

## Moodle Forums for ESOL Students

### Introduction

An internet forum (or message board) is a space where users can post comments or questions for others to read. Other users can then add further comments or replies. Internet forums are often used to get answers to specific questions or to comment on and discuss a particular topic.

They also have potential as tools for language teaching. Forums allow students to communicate with each other, and also leave a record of their language use, which can be used to demonstrate learning and also areas for further work. I have found this to be a useful tool with my own students particularly in combination with websites that may be useful to them in their everyday life. Below are some examples of forums that I used with my students. I set up these forums using Moodle and have included a guide to doing so underneath, however there are a huge number of different tools and websites that can be used to do this.

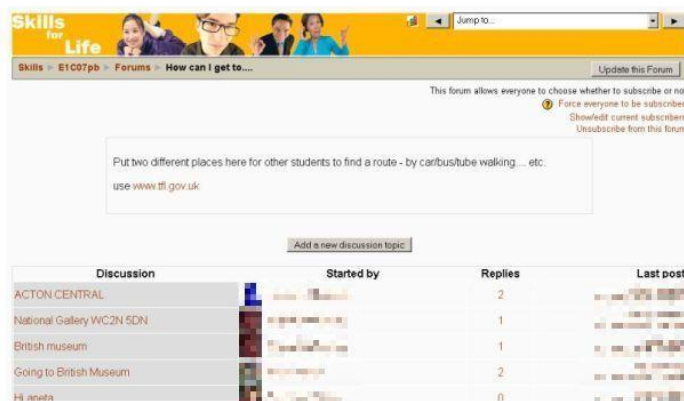
### Example forums – a) E1/E2 (Beginner/Elementary)

With students who have a lower level of English, I use forums as a way of getting students to interact with websites, and also to practise new areas of language.

#### 1) Transport for London

The Transport for London website ([www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk)) has a very useful Journey Planner feature for finding routes by public transport between different addresses in London. I have found this an excellent resource for students to practise language for

asking for information about public transport. I introduced students to the website by setting up a “customer service” role play where half the class sat at computers with the TfL Journey Planner open, while the other half had to choose a starting point (usually their house) and a place in London that they wanted to go to. They then asked their partners for the best route.



Once the students had practised the language orally, I asked them to use a

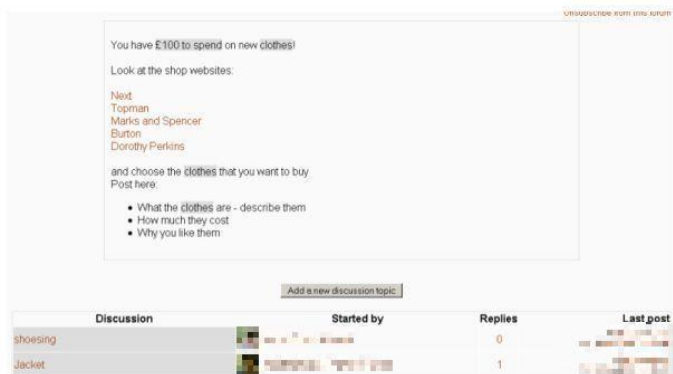
Moodle forum to ask the class for the same information. Students posted the start and end point of their journeys; they then looked at one of their classmates’ posts and used the website to look up a journey. The students would then have to interpret the information given by the TfL website and write instructions for their classmates. I monitored the students’ language use in the forum and could print out pages from the forum for the students to correct the language on the page. Finally, the students could return to working orally, as above, with a different student to practise any points that they needed to work on. With these activities, I was able to get students to practice oral language for finding information about local transport, I could introduce the students to finding information on a website that was likely to be genuinely useful to

them in the future, I was able to get students to look at the language structures used in questions and in writing instructions to get somewhere and I was able to give them some oral fluency practice.

## 2) Online Shopping

Students had been looking at language to describe items of clothing. For this exercise

I set up a forum in Moodle, with the premise that the students had £100 (unfortunately not real money) to buy clothes that they liked. The students had to look at the websites I had provided, choose clothes that they liked and post them in the forum, complete with a description of why they liked them.



This allowed the students to practise using the vocabulary that they had

learnt for describing clothes, it also gave them practice finding information from the internet. The students were genuinely interested in each others responses and so they got the opportunity to practise question forms and other language areas that arose in 'conversation'. Again, I could print out the students' work and get them to find errors for correction, etc. There was also the opportunity to develop students' numeracy skills.

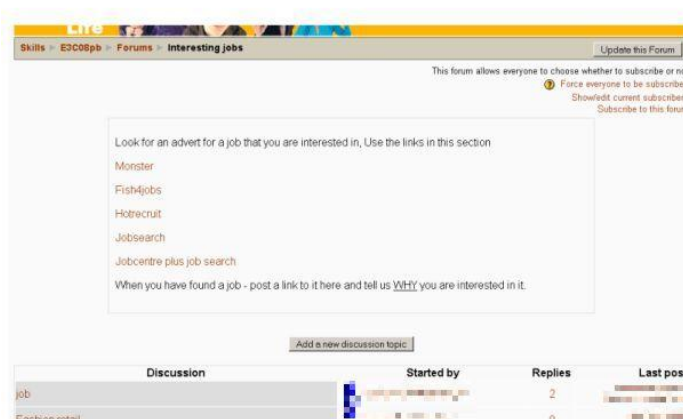
This exercise can easily be adapted; I have also used forums in a similar way with the Argos website to look more generally at online shopping. I have also asked students to find a present for someone in the class and to explain their choice.

## **Example forums - b)E3/L1 (Pre-intermediate/Intermediate)**

### Looking for work

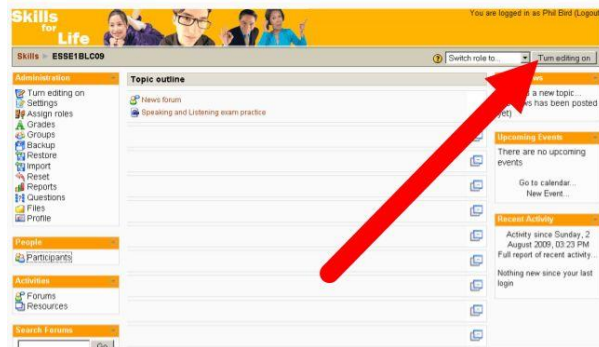
With a higher level of English, students are able to express much more of their personal opinions through forums. I used a forum to encourage students to look for job vacancies, using a number of different websites.

Students searched the websites for positions that they were interested in. They then posted the link to the advert in the forum and described why they were interested in the particular position. This exercise helped students to interact more closely with a selection of the numerous employment websites on the net. Being able to describe the motivation in applying for a particular position is often an important part of finding employment. This exercise gave students the chance to develop these skills.

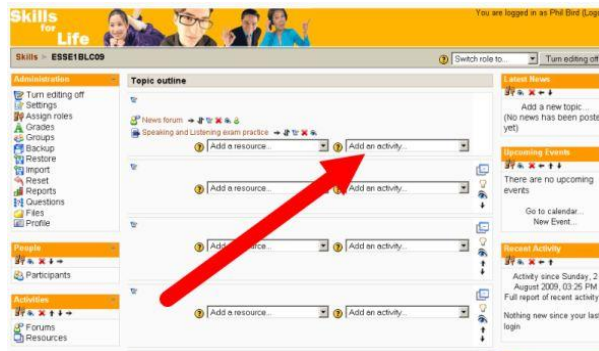


## How to create a forum using Moodle

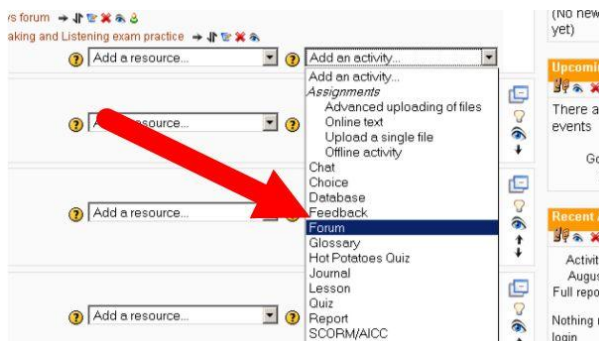
1. The first step is to turn editing on, using the “*Turn editing on*” button, usually in the top right-hand corner. If this button is not there, it probably means that you have not been given editing rights, contact your Moodle administrator to resolve this.



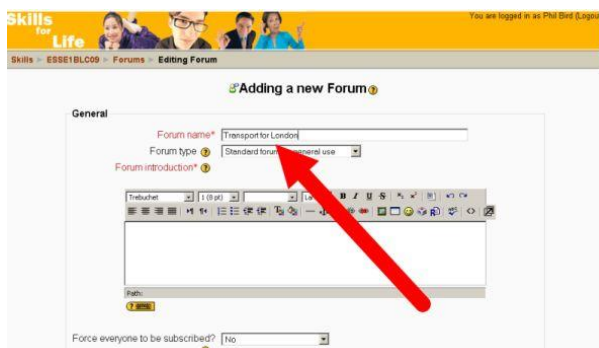
2. Next, select the “*Add an activity...*” drop-down menu in the section where you want to add the forum.



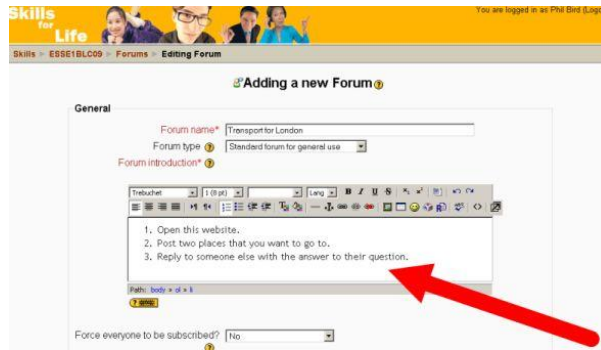
3. In the drop-down menu that appears, select “*Forum*”



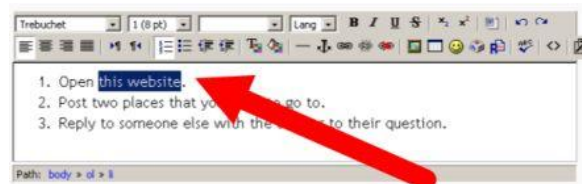
4. In the “*Adding a new forum*” page that appears, add a title for your forum. This is what the students will see on their course page, so ensure that it is appropriate for them.



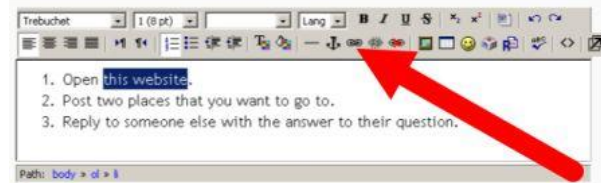
5. Next, insert the instructions for the forum. This is the text that the students will see when they enter the forum. We are going to add the weblink in this section.



6. To add the weblink: first, highlight the text that you want to be the link (ie. "this website"). This will be the text that students click on to get to the website you want to use.



7. Next, click on the chain link icon above the text entry box. Make sure that the text is still highlighted.



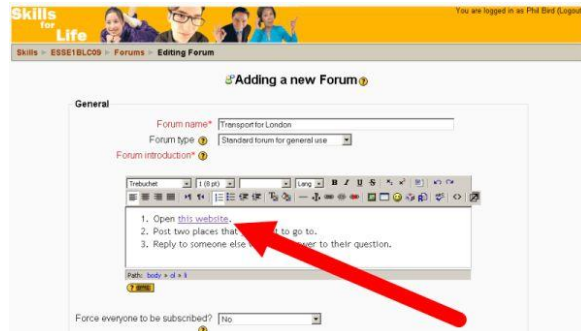
8. In the window that appears, enter the web address that you want to link to in the URL box (URL means web address). It might be easiest just to use the right mouse button to copy and paste the address from another window. **N.B. Ensure that the web address starts with 'http://'** – if it just has 'www.' it will not work.



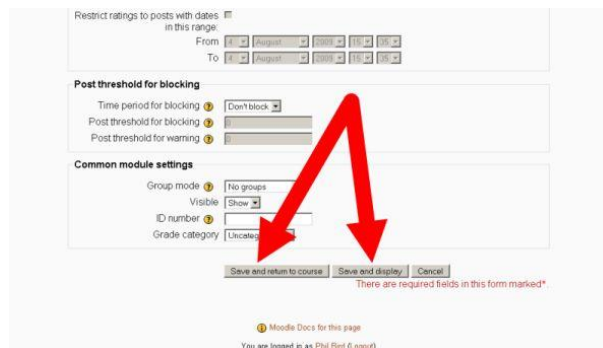
9. It is a good idea to select “New window” in the “Target” menu, as this means that the website will open in a separate window. This means that the student will be able to see the forum and the website linked to at the same time.  
Click OK to save the link.



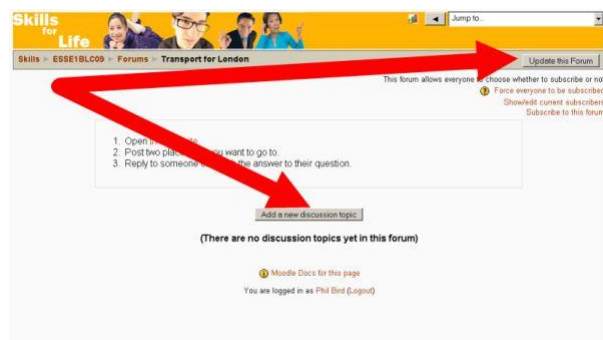
10. You should now see that the text you highlighted has changed colour and is underlined.  
The other options on the page are purely optional; you will not usually need to change them at all.



11. Finally, click on either the “Save and display” or the “Save and return to course” options at the bottom of the page. **N.B. If you navigate away from the page before clicking on either of these save buttons you will lose EVERYTHING!**



12. From the main forum page, students and teachers can contribute to the forum using the “Add a new discussion topic” button. If you wish to edit any aspect of the forum click on the “Update this Forum” button, which will take you back to the fourth step above.



*This document can be downloaded from:*

<http://classroom201x.wordpress.com/2010/01/04/moodle-forums-for-esol-students/>