

USING ONLINE COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO SUPPLEMENT THE COURSE

To help you communicate easily with students at a distance, you may wish to use

- Email
- Discussion Board
- Chat

These activities may be done using free third-party tools, such as Hotmail, Blackboard, WebCT, Yahoo groups, etc.

Email

You may want to **email** individual students to

- Greet them on the first day of class
- Make short announcements
- Remind them to do an assignment
- Remind them to complete a quiz
- Give them personalized feedback
- Schedule chat or discussion sessions
- Encourage and motivate them

Example of a Group Email:

Dear Everyone,

I hope you all are enjoying the course. Just a reminder: please be sure to complete Unit A4 by the end of the week. We will be having a live chat session Friday at 4 p.m. I will send you an email on Thursday evening with the “chat assignment” so you can prepare.

I look forward to speaking with you then.

Best,

Maria

Example of an Individual Email:

Dear Diego,

Hi. I have just received your email in which you have recorded your latest quiz score on unit A4. It looks as if you need to focus on your listening skills a bit more. Please be sure to listen to the video in the unit at least two or three times. And when you make a mistake on the exercises, make sure you review your errors. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email me again. Thanks. I hope you are enjoying the class.

Best,

Maria

Discussion Board and Chat Activities

Each module offers a **supplementary discussion board or chat activity**, which allows students to have "a conversation in writing" with their classmates that is related to the material they have learned in the module. The discussion board or chat activities are culminating activities that close the unit. These supplementary activities can be found in the "Discussion Board or Chat Activities" section of the Unit Notes for Units A.4, B.4, or C.4 in *Longman English Interactive 1 and 2*. In *Longman English Interactive 3 and 4*, each unit offers two supplementary discussion board or chat activities. Details for managing these can be found in the individual Unit Notes.

Discussion Board activities do not take place in "real time"; that is, teachers and students can read and send messages whenever they want to. Students do not all have to be there at the same time. Chat activities, on the other hand, take place in "real time." Choose either a Discussion Board or a Chat activity depending on whether your students can access the Internet at the same time.

The next two sections offer tips for managing Discussion Board and Chat activities.

Tips for Managing a Discussion Board Activity

Before the Discussion Board Activity

- Give the Discussion Board topic a clear title, such as "Module B: A Typical Weekend for a Famous Person."
- Before beginning the discussion, via email
 - Tell students when they should log on to the Discussion Board.
 - Explain to students what the theme will be.
 - Explain to students what linguistic points you will focus on (for example, the simple present tense, vocabulary of daily activities, etc.).
- Post a message to the Discussion Board setting up the topic. Include
 - some background information on the theme
 - a question or questions to answer
 - a model
 - a due date for participation in the discussion

Example:

Imagine you are a famous person. What do you do on the weekend? Write a story describing your daily activities and your leisure activities. Here is an example:

I am Gwyneth Paltrow. I have a lot of fun on the weekends. On Friday evening, I go out to eat at an expensive restaurant and go dancing with my good friends. I usually get home at about 2 A.M. I get up at noon on Saturday. My cook makes me a delicious lunch. I go shopping in the afternoon. I sometimes go to parties on Saturday night. On Sunday, I get up and read the paper. In the afternoon, I always take my dog for a walk in the park. I relax at home on Sunday evening.

During the Discussion Board Activity

- Log on frequently to check for students' responses.
- After some students have responded, post your own response.
 - Use students' names.
 - Summarize the points made so far, if appropriate to the topic.
 - Give positive feedback to students who have responded. Focus on both content and linguistic points.
 - Correct students' errors, adhering to the guidelines you set forth during the introduction. Focus on errors that the student makes frequently, or that several students make.
 - Encourage students who have not yet participated to respond.
 - Ask additional probing questions based on students' comments, if appropriate to the topic.
- Continue to log on frequently and post responses in this manner.

Ending the Discussion Board Activity

- On the date you set to end the Discussion Board, post a summarizing response.
- Follow up in the classroom, asking students for their reactions to the Discussion Board activity.

Tips for Managing a Chat Session

Before the Chat Session

- Divide the class into groups. Keep the Chat groups small. Five or six students in one group is optimal.
- Before beginning the chat session, via email
 - Explain to students what the Chat topic will be.
 - Tell students when the Chat session will take place. Be clear about the start and end times. (Include times in different zones if this applies to your group.)
 - Tell students what their groups are.

During the Chat Session

- Use questions to start the Chat. The Teacher's Guide Unit Notes offer suggestions.
- Offer open-ended or neutral questions or set up a debate to make the discussion interesting.
- Build in a "warming up" period. Allow time at the beginning of the session for informal conversation. Make small talk while you are waiting for all students to arrive.
- Set a time limit of five minutes for the warming up period and then start the formal session.
- Stick to the topic. Step in and remind students to focus on the task if you see students getting off topic. You can use statements or questions, such as "How do you think this relates to our topic?" or "This may be a good idea for another Chat, but let's get back to our main focus, which is...."
- Teach students how to 'talk online.' Messages in the first few Chat sessions may seem disconnected. Ask students to make sure they read what classmates have written before they send a comment.
- Actively include quiet students. Some students seem to 'drop out' of a discussion. Ask these students questions directly, such as "Oswaldo, what's your view on this topic?"
- Get the discussion going and then step back. Just like in the face-to-face classroom, the instructor gets the discussion going and then steps back to let the students actively communicate.

Ending the Chat Session

- Give a five-minute warning. Let students know that the live online discussion is going to end soon. Allow students to make their final comments.
- Sum up the discussion as the final steps to the Chat session. Write a few sentences that are general statements about the topic and the session.
- Say goodbye. Leave a minute or so at the very end for people to say goodbye.