Forums Quick Start, Tips & FAQs

Discourse Quick Start

Discourse Structure and Terminology

- In our online courses, **we use an online discussion forum called Discourse.**
- **In the Discourse forums**, individual messages are called **posts** and each collection of posts on a specific subject of conversation is called a **topic**.
- **Topics are organized** into **Categories** (e.g. "UNIT 0: Welcome!") and **Subcategories** (e.g. "Introductions").
- To add your first post to any category or subcategory, you start by adding a **topic**. Your topic will include a **title** (e.g. "Hello from Toronto") and a message.
- When you're adding a post to an existing topic or replying to another post, no title is required.
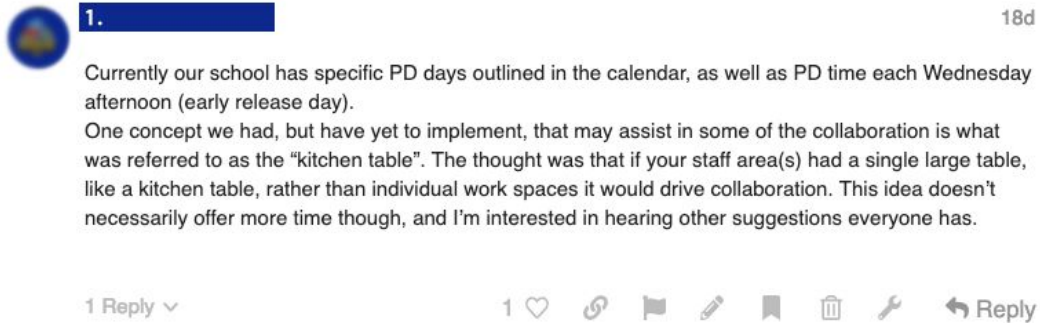
To learn more about the forums:
- The [Discourse New User Guide](#) is a great place to learn more about basic features and use.
- A Google search with your question in the format of "how do I do X on Discourse?" is often a good way to learn more about details not included in the [New User Guide](#).

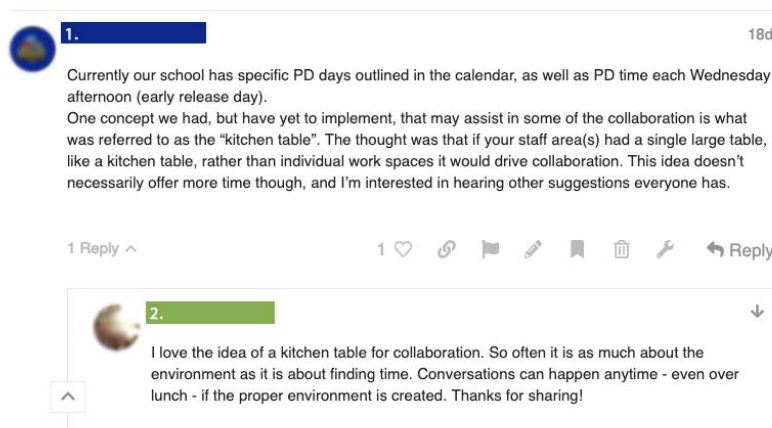## Replies and Discussion threading on the Discourse Forums

The Discourse forums platform shows replies in chronological order, and conversational threads only are shown "on demand." (Note: all of this is handled differently on mobile and will look different.) Let's look at some examples:

1. Here is a comment by Blue1 that generated some conversation, focusing on the idea of a professional development "Kitchen Table" (we've hidden the name of users in these examples, who shall henceforth be known as "Blue1," "Green2," etc.):
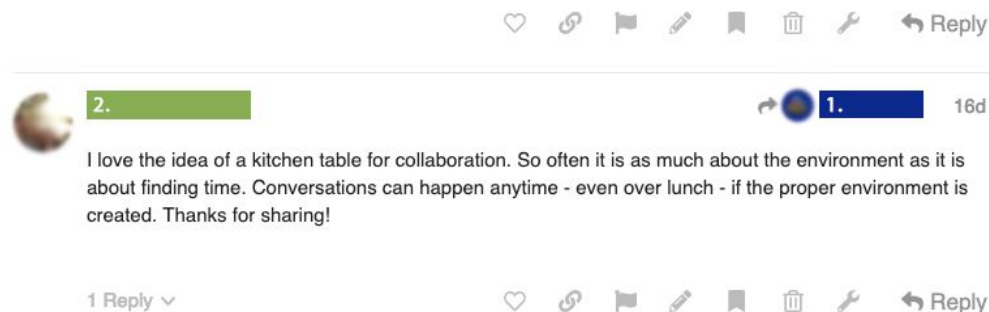

2. Notice the words "1 Reply" at the bottom left of this post. If you click it, you will see a response to Blue1 by Green2:

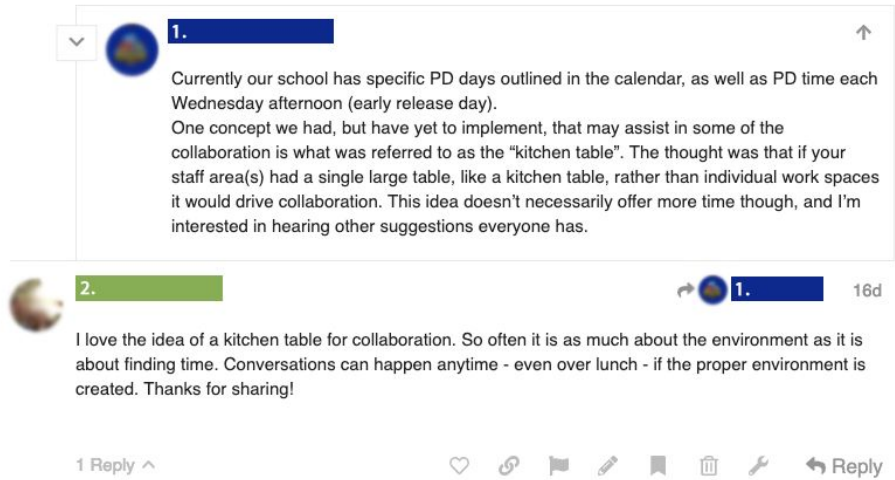3. Further down in a thread, you might see a post that was made in response to an earlier comment. For example, if you had seen Green2's post first, here's how it would look:
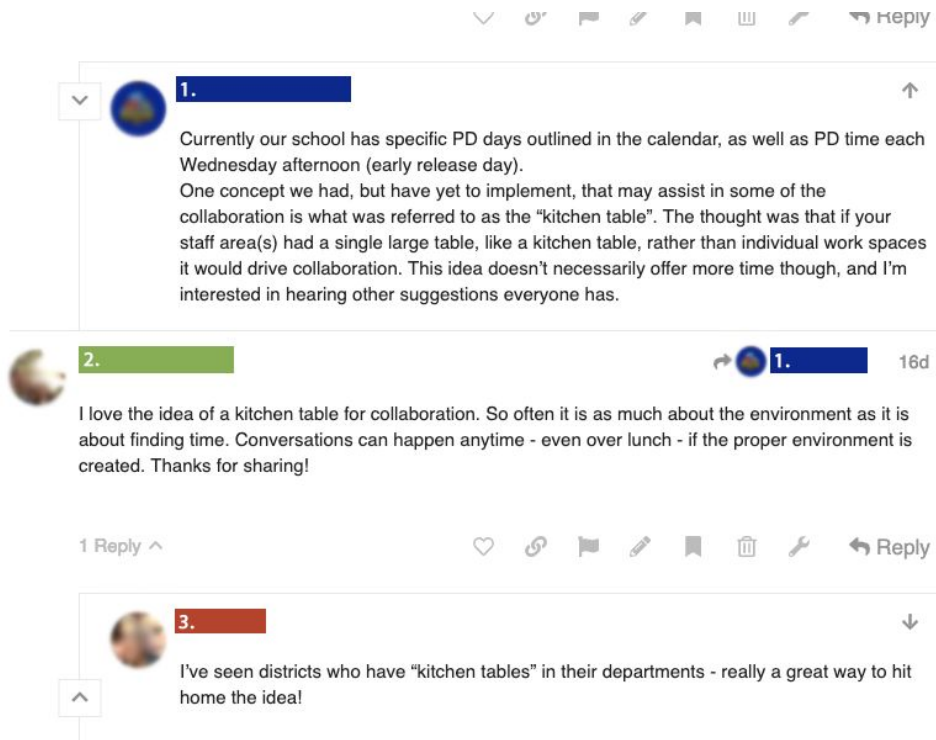
4. In this post, notice the tiny arrow and Blue1's username in the upper right-hand corner. That indicates that Green2 is replying to Blue1, and if you click it, the original comment will appear (scroll down for image):

5. In this case, someone also replied to Green2's comment. If you click on that reply, the whole "thread" will look like this:

Hopefully understanding how comments & replies work on Discourse Forums will help you follow conversations and connect with fellow learners.

Tips: Connecting with Other Learners

- **Tag another learner:** Use @+username to "tag" another learner in your post. (See more about "replies" on the forums below.)
- **Want to read more by a particular learner?** Double click on a user's name to see a list of their posts. (You can also do this with your own username.)
- **Direct Messaging:** You can also send them a direct message by clicking on their picture and then clicking the blue Message button (you can also message from their profile page).
- **Leverage your titles!** For example, if you're requesting resources or advice, consider mentioning it in your post title.
- **Acronyms can be confusing.** Consider using full phrases in your posts instead of acronyms, to help those unfamiliar with the term you're using.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I search the forums?
1. Click the magnifying glass icon in the upper-right hand corner and enter your search term.
2. Hint: Use quotation marks to search multiple words together (example: "special education"). You can also search for learners using @+username.

How can I find my own posts?
1. Click your round profile icon in the top-right corner.
2. Click on your username.
3. Click on summary.

Can I use our forums on mobile?
Yes, you can access the Discourse forums on mobile on a mobile web browser (not an app):
1. Log in to the course on your mobile device.
2. Tap any "Launch Forums" button (if you're in the edX app, use the "View on Web" button to open in a browser).
3. Click "OK" in the pop-up.

How do I change my email or notification settings?
1. Click your round profile icon in the top-right corner and click your username.
2. Click Preferences.
3. Click Emails or Notifications on the left.

How do I update my profile?
1. Click the round profile icon in the top-right corner. Click on your username and then click on "Preferences".

2. Click "Profile" on the left.
3. In the About Me section, provide some information about your background and customize your profile.

How can I see replies to a post in a forums topic?

1. To see details about how the platform handles posts & replies, see [Discourse Quick Start](#) below.

**How can I make my posts more accessible to all learners?**

You can add alternative text (alt text) to images. Alt text describes the relevant pieces of information that someone needs from an image. It allows those with visual impairments, those who use screen readers, and others to fully understand your post. Here's how to do it:

1. When you add an image to a post in Discourse (by uploading or dragging & dropping from your computer), you will see the text that Discourse uses to code for an image. Add alt text by using quotation marks inside the parentheses of the code; it should look like this: ![FileName|FileSize] (upload://.jpeg "alt text goes here"). See below for an example where we added alt text to our course image.
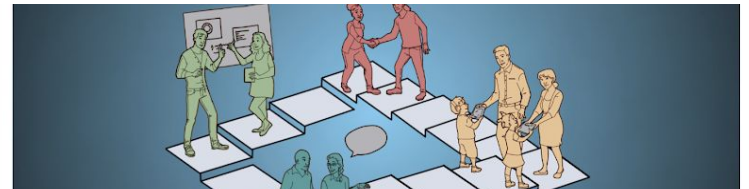
2. If your attempt at adding alt text is not working, check your quotation marks - for example, if your alt text itself also contains quotation marks, it probably won't work. You'll know it has worked when you see your image displayed correctly in the right-hand preview box.

Please let us know if you have other questions or tips for your fellow learners!