



Redesigning Forum Activities

Forums can be used in multiple ways to support students' learning online through, sharing ideas, reflecting on learning and providing support through feedback or links to additional resources. Moreover, forums as asynchronous tools, allow students to work at their own pace while still benefiting from the contributions of other students (Shank 2007).

However, in practice, forums can be problematic. The learning in forums happens over a longer time period, which allows more time for consideration and reflection in posts, but which can also be frustrating for learners. A delay in feedback within a forum can be detrimental to learning – research shows that the shorter the time between student performance and their receiving of feedback, the greater the learning outcome for the student (Miller 2014).

Active student participation in a forum could generate large amounts of information resulting in information overload for students and an exhausting workload for those teaching staff managing the forums. Alternatively, low student participation may result in the intended benefit of the learning activity not being achieved. The presence of more than one facilitated forum activity per week, may mean that students are overloaded and unable to respond meaningfully to all the forums. When students realise that they will not gain any extra benefit from participating in forums they will quickly stop posting to them.

In this *Guide* we will look at the options available when redesigning forum-based learning activities and the pros and cons of each approach.

Using ADDIE and the Flowchart

Forum activities can be redesigned to be more appropriate learning activities for your students using the ADDIE process. ADDIE is an acronym for **Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate** and is discussed in more detail in the following *Guide*:

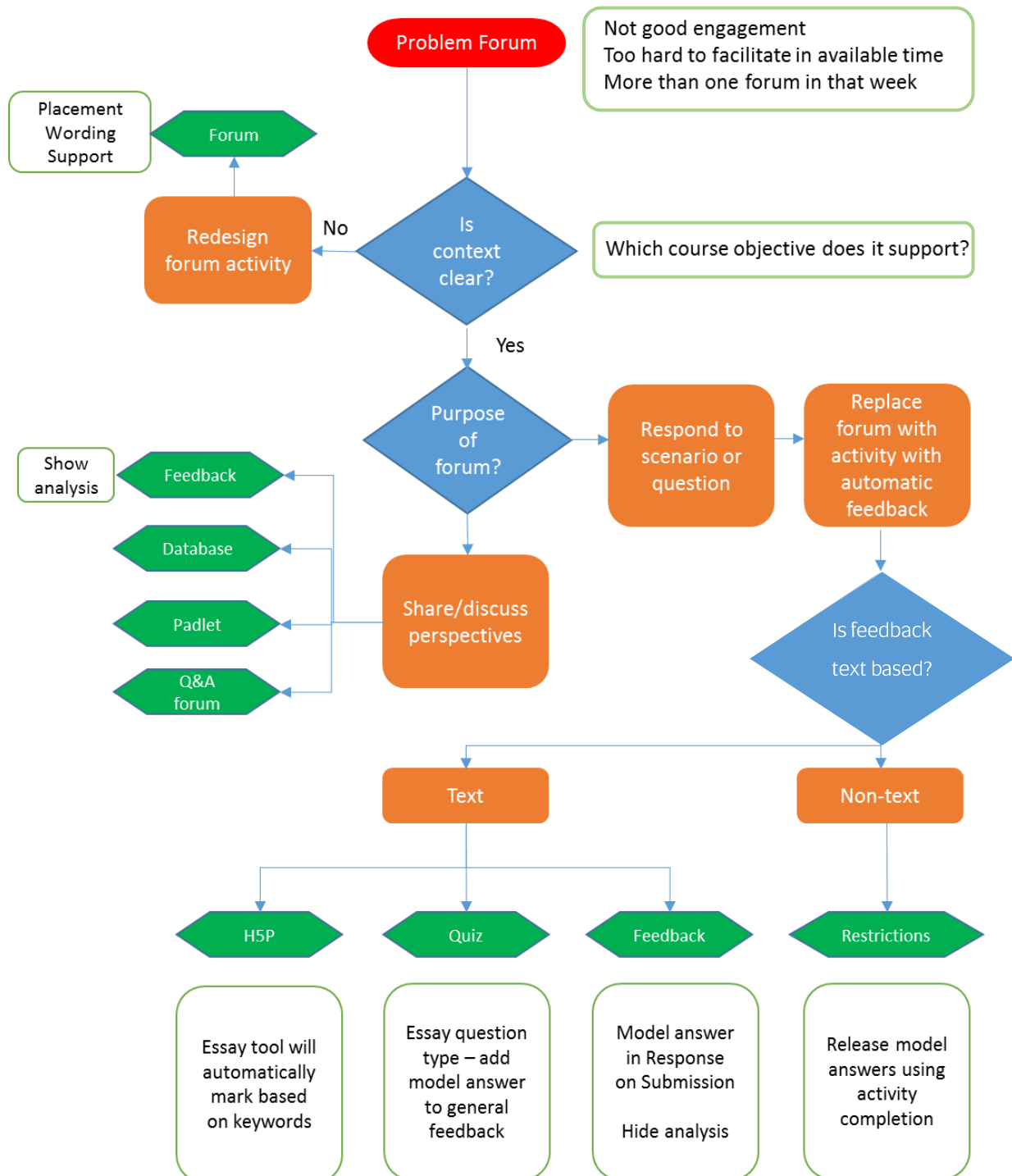
- Online T&L Guide - [Introducing something new into your course](#)

Analyse and Design

To identify a problem forum, start by **analysing** the engagement data for the forum which is available through the course Dashboard. More information can be found in this *Guide*:

- Online T&L Guide - [Online Student Engagement: Reports from learnonline](#)

Use the flowchart below to explore your options when addressing your problem forum.



Analyse and Design

To begin the redesign option, consider how the current activity is related to the **course objectives** – which CO is the activity supporting?

Then determine whether the context around the activity is clear. For this consider where the problem forum is located in the week of study. You would also look at the wording that introduces the activity to ensure that what the students need to do to participate in the forum is absolutely clear and designed to motivate them to participate (e.g. incentives, provocative questions, images). Also consider if there is adequate support for the students to complete the forum-based learning activity including feedback from the teaching team. If you do detect problems with the forum's context, then you may want to work on improving the placement, wording and support of the forum-based activity to see if this will impact student engagement.

If the context for the forum activity is clear, then the next major question is to consider the purpose of the forum. Consider how the forum is being used. Is it to have students **discuss or share perspectives**? If so, you can use tools other than the forum for this purpose, including the Moodle feedback tool, the Moodle database tool, Padlet, and the Moodle Q&A forum. Using these tools, allows participants to learn through composing their own submissions and seeing the responses of other students.

Deciding which tool to use will be based on the type of feedback that you will provide.

- If the purpose of the forum is to **respond to a scenario or to answer a question**, then you could replace the forum-based activity with one which will give automatic feedback to the students.
- If it is text-based feedback, then you can use the H5P essay tool, the essay question within Moodle quiz, or the Moodle feedback tool to deliver feedback once the student submits their response.
- If the feedback is more complicated, then you could use restrictions within the website to reveal the answer once the students' submission has been uploaded.

The following table lists the pros and cons of each of the alternatives as well as an example of how each has been used in various courses.

Tool	About	Pros	Cons	Example
Forum	Students can see the responses of others even before they post	Broadens the perspective of participants Challenges assumptions Asks questions Can add images, links and videos	Staff facilitation can take time Making timely responses is demanding for staff	Week 2 discussion forum
Q&A forum	Students cannot see responses of others until they make their own post	Broadens the perspective of participants	Staff need to ask question in forum to kick off each time the course is offered 30 minute delay	Learning Activity: Compliance or Ethics?
Padlet	Add responses to online board	Feels alive Can be colourful Can be embedded in the page Ability to reinforce others' comments using stars Students can add images, links and videos	Inappropriate material needs to be removed Needs to be set up at the beginning of each offering of the course Big classes can be an issue	Ethics and health promotion
Feedback – survey-like tool	Model answer is added to 'Completion message' in the overview section Option to 'show analysis' to share aggregated input or option to select 'no analysis' Use as non-anonymous	Question types include text and multiple choice Shows histogram of student responses and tables of written comments Do not need to re-enter model answer each time (set and forget) Staff can see an overview of what each student has submitted	Text only feedback Students can write anything to get answer	4.2 Biopsychological factors

Tool	About	Pros	Cons	Example
Database	Students can't see responses of others until they make their own post	Can add a model answer which will appear at the top of the list Great for sharing images	If using a model answer, staff will need to add it each time the course is run Students can write anything to get answer	Learning activity: The external environment
Moodle Quiz – Essay	The model answer for the question is added to General feedback	Students submit written response and see feedback immediately Option to use images, videos and links in the feedback	Several clicks to start quiz Students can write anything to get the model answer	Staff have limited access to quizzes
H5P essay	Key words need to be identified for automatic marking	Can be embedded on the page Students will need to write something sensible to get a response Can show model answer No need to update for each course offering	It can be tricky to get keywords right	Socioeconomic factors
Restrictions – file released when activity completed	Activity completion is turned on, linked to an assignment submission	Students submit work and get an automatic answer. Staff can provide anything as the model answer – spreadsheet, code, drawings, files etc.	Activity completion needs to be considered for all parts of the website	Practice with Building P on Week 7

Some of the Moodle tools such as the quiz, feedback and database tools, can provide model answers automatically regardless of the quality of the student submission. However, some of these tools also display student submissions (e.g. database, Q&A forum) which may motivate students to think about the quality of their work before they submit it. Another disadvantage that you need to be aware of is whether or not the activity needs to be set up each time the course is rolled over for a new offering (Q&A forum, model answers in database, Padlet), or will it be ready automatically?

Develop, Implement & Evaluate

To **develop** the change in your course website, first work on any feedback or model answers that you would like to provide to students as well as any instructions for students on how to complete the activity.

Then book an online consultation with a member of the TIU, or another critical friend, to ensure you have the correct settings, placement and wording to achieve what it is that you want to achieve with the learning activity.

Remember to check that the final design of the activity still aligns with the intent of the course objective/s.

- TIU – [Book an online consultation](#)
- Learnonline Help – [Learnonline Activities](#)

Implement your innovation in your course website either while you are teaching the course or in the next offering of the course. Remember that you will need to not only update the activity but often any other parts of the website that refer to the activity, for example the 'To know/To do' section of UniSA Online courses. Any other schedules or narratives that might refer to the old forum activity will need to be updated with information about the new activity.

Always let your students know that you are trying something new out and flag that you will be asking them for feedback about the change. Students are generally supportive and see it as a positive sign of good teaching: that you are not satisfied with how part of the course has been going and you are doing something to make it better.

Always take the time to **evaluate** how the change has impacted student engagement. You can do this informally or by using a feedback tool or by monitoring student interaction with the tool itself using data from the course dashboard.

- Online T and L Guide - [Taking the temperature of your online classroom](#)
- Online T&L Guide - [Online student engagement: Reports from learnonline](#)

If you would like to ask online teaching and learning questions related to your course, you can look through our [FAQs](#), write to TIU@unisa.edu.au, have an [online consultation with a member of the TIU](#) or complete the online modules as part of [*Introduction to Engaging Learners Online*](#).

References

Miller M 2014, *Minds online: Teaching effectively with technology*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

Shank P 2007, *The online learning idea book: 95 Proven ways to enhance technology-based and blended learning*. Pfeiffer, San Francisco.