

# Learning Design Best Practice: Discussions

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## Why use discussions in learning design?

[Discussions](#) convene groups of learners and experts around specific topics to solve problems, come up with new ideas, or generate approaches to issues of common concern.

Within a learning experience, discussions create spaces for colleagues to connect, collaborate, reach out for help, reflect on their experiences, and support one another.

Through discussion, people can develop new skills and ideas and connect with a network of colleagues and experts. Everyone involved benefits from each other's learning. Specifically, discussions in an online collaborative setting can:

- Promote learner understanding of material
- Encourage the practice of reflection
- Develop shared mindsets and reinforce changes in behaviors
- Empower participants to contribute ideas, insights, individual expertise, and reflection
- Lead to insights that no participant would have on their own
- Engage introverted learners who might be inhibited in in-person learning environments

## How to Design Effective Discussions:

The key to an effective discussion thread is to create organic discussion. The topic should be compelling enough that learners want to read other posts or talk more about a topic.

We've found these tactics to be very effective for creating engaging discussions.

### 1. Be intentional about [discussions](#) vs. [assignments](#).

Not all topics lead to engaging conversations. If you imagine everyone having the same answer to a discussion question, it won't be a helpful thread.

- Avoid discussions that ask learners to summarize content or answer a question based on a lesson page (e.g. "What is the correct way to..."). These types of questions work better as assignments or quizzes than discussions.



- Consider questions that ask learners to share insights that go beyond the content, such as stories of their own experiences, additional resources about a topic, or creative responses to a prompt.
- Ironically, adding creative constraints to an assignment often leads to greater creativity and engagement! Here are some ideas to get you started:
  - Compose a tweet that...
  - Write a haiku or limerick about...
  - In # words...
  - Post a picture/gif that...
  - Find or create a meme that...

**Why is Data Security Important to the Success of NovoEd?**

Andrew Linford

[Review: Module 1](#)

Now that you've learned why data security matters, write a haiku that explains how prioritizing data security can impact NovoEd's success.

**Haiku**  
hai-ku /hi,koo/

1. a Japanese style of poetry that includes 17 syllables in total distributed over 3 lines--5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second, and 5 in the third.

63

Nov 10, 2020 7:31 AM

## 2. Pair discussions with [private activities](#) to create opportunities for collaborative learning.

Some topics need to stay private, but that doesn't mean that key takeaways need to be!

- On lessons with a private activity, add a discussion that invites learners to share their key insights or takeaways from the activity.
- Similarly, after a private [team](#) activity, add a discussion thread about the teams' key takeaways or outcomes. This is similar to a "report out" discussion in a classroom.

## 3. Create optional "Get help" or "Ask us Anything" discussion threads.

While not every learner will comment on these optional threads, the discussions that do happen will be deeper and more valuable for the learners who opt into them.

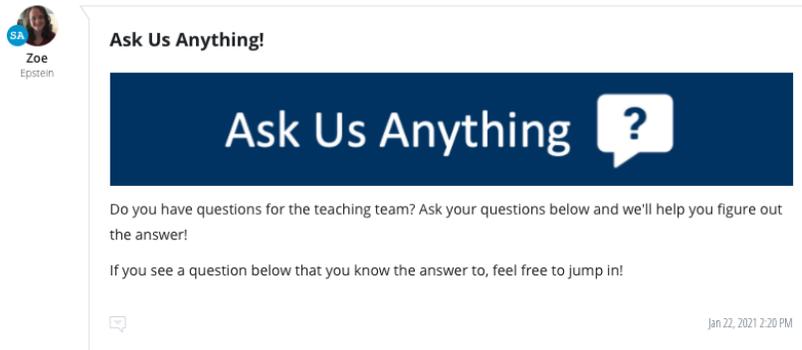
- Use a question thread as pre-work for a [live session](#) to generate a list of questions to discuss when you're live.
- Create "Ask a Leader" or "Ask an Expert" Q&A threads for guest speakers in the course to engage with learners.
- Set the [Points](#) value for these assignments to 0 so learners aren't incentivized to comment just to get points.



#### 4. Highlight and differentiate discussions by including images in the prompt.

Consider options like a banner to identify different question types, an image or slide for learners to react to, etc. For example:

- “What does the data in this chart tell you about the future of the workplace? Have you seen any of these trends with your customers? Share an example below!”
- “What does this person’s body language tell you about how you should approach the conversation?”



[Image specs](#): images will automatically scale to 800px wide. If your image contains text, a .svg file will look best on the page.

#### 5. Invite learners to make creative use of imagery.

Discussions aren’t limited to text! We’ve found that discussion threads where learners share images tend to get higher engagement. For example:

- In a course introduction thread, encouraging learners to share photos of themselves will encourage more organic discussion than text alone – “You like skiing? Me too!” or “I love deep dish pizza! What’s your favorite restaurant?”
- In a leadership course, inviting learners to share an image that symbolizes what leadership means to them will encourage learners to engage more deeply than the same question in a text-only format.

#### 6. Assign a specific facilitator to each discussion.

You don’t have to respond to or like every comment in a discussion, but it’s best to have a course facilitator engaging in discussions along with learners. Minimize the facilitation burden by clearly assigning specific discussions to specific facilitators.

- [Select the assigned facilitator as the “discussion starter”](#) for the discussion, and make sure they’ve uploaded their profile image to NovoEd so learners see the face associated with the prompt!
- Have them [“Follow” the discussion](#) to receive notifications about new comments.



## Related Articles

- [Discussions](#)
- [Adding Discussions to Content Pages](#)
- [How to Set up Discussions](#)
- [Team Discussion Activity](#)
- [Navigating the Discussions](#)
- [Interacting with Discussions](#)
- [Managing Discussion Subscriptions](#)
- [Discussion Content Download](#)
- [NovoEd Whitepaper: Collaborative Learning](#)