



Tech Tip #2016-01

Minimize Due Date Confusion on Discussion Boards

Transcript

For the full screencast, see <http://ctle.utah.edu/resources/tech-tips.php>

Hello! Welcome to **Tech Tips for Teachers #2016-01: Minimize Due Date Confusion on Discussion Boards**. My name is Heather Stone, and I work for the University of Utah Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence, CTLE for short.

If you've used Canvas to assign discussion boards for your students, you have probably also had students who were confused about due dates. Perhaps it seemed like no matter how you set things up, some students forgot to contribute an initial post, while others forgot to respond to their classmates' posts. This video shows you one way to set up Canvas discussion boards so as to minimize this confusion.

I've created a sample discussion board assignment, called Planning Exercise, to show you this can be set up. You'll note that this discussion board—like many of yours—has two parts: Part A is what I call it when students make their initial post, and in this case they are expected to do that by Friday, January 15th at noon; Part B is what I call it when students respond to their peers' postings, and in this case they are expected to respond to two peers by Tuesday, January 19th at noon. In this class, Part A of discussion boards is always due on Fridays, and Part B of discussion boards is always due on Tuesday.

That's the first principle to minimize confusion: Set due dates fall on the same days of the week. Especially in a fully online course, it is much easier for students to keep track of deadlines if they know that they will always have something due on certain days of the week, and that nothing will be due in between those days.

Notice that I have set this assignment up as a "graded discussion" rather than as an "assignment." You can select the graded box on a discussion board, which turns it into an assignment. Then you can see student responses all in one place in the Speed Grader window, and the discussion board will show up in the assignment list, on the calendar, and on students' dashboards. If you want a discussion to be graded, we recommend setting it up as a discussion in Canvas rather than an Assignment. Discussions can be turned into formal assignments by simply checking the "graded" box while assignments cannot be set up to allow threaded discussion posts.

So, back to our graded discussion. I have set the due date on this discussion to be Friday, January 15th. Remember, this is the day students are supposed to make their own initial posts. This graded discussion will now show up on the calendars and dashboards as an assignment due that day, thereby reminding them to post.

However, Canvas does not yet allow one assignment to have two due dates. This means that the assignment we just set up will not show a due date for the peer response, Part B, portion of the assignment. So, even if you remind students in the discussion board instructions to post responses to their peers before Tuesday, as I have done here, they will not receive any notifications on their dashboards or calendars and many times students will forget to respond to their peers as a result.

I find students can get confused about what is due if I am expecting them to turn in something via Canvas that does not show up as due on their assignment list, calendar, or dashboard. So, to fix this problem, I create another zero-point assignment reminding them to respond to their peers and pointing them back to the initial discussion board.

So here is an example of that zero-point assignment. Notice that it simply reminds students to respond to their peers on the previous discussion board, and then it provides a link to that board. The assignment is set to NOT accept submissions and to be worth zero points, and it is set to a due date of January 19th at noon—the PART B deadline. There is no way students can submit anything to this assignment, and it does not show up in any grade calculation. However, it does show up on students' dashboards, calendars, and assignment lists as something that is due. It is named the same thing as the discussion board assignment but I have included the word RESPONSE before the name. This allows students to easily pair the two assignments together when they see them side-by-side on assignment lists.

I have found that this structure prompts students to complete both parts of the discussion board assignment with minimal confusion. So, to summarize, the two main elements are as follows:

- A graded discussion board where all posts and responses are submitted, and where scores are assigned. This assignment should be due on the initial post date.
- A zero-point assignment that does not accept submissions but is due on the response date. It should provide a link back to the discussion board assignment.

I suggest a standardized vocabulary when talking about discussion boards with students. I use Post for their first contribution and Response for later contributions that are in reply to peers' Posts.

Canvas has promised that assignments will be able to have multiple due dates (which they call Checkpoints) in a future version, but for now, this structure should help minimize confusion.

If you have any trouble putting this Tech Tip to work for you, please don't hesitate to contact CTLE or TLT. Here's the contact info:

Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)

Email: info@ctle.utah.edu

Phone: 801-581-7597

Website: ctle.utah.edu

Teaching & Learning Technologies (TLT)

Email: classhelp@utah.edu

Phone: 801-581-6112

Website: tlt.utah.edu

Canvas help drop-in hours: M/T 9:00 am – 4:00 pm | Faculty Center (MLIB 1705)