have added!

It is possible to read multiple threads at once by opening each thread in a new browser tab. To do this, right-click the title of the discussion you want to access then select "Open in new tab".

By returning to the tab with the list of discussion threads, you can right-click on each thread in turn to open them in new tabs.

6.3   Adding your Say

There are two ways in which you can contribute to an online discussion.

1. By starting a new discussion topic, or

2. By responding to an existing message.

Both options work very similarly. To start a new discussion topic, make sure you are in the first page of the forum, the one that lists all of the threads. Click the "Add new discussion topic" button.

You will be taken to a screen that enables you to write your own message. At the top of the screen you will see the introduction to the forum. Beneath that introduction is an area where you actually write your message.

To add your message, follow the steps below:

1. Type in a **subject** for your message. Try to be imaginative and descriptive.

2. Type the **actual message** itself. If you are planning to spend some time drafting the message, we suggest you create the message in Notepad (or another simple editor), save it, and then copy and paste your message from there into Moodle. This prevents internet and Moodle connection timeouts from making you lose your work.

    You can use the toolbar (like that found in most word processors) to format your message, and add images, hyperlinks and smileys (see below) as you wish. You can change the font, font size, add italics and bold effects, create numbered or bulleted lists, etc. by using the buttons above where you type your message. Hovering the mouse over the button will provide brief help on features of the button.

When posting messages to Moodle, please ensure that your message has a logical structure to it, it is free from grammatical and spelling errors, you have made your point clearly, and the subject line is appropriate.

3. If you want to **add an attachment**, do so as you would for an email.

4. Click "Post to forum" to add your message.

Once your message has been posted, you have 30 minutes to edit it *before it is emailed out to all subscribers* (usually all staff and students in the course).

The blue number 4 on the above diagram shows where you can choose to be subscribed to the discussion or not. If you are subscribed to a discussion, then all posts to the discussion will be emailed to you. We suggest you uncheck this.

Here is an overview of the toolbar with some of the less obvious but useful features:

1. Word counter. Note that it is primitive, and will count anything separated by a space as a different word.

2. Full screen.

3. Add a hyperlink.

4. Insert a picture.

5. Clear formatting. *This is very useful, especially if you are pasting text in from another word processor such as Word. Remember to select the text first.*

6. Add emoticon.

To respond to an existing message, you can either click the "Reply" button that appears in an email notification of the message or else respond to it in Moodle itself by clicking the "reply" button that appears at the bottom right of the message.
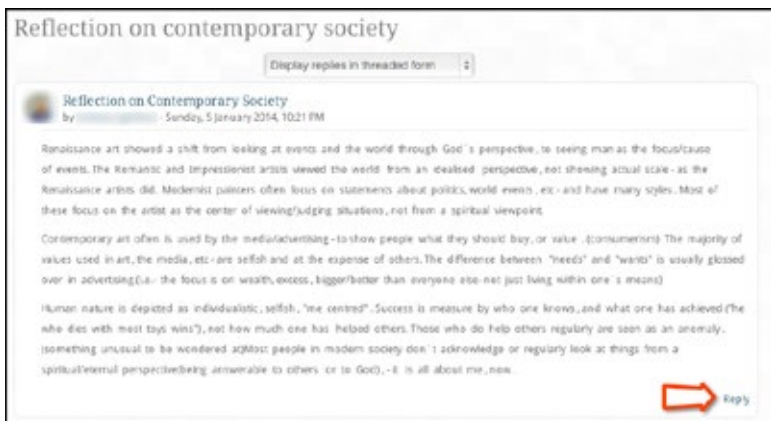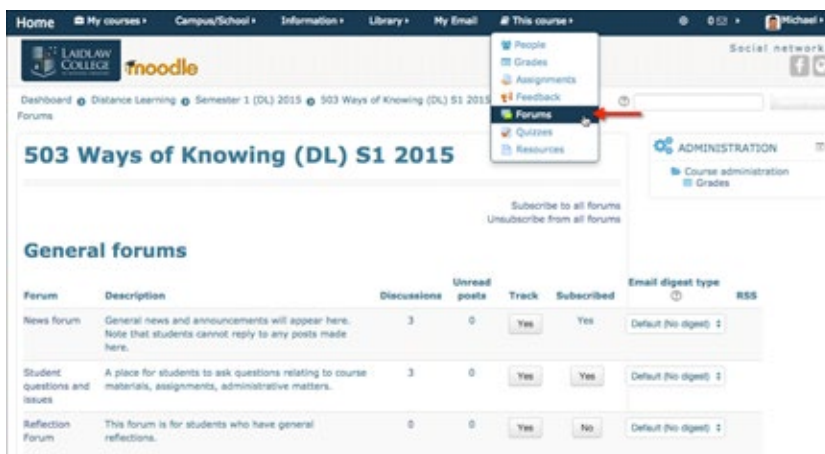

Once you have clicked "Reply", a screen like the one for starting a new discussion topic will appear beneath the message you are replying to.

6.4 Email Notification of New Posts

Moodle will automatically email you a copy of all posts made to a discussion area that you are subscribed to. This means that you can read all messages added to discussion forums as people add them, directly from your email. These will be ordered by time rather than by subject.

Unless a forum has compulsory subscription (generally only news forums will) you may choose to be subscribed to it or not. You may find yourself overwhelmed with numerous emails if you are in a large course. If you wish to be subscribed to the forum, but want to reduce the volume of emails you receive, you are able to change your settings so that your emails are compacted into a *daily digest*: one email containing all the posts, or all the subject lines.

1. Go into the Forums area of the course (menu: This course / forums)

2. For each forum you wish to change, toggle the yes/no button for 'Subscribed'.

3. For each forum you wish to change, set the 'Email digest type' to determine how you will received notifications of new posts.

6.5 Getting Help

If you need assistance in using Moodle or Email, then please contact IT Services.

- By phone – 09 836 7816 or from on campus dial ext: 816
- By email – ithelpdesk@laidlaw.ac.nz
- Or the online helpdesk – http://helpdesk.laidlaw.ac.nz