

# Collaborative Tools in Moodle

By the C-FB Virtual Campus Team referencing content from Moodle.org

## Chats

### What is a Chat?

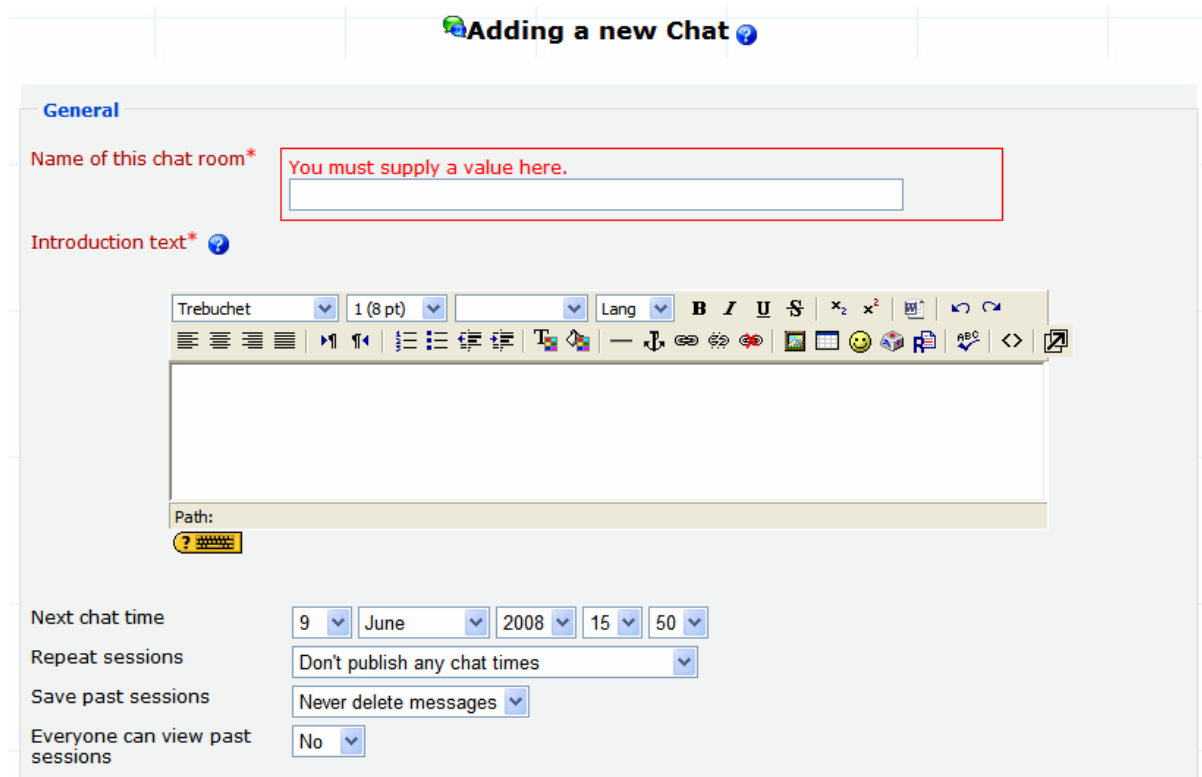
The Chat Activity Module allows participants to have a real-time synchronous discussion via the web. This is a useful way to get a different understanding of each other and the topic being discussed – the mode of using a chat room is quite different from the asynchronous forums. The Chat module contains a number of features for managing and reviewing chat discussions.

### Why or where would I use a Chat activity?

Probably the best use of chat functionality is for independent student study groups or for planned online tutorial sessions.

### How do I implement a Chat?

To implement a chat activity, select it from the “Add an activity” in the course section you’d like to put it. This will open up the “Adding a New Chat...” window that looks like the following.



The screenshot shows the 'Adding a new Chat' form in Moodle. At the top, there is a title 'Adding a new Chat' with a globe icon. Below the title, the form is divided into sections. The 'General' section is highlighted in blue. It contains the following fields and options:

- Name of this chat room\***: A text input field with a red border and the message 'You must supply a value here.' below it.
- Introduction text\***: A rich text editor with a toolbar containing options for font (Trebuchet), size (1 (8 pt)), language (Lang), bold (B), italic (I), underline (U), strikethrough (ABC), subscript (x<sub>2</sub>), superscript (x<sup>2</sup>), bulleted list, numbered list, link, unlink, image, video, audio, and help. Below the toolbar is a large text area.
- Path:**: A field with a yellow background and a question mark icon.
- Next chat time**: A series of dropdown menus for time (9), month (June), year (2008), day (15), and hour (50).
- Repeat sessions**: A dropdown menu with the option 'Don't publish any chat times'.
- Save past sessions**: A dropdown menu with the option 'Never delete messages'.
- Everyone can view past sessions**: A dropdown menu with the option 'No'.

The description of each parameter follows...

***“Name of this chat room”*** – Begin by entering a name for your chat room. The name entered here will be the name that learners see in the course content area. Learners will click on this name to view the description of the purpose of the chat room and then to enter the chat. It is useful to name your chat room with a name that implies its purpose. For example, if you will be using your chat room for virtual tutorials, then you might name your chat room “Virtual Tutorial”. Alternatively, if the chat room is designed solely to give learners a place to socialize or discuss class activities, you might name the chat room “Student Lounge.”

***“Introduction Text”*** - Type the description of the chat here. Include precise instructions for students regarding the subject of the chat.

The introduction text is designed to welcome learners to the chat and to provide information regarding the purpose of the chat room. The introduction can be as simple or as complex as you would like. As an example, you could simply explain that the chat room is being made available for learners to collaborate on group projects. A chat could also be used for structured discussions of course content; in that case, the Introduction text might present a specific list of questions to be addressed or the protocols to be followed.

It might also be beneficial to let the learners know in the Introduction text who will be able to see the transcripts of the chat sessions. The instructor will be able to see every part of any conversation that takes place in the chat room. However, you can choose to make these transcripts visible to all learners as well. When working with younger learners, experience has revealed that discussions in the chat rooms are more likely to be on-task and appropriate when the learners are aware that their discussions can be viewed by the instructor and/or other learners. The same may well be true with adult learners.

***“Next Chat Time”*** - The day and hour of the next chat session.

If you wish to schedule chat sessions for or with your learners, then you can use this setting to publish a time and date for the next chat. The date you select here will be displayed on the course calendar along with a link to the chat room. Realize that setting a date and time here will not restrict access to the room at other times, it is merely a tool to communicate with your learners; to let them know when they can expect to find you or other learners in the chat room. If you wish to make the chat room unavailable, you must hide it from the learners.

To choose a chat time, use the drop down menus to choose the day, month and year. Then, set a time with the last two fields on the line. Note: the time is based on a 24 hour clock or “military time,” so 14:00 refers to 2:00 p.m.

For courses involving users across different time zones, it is useful to know that the time you set here will be adjusted to match the time zone of the user viewing it.

If you do not wish to publish chat times, then you can disregard the date and time settings here and then choose not to publish them in the next step.

***“Repeat Sessions”*** - You can choose any out of four options allowing to schedule the future chat sessions:

1. Don't publish any chat times--If you prefer not to schedule chats for the chat room, select this setting. This option will cause Moodle to disregard the date and time set above for the Next chat time. Not publishing chat times could be used to indicate to learners that the chat room is available at all times for them to use.

2. No repeats - publish the specified time only--This setting will cause only the date and time selected for the Next chat time to be published. The date and time will be displayed on the course calendar as well as when the learners click on the title of the chat room in the course content area. Published chat times could be used to schedule special events or meetings or simply to help learners identify a common time in which they can expect to find other learners in the chat room.
3. At the same time every day--In some situations, you may need to schedule a chat session for the same time every day; this setting allows for this option. The scheduled chats will then be based on the time of day you selected above for the Next chat time. Scheduled daily chats are useful for scheduling daily office hours or work sessions with learners.
4. At the same time every week--To schedule a chat for the same day and time every week, select this option. When this option, the scheduled chats will be on the same day of the week at the same time you indicated in the Next chat time area above. If you regularly give assessments on the same day of the week, this setting could be useful for scheduling review sessions prior to each assessment. You could also schedule a weekly chat to meet and review key ideas and questions related to the week's content—assessment or not.

*“Save past sessions”* - You can determine the number of days.

When users (two or more) participate in a chat session, a record, or complete transcript of the session is created. As the instructor, you can choose how long these transcripts are saved and available for viewing. You may wish to never delete the messages from a special chat room used for discussions between learners and visiting authors, but you may choose to keep transcripts from an open, informal chat room for only 30 days.

If you have any concerns about discussions that might take place in your chat room, you may want to keep transcripts for an extended period of time to allow the transcripts to be used for documentation. Likewise, you may find the documentation provided by the transcript to be useful for accreditation or evaluative purposes. Another consideration is how long you expect your learners to need access to the transcript. For instance, if learners are using the chat room to collaborate on a group project, you won't want to delete the messages until that project is completed and assessed.

*“Everyone can view past sessions”* - You can decide here whether or not allow everyone to view past chat sessions.

Instructors in a course can always view transcripts from sessions in the chat rooms. However, you also have the option to make these chat transcripts available to all of the learners in the course. If you select Yes for this setting, learners can click on the title of the chat room and then view past sessions to see any interactions that have taken place in the chat room. If you select No here, then only the instructors in the course will have access to the transcripts. If learners need access to a specific transcript though, the instructor can always copy the transcript and share it with learners in the form of a document.

## Forums

### What is a Forum?

A “forum” is the Moodle equivalent to what you probably more commonly know as a “discussion board”. Forum activities can contribute significantly to successful communication and community building in an online environment. You can use forums for many innovative purposes in educational settings, but teaching forums and student forums are arguably the two more significant distinctions.

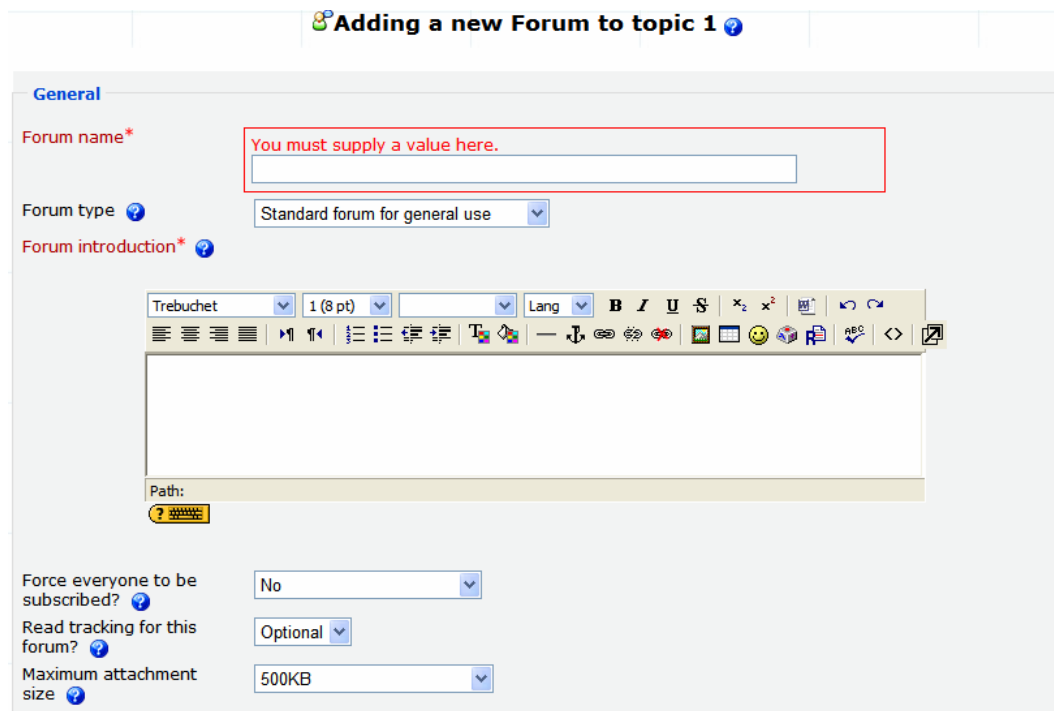
### Why or where would I use a Forum activity?

There are lots of opportunities to use Forums. You can use them as “teaching forums” by posing a broad question and have students respond to gauge their understanding (and in the process have students reflect on their peers’ understandings).

Alternatively you can use forums as “student forums”. For example, you could build a “student commons” where any class-related issue could be brought up by students to discuss. Or perhaps a “get-to-know-you” forum, where students introduce themselves to each other.

### How do I implement a Forum?

To implement a forum activity, select it from the “Add an activity” in the course section you’d like to put it. This will open up the “Adding a New Forum...” window that looks like the following.



The screenshot shows the Moodle interface for adding a new forum. The title is "Adding a new Forum to topic 1". The form is titled "General" and contains the following fields:

- Forum name\***: A text input field with a red border and the error message "You must supply a value here." below it.
- Forum type**: A dropdown menu set to "Standard forum for general use".
- Forum introduction\***: A rich text editor with a toolbar (font: Trebuchet, size: 1 (8 pt), color, background color, bold, italic, underline, strikethrough, subscript, superscript, link, unlink, list, unlink list, indent, outdent, undo, redo) and a large text area below it.
- Path:**: A small icon with a question mark and a warning symbol.
- Force everyone to be subscribed?**: A dropdown menu set to "No".
- Read tracking for this forum?**: A dropdown menu set to "Optional".
- Maximum attachment size**: A dropdown menu set to "500KB".

“Forum Name” - A short name of the forum (e.g. "Favorite color"), which will be displayed on the course homepage.

“Forum Type” - There are four forum types to choose from:

- **A single simple discussion** - A single topic discussion developed on one page, which is useful for short focussed discussions
- **Standard forum for general use** - An open forum where anyone can start a new topic at any time; this is the best general-purpose forum
- **Each person posts one discussion** - Each person can post exactly one new discussion topic (everyone can reply to them though); this is useful when you want each student to start a discussion about, say, their reflections on the week's topic, and everyone else responds to these
- **Q and A Forum** - Instead of initiating discussions Teachers (only) pose a question in the initial post of a discussion. Students may reply with an answer, but they will not see the replies of other Students to the question in that discussion until they have themselves replied to the same discussion.

“Forum Introduction” - Type the description of the forum here. Include precise instructions for students regarding the subject of the forum and, if necessary, the grading criteria.

“Force everyone to be subscribed?” - When a person is subscribed to a forum it means that they will be sent email copies of every post in that forum (posts are sent about 30 minutes after the post was first written).

People can usually choose whether or not they want to be subscribed to each forum. However, if you choose to force subscription on a particular forum then all course users will be subscribed automatically, even those that enroll at a later time. This is especially useful in the News forum and in forums towards the beginning of the course (before everyone has worked out that they can subscribe to these emails themselves).

If you choose the option "Yes, initially" then all current and future course users will be subscribed initially but they can unsubscribe themselves at any time. If you choose "Yes, forever" then they will not be able to unsubscribe themselves. Note how the "Yes, initially" option behaves when you update an existing forum: Changing from "Yes, initially" to "No" will not unsubscribe existing users, it will only affect future course users. Similarly changing later to "Yes, initially" will not subscribe existing course users but only those enrolling later. Lastly, there is an "Subscriptions not allowed" setting which prevents Students from subscribing to a Forum. Teachers may choose to be subscribed if they wish.

“Read tracking for this forum?” - If 'read tracking' for forums is enabled, users can track read and unread messages in forums and discussions. The instructor can choose to force a tracking type on a forum using this setting. There are three options for this setting:

- Optional (default) - students can turn tracking on or off for the forum at their discretion
- On - tracking is always on
- Off - tracking is always off

“Maximum attachment size” - When students attach files to their posts, you'll want to limit the maximum size of their posts so you don't use up all your server space. This is especially important if you are paying a commercial hosting company for your Moodle site.

Further forum options include...

The image shows a screenshot of a forum configuration interface with three sections:

- RSS:** "RSS feed for this activity" is set to "None". "Number of RSS recent articles" is set to "0".
- Grade:** "Allow posts to be rated?" has an unchecked "Use ratings" checkbox. The "Grade" scale is set to "Satisfactory". "Restrict ratings to posts with dates in this range:" is unchecked. The "From" and "To" date ranges are both set to "9 June 2008 20:00".
- Post threshold for blocking:** "Time period for blocking" is set to "Don't block". "Post threshold for blocking" and "Post threshold for warning" are both set to "0".

“RSS feed for this activity” - This option allows you to enable RSS feeds in this forum. You can select between two types of forums:

- **Discussions:** Using this, generated feeds will include new discussions in the forum with their initial post.
- **Posts:** Using this, generated feeds will include every new post in the forum

“Number of RSS recent articles” - This option allows you to select the number of articles to include in the RSS Feed. A number between 5 and 20 should be appropriate for most forums. Increase it if the forum is very used.

“Grade” - Forum posts can be rated using either a numerical scale or a scale made up of words. By default, only teachers can rate forum posts, though you can use a role override to allow students to rate each others' posts (see site administrator for forum permission adjustments). This is a useful tool for giving students participation grades. Any ratings given in the forum are recorded in the gradebook.

If you allow posts to be rated, you can choose a scale rating using the Grade drop-down menu. You can give a number of points to each post (from 1 to 100) or you can opt for either "Scale: Satisfactory" (Outstanding, Satisfactory and Not satisfactory) or "Separate and Connected ways of Knowing" (Mostly Connected Knowing, Separate and Connected, Mostly Separate Knowing).

You can allow only posts within a certain date range to be rated. This is useful if you want to keep students focused on the most recent content.

“Post threshold for blocking”

**Post threshold for warning** - Students (only) will be blocked from posting after a specified number of posts in a given period - this option is for setting the number of posts a Student may make before receiving a warning. Set to 0 to disable warnings.

**Post threshold for blocking** - This option is for setting the number of posts a Student may make in the period defined below. Set to 0 to disable blocking. If blocking is disabled, warnings will automatically be disabled.

**Time period for blocking** - This option defines the period in which a student may make a the number of posts specified in "Post threshold for blocking".

## Wikis

### What is a Wiki?

A wiki activity is a collection of collaboratively authored web documents. Basically, a wiki page is a web page everyone in your class can create together, right in the browser, without needing to know HTML. A wiki starts with one front page. Each author can add other pages to the wiki by simply creating a link to a page that doesn't exist yet.

Wikis get their name from the Hawaiian term "wiki wiki", which means "very fast". A wiki is indeed a fast method for creating content as a group. It's a hugely popular format on the Web for creating documents as a group. There is usually no central editor of a wiki, no single person who has final editorial control. Instead, the community edits and develops its own content. Consensus views emerge from the work of many people on a document.

In Moodle, wikis can be a powerful tool for collaborative work. The entire class can edit a document together, creating a class product, or each student can have their own wiki and work on it with you and their classmates.

### Why or where would I use a Wiki activity?

The free-form, collaborative nature of wikis makes them easy to apply in creative ways. Any sort of group process can be facilitated using a wiki. Consider the following ideas...

**"Group class notes"** - Usually, class notes are a solitary activity, but one person can easily miss an important point during a lecture through daydreaming or trying to understand a prior point. Students may also have difficulty deciding what information is important and what is elaboration or example. Creating a wiki for group lecture notes after a lecture gives students a chance to combine all their notes. Those that missed information can get it from their peers. The group can also decide what information is critical and give it proper emphasis. Group lecture notes could be done with the entire class, if it is small enough, or with small working groups. Groups can also compare notes for further discussion and refinement.

**"Group Project management"** - The most straightforward use of a wiki is as a tool for group collaboration for creating group projects. A teacher assigning a group project can give students a place to work by creating a wiki with the group mode enabled. This will give each group their own space to record research, to develop outlines and to create the final product. The teacher may create a submission date on which to turn off editing capabilities for students so that he or she can grade the final projects. Afterwards, the teacher may enable visible groups so that everyone can see each other's work.

**"Brainstorming"** - Brainstorming is a non-judgmental group creative process in which group members are encouraged to give voice to any ideas they personally consider relevant to the group exercise. In a face-to-face meeting, a brainstorming facilitator will usually stand in front of a big piece of paper and elicit ideas from the participants in the room. A teacher can create an online version of this process by setting up a wiki for the entire class or for smaller student groups

and asking people to submit ideas around a brainstorming topic. People can add ideas as they occur and link to other pages for elaboration.

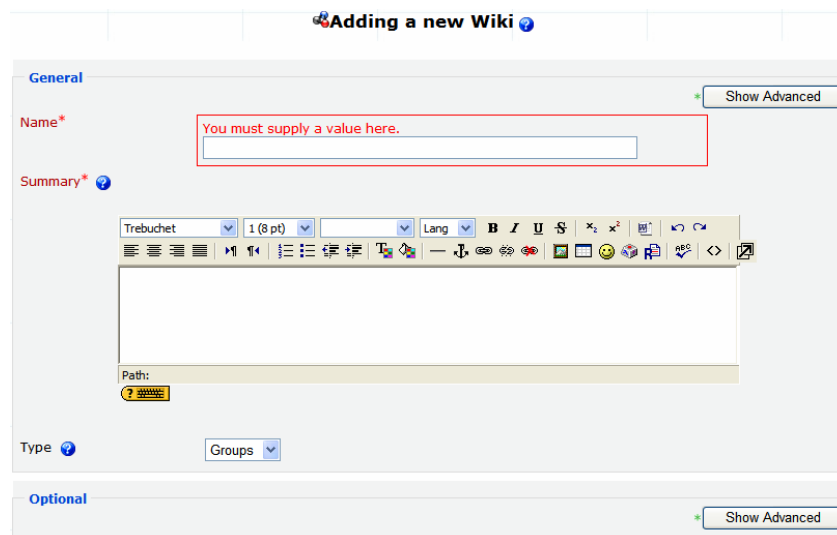
“Contribute to other wikis” - A teacher might assign his or her class the task of contributing to Wikipedia, or to another wiki on the Web, on any class topic, perhaps by assigning students to groups (or making it a class project if the class is small enough and the topic broad enough) and challenging them to collaboratively create an article they would feel confident posting to a public-information space. Students will use the course wiki to create drafts of the article they will eventually publish to the community at the end of the semester.

This type of assignment has a number of benefits:

- It gives students additional motivation to do their best, since they know their work will be viewed and critiqued by the public instead of just by their instructor.
- It can act as a summarizing activity for an entire semester’s worth of material.
- Students will know their work will be used by other people, not just graded and filed away.

### How do I implement a Wiki?

To implement a wiki activity, select it from the “Add an activity” in the course section you’d like to put it. This will open up the “Adding a New Wiki...” window that looks like the following.



The screenshot shows the 'Adding a new Wiki' form in Moodle. The form is titled 'Adding a new Wiki' and has a 'General' section. The 'Name\*' field is empty and has a red error message: 'You must supply a value here.' The 'Summary\*' field is empty and has a rich text editor toolbar above it. The 'Type' dropdown is set to 'Groups'. There are 'Show Advanced' buttons for both the General and Optional sections.

On the Adding a new wiki page, give the wiki a descriptive name. In the summary field, describe the purpose of the wiki and what you expect students to contribute. From there, the students can take it. Now, wiki implementation can be challenging and we suggest you reference the following resources for more information.

**Setting up:** [http://docs.moodle.org/en/Adding/editing\\_a\\_wiki](http://docs.moodle.org/en/Adding/editing_a_wiki)

**Adding pages:** [http://docs.moodle.org/en/Viewing\\_a\\_wiki#Adding\\_a\\_wiki\\_page](http://docs.moodle.org/en/Viewing_a_wiki#Adding_a_wiki_page)

**Editing pages:** [http://docs.moodle.org/en/Viewing\\_a\\_wiki#Editing\\_a\\_wiki\\_page](http://docs.moodle.org/en/Viewing_a_wiki#Editing_a_wiki_page)