



Using The Course Announcements Tool

Ongoing support throughout an online course or activity is an essential part of your duties as a facilitator. As you maintain your presence in the online space, you will need to respond and react to the discussion and activity of your learners.

You will need to attentively monitor and observe your learners' activity, noticing when they might be experiencing difficulties. You will need to provide learners with guidance about their language use, helping them to better understand the target language of the course. Ongoing support for the learning space will enable learners increased access to all aspects of the course space and materials by way of letting learners know that they are on the right learning path.

Here are examples of ways that you can provide ongoing support throughout a course or activity:

- Monitor and participate in discussions.
- Review grammar points and other teaching points.
- Model language use whenever possible and applicable.
- Mark and provide feedback for assignments.
- Answer inquiries and maintain your office hours.

- Check in with learners who may be absent or struggling.
- Organize group and collaborative work.
- Provide course news and updates.

While all of these ways to provide ongoing support are essential duties of a facilitator, the course announcements space for providing news and updates affords a unique flexibility that makes it particularly useful for online language learning contexts. In this space, you can react and respond to course activity as it happens. On the next page are some ideas to make the most of your course announcements tool.

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Ideas for Course Announcements Tool

MAKE ROUTINE UPDATES

Stemming from the welcome message, you have the ability to create a habitual course message by posting on a regular schedule. Weekly messages at the start of the week, for example, will put your learners in the habit of expecting this information in the same space on a regular basis. This type of routine communication will be welcome to learners studying in a second language. Weekly postings (or whatever frequency of routine postings you decide to use) can act as the base of your course announcement activity – other posts throughout the week, as needed, will be valuable.

PREPARE YOUR POSTS BEFOREHAND

There are benefits to preparing your routine posts before the start of the course. One is that having them prepared will save you time during the course. Your prepared course announcements do not need to be posted as-is during the course; however, having them pre-written will allow you to adapt them quickly for posting. Writing them all at once will also help you to create a standard format for these updates, which again will benefit language learners by way of their consistency.

Another reason to pre-write your course announcements is so that you can take time to directly connect the content of your messages to course language. Once you have identified target language in your course design, you can use the announcement posts to highlight this language and specific problem areas that you anticipate. You can systematically and evenly distribute these throughout the course announcement posts.

POST REMINDERS

Language learners in an online environments will end up using a large amount of their cognitive load on language alone. Online spaces are generally text heavy, and this requires a lot of reading and writing work on the part of the learner. Posting reminders about support and other course features will help learners keep these features in mind and increase the chances that learners will know how to access help at the point when they need it. It may be useful to post reminders about the following:

- types of support and links to their location
- examples of effective language use
- any general discussion forum and its purposes
- your facilitator contact information and office hours
- assignment or activity due dates
- active discussions and their location
- any supplemental course materials and links to their location.



RESPOND TO COURSE ACTIVITY

The announcements section of the online space allows you to communicate for the duration of the course, making it a useful tool for responding quickly and visibly to activity and discussion that is taking place in the course.

You may want to comment on small problems or language tendencies that you notice reoccurring within the class. For example, learners are being too formal or not formal enough in the forum or in emails. You can also respond positively to class activity, commending certain actions to provide motivation and feedback for your learners – for example, praising a group of learners for using vocabulary learned in past units. Using announcement messages, you can also highlight salient discussion points from the forum, reinforcing the importance of certain questions and debates that are particularly tied to course content.

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

You can use the announcements feed for suggesting supplemental language activities to your learners. Language learners often look for additional ways to practice language and gain feedback about their language use. Even scheduling certain types of activities on a reoccurring basis for specific days of the week is an excellent way to help learners create the habitual practice needed to develop their target language skills. Three examples of activities you can use in your class are:

Vocabulary days

Every Friday, learners post sentences or a short story in the general discussion forum using use that week's vocabulary. You can initiate this activity through the announcements space, and even post your own short story there to model language use.

Audio recordings

You can challenge learners to post an audio recording of themselves reading some of the course material for others to hear and comment on. Posting a recording of their own voice in target language, for everyone to hear, will be motivating for learners. This type of activity has the added value of developing digital skills for using audio recording technology.

Idioms practice

Idioms are ubiquitous in language, yet sometimes difficult to work into lesson plans and curriculum. Weekly or even daily announcement posts highlighting a different course-related idiom will be useful to learners who want to extend their learning into more informal language.



INTRODUCE AUTHENTIC MATERIAL

The announcement section of the course space is a great place to tie your course content to authentic language use and real world examples. Post links to news stories and other information that are relevant to the course content and to your learners' own contexts. If you are mainly teaching immigrants, for example, learners may find the language used in a local news story about immigration useful. You can also challenge learners to respond to these posts, or post their own links, in a general discussion forum.

USE MULTIMEDIA

Providing multimedia in a course or activity is important for language learning because various technologies are often associated with particular language skills such as listening or reading. Posting your weekly announcements as a video, for example, provides learners with a listening experience and a visual communication experience (e.g., gestures, body language).

These days, the short turnaround between shooting an informal announcement video and posting it even allows you to comment on class discussions as they are taking place, or shortly thereafter. Video can also help to increase your facilitator presence, reminding learners that you are a real person with a real desire to teach and help them learn in the class – a fact easily forgotten in an asynchronous online environment where learners may only see your face in your profile photo.

See this [example video](#) of a weekly announcement. Notice how the facilitators review past content and discussion, they highlight language and phrases, and they comment on ongoing discussion. A video like this can add a great deal of facilitator presence in the course, and at the same time, provide a variety of language experience compared to learners reading a text post.

