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Postgraduate Studies in Study of Religions

Study Guide

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

2011-2012

Contents

Becoming a Student 3

1 Juggling, home, work and study 4

2 What is Postgraduate study? 4

3 Getting started, thinking about study skills 5

4 Reading, writing & tackling your assignments 5
- 4.1 Understanding the question - Identifying the issues and key words 6
- 4.2 Reading 6
- 4.3 Note taking 7
- 4.4 Mapping your understanding 8
- 4.5 Competing arguments in writing 8
- *4.6* Plan your essay 9
- *4.7* Writing a draft assignment 10

5 Referencing 10
- 5.1 Refworks 11

6 Plagiarism 11
- 6.1 What is plagiarism 11
- 6.2 How to avoid Plagiarism 12

7 Finding your voice - positionality and reflexivity 12

8 Residentials 13

9 Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment - VLE) 13
- 9.1 Module and programme common room areas 14
- 9.2 Discussion forums 14
- 9.3 Notice boards 15
- 9.4 Study Resources 15

10 Learning Resources Centre 16
- 10.1 Borrowing 16
- 10.2 Renewals 17
- 10.4 Fines 17
- 10.5 E-resources 18
- 10.6 SCONUL access 18

11 Yours and fellow participants' experience 19

12 Resources from outside the programme 19

Appendix 1 - Understanding the question 20
Appendix 2 - Active Reading Guidance 24
Appendix 3 - Mapping your essay 25
Appendix 4 - Trinity Saint David plagiarism rules 26
Appendix 5 - Moodle VLE 28

Becoming a Student

Now you are a student! Congratulations and welcome.

We are sure you will enjoy your time studying with us, and find the module and course both interesting and rewarding. However, before you begin your journey into studying your modules within the MA Study of Religions, it is important to take a little time to consider what this will involve and what your commitments need to be as you undertake the course. Think here not only in terms of subject knowledge but also in terms of how you will fit studying into your life as a mature part time (and probably working) student. You will need to develop a range of skills that allows you to fully enjoy your course and gain the most from your reading, the experiences of your fellow course participants and your course tutors. These skills will include:

1. Organisational skills, thinking about how you will plan and schedule your reading, thinking and writing time;
2. Study skills, developing a range of reading, writing associated skills;
3. Writing skills, how you will analysis and synthesise your reading then write in a style asked of you by your course team within the time frame required;
4. Knowledge and understanding, gaining subject specific knowledge and relating and understanding this in context;
5. Research skills, searching and finding relevant and appropriate information related to your area of interest;
6. Communication skills, communicating online is becoming part of life today and you will learn and develop your own sense of identity and style as we engage in our learning online

This short section at the beginning of the course will support you to think about the new skills you will develop over this and future modules, and help orientate you into becoming a distance-learning student.

First a metaphor for learning:

When I think of learning, I think of a river canoe journey. We begin with learning to use the paddle, the water is smooth as we get to know our fellow travellers and we practice our capsize drills, sprits are high as we begin our journey together. Soon we come encounter an eddy and we negotiate the new way the water moves before we stabilise ourselves ready for our first rapid. As we negotiate the water, we can feel overwhelmed, we shout to, and look out for, our new friends as we nervously and anxiously try to remember and put into practise all we learnt. We all reach the other side, sit back once again on the smooth water, reflect on our achievement as we mastered over the first challenge. Our journey continues…

We hope you will enjoy your journey with us and very much look forward to working with you over the next years.

1 Juggling, home, work and study

One of the largest challenges mature part time students face is the time challenge. You may have family and work commitments and now you have to fit in your studying time. We understand this challenge and have taken this into consideration within the designed of the module and course. There are a number of skills and practicalities you can implement to support your balancing act.

1.1 Plan your time; be clear about your deadlines and plan the time you need (and you have) to meet these. If you have not already done so, look at the study calendar provided by your tutor and mark in your diary when your assignments are due.

1.2 Diary your time; make sure you set time aside to study. You may find it too difficult to fit in your study around everything else you need to do, so make sure you mark out your time and stick to it.

1.3 Train your family & friends; this may sound odd, but if you have a family they will be on the journey with you and you need their support. They need to understand why you are studying and how they can help. Discuss the time you need to study so everyone at home understands and feels part of your journey (coffee of course is always welcome when you are in the middle of writing your assignment!). Your friends (and work colleagues) too will become sounding boards for your new ideas and intellectual struggles. You may have to miss the occasional evening out or favourite TV show, your family and friends will support you and feel part of your achievement when you complete.

1.4 Know your study pattern; we are all at our best at different times. Are you an AM or a PM person? Be flexible initially but learn when your study better, tackle the most challenging work when you are at your strongest, and remember to take frequent breaks.

When the going gets tough….

All students at some point sit and wonder why they started (usually when there is an impending deadline and the sun is shinning)! Learning at a distance is not as isolating as it once was; just talking to other students can sometimes be all that is needed. So remember you are not alone on your journey, you have family, friends, your peers and tutors and the online environment helps you to remain in touch. If there are times when you fall behind with your reading and writing, communicate with your course members and tutors we are there to help and support.

2 What is Postgraduate study?

We have talked a little about your journey and the organisational skills you will develop, but what about other study skills you need to develop and what is being a postgraduate anyway?

Being a postgraduate is a unique opportunity to deepen your knowledge and understanding in your chosen area, but it is no picnic and you will need to learn to develop independent thinking, reflecting on the readings given, learn to carry out your own research and write extended essays. As you progress, you will develop, reflect on and keep developing all a range of skills as you go through your course. In this section, we introduce some key aspects and point you towards further resources to support you.

- Reading and writing associated skills
- Knowledge and understanding
- Research skills
- Communication skills

As you go through your studies you will gain all these skill, they may not come over night but after you complete your MA you will realise how far you have come.

We will begin however, with thinking about the skills you will need for your assignment - that is reading and writing associated skills.

3 Getting started, thinking about study skills

The practise of studying is a skill in itself and your study skills will develop over time throughout the course; time invested in thinking and reflecting about how you study is well spent. There is a great deal of information on the internet in relation to study skills, and a number of useful websites, we have included 2 below, but there are many and it is worth taking some time to look at these.

http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/

http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/ai/ask/index.php

There are a number of books in the Learning Resources Centre (See section 10) related to study skills available to loan. If you are interested in investing in a text to support your skills development throughout the MA the two mentioned below are recommended:

Bedford, D & Wilson, E (2009) *Study skills for part time students.* Harlow, Pearson Education
And
Cottrell, S. (2008) *The study skills handbook*. Palgrave Macmillan

4 Reading, writing & tackling your assignments

At postgraduate level you will be embarking on an advanced level of study. This will require not merely the description or repetition of knowledge itself, but the analysis, evaluation and interpretation of knowledge and find your own voice (we will come onto this). In the beginning this may sound daunting. However, there are steps you can put in place from the start to help.

4.1 Understanding the question - Identifying the issues and key words

Tackling an essay begins with the question (whether it is your question or someone else's). This involves identifying the issues of the question. In this section we talk a little about how to tackle this first step.

Begin with looking at the question and ask yourself…

- Have I identified clearly the key issue the essay question asks be to tackled?
- What are the key words (commonly called command or process words) in the question, think about particular terms and phrases?
- Once you think you understand what the question is asking write down what you think and what you have to do in your own words.

Look at Appendix 1 for the main process words that are key when thinking about the question.

4.2 Reading

Do you know how *you* read? Do you ever sit and read something then think you didn't remember any of it when you finished! We have all done this, whether it is because it a complex piece we are reading or because it is 10pm and we are tired. You will be reading a great deal for your course, and will develop strategies to enjoy and tackle the complexities. We will also talk about what to do when you are tired! You will learn to process the meaning of articles and link these with others as you progress. For some students this is the most enjoyable area of study as your knowledge develops and understanding deepens. Below are a few key points and Appendix 2 'Active Reading Guidance' is an example template for active focused reading.

Perhaps you remember when at school we learnt to Scan and Skim? These are useful reading strategies when you are faced with a lot. They help you gain the gist of an article, allowing you to make a judgement on its value to your research, or just get a flavour of what it's main point it (it also helps with note taking).

Scanning is a useful way to read a whole article. To do this read:

- The abstract (if there is one), if not the introduction;
- Subheadings;
- The first sentence of each paragraph;
- The conclusion (or last few paragraphs if it is long).

Skimming is slightly less in depth than scanning and is useful if you are revising readings for key areas, but cannot remember where you have read them. You are reading the article for key words and / or statistics that are specific, you are not following the whole article. Once you have found your keywords read the paragraph and decide from there if you need to scan or reread the article.

Questions
If your tutor has not implied the areas you should be thinking about when reading, begin the process of jotting down a few questions you would like the article to address before you begin. Then ask yourself at the end - did the article answer my questions and if not, why not?

Unfamiliar words and phases
Part of being a student is coming across unfamiliar words, phrases and long and complex text. The internet is wonderful these days and you can use Google to find the meanings of unfamiliar words. Complex text takes more time and you will need to revisit some articles, which can at first appear impregnable. Using the active reading template will help with this.

4.3 Note taking

Like reading, you will come to develop your own note taking methods and skills. For some taking notes and reading are activities that sit side by side. Notes are important and Appendix 2 'Active Reading Guidance' can support your notes. Notes help you to identify the key arguments in the article, and like reading, there are a number of ways to good note taking and you will develop your own style.

Use a highlighter to mark key areas, but don't overuse it as you may end up with a totally highlighted and yellow article.

Short note taking is the process of writing in the margins of the article, some people develop their own shorthand for this. This is a useful process when used with highlighting, but again try not to overdo this as it can become confusing with too much shorthand on the text.

Both the above techniques are useful but writing a summary of the article (as in Appendix 2) is an important part of note taking. You will revisit your notes (and sometime add to them) as well as your readings as you progress through your studies. It is important then they stand alone and make sense to you. Your bibliographic software (Refworks, see section 5.1) is a good place to keep article summaries as you develop your own personal resources.

Be clear with your note-taking when you are reading, this will help you to avoid plagiarism. The notes you take as you research for your assignments should make quite clear where the material comes from (including page numbers) and what is a direct quotation from your source, or what you have paraphrased. In your essays, make sure that you reference all material that you have consulted. This includes all:

- Printed sources (books, journal articles, newspaper articles);
- Internet sources;
- Direct quotations;
- Paraphrases of material from your reading;
- Allusions to facts and ideas you have encountered in your reading.

4.4 Mapping your understanding

So you have the question and you have read. Now it is time for you to think about writing - where to start! Sitting looking at that blank sheet of paper can be daunting, so the first thing to remember is that word processing is wonderful, it doesn't matter what you write as a first sentence you can change it…. So write something or draw a map!

Essay mapping

A useful way to start you thinking about your essay on paper is to create a map (a mind map). This will help you decide what information you need and where to get it, who you agree with from your reading (and who you disagree with). You will need to draw upon a range of authors, arguments, agreements etc. Your map may help you to see the main sections of your essay and help you decide how to sequence it - it becomes a picture.

You can do this as a mind map or a table. Appendix 3 has an example of both. Doing this will help you realise how much knowledge you have already gained and it will also get over the 'blank page' syndrome!

Whatever you decide to do, remember to ask yourself some questions at the end:

- How do my ideas fit together?
- Does it all make sense? Why, or why not?
- Is there anything missing, unclear, or problematic about it?
- Is my position clear? Why, what evidence have I used?
- How does it fit with your personal experience (remember this is important)?
- Could there be other ways of looking at it?
- What are the gaps?
- What more do you need to find out?

4.5 Competing arguments in writing

The main aim behind an essay is to demonstrate your understanding of the arguments in the literature (and beyond), then to form an opinion about it and then argue your opinion (or position), illustrating why you take this position. To do this you must of course read widely to understand different positions. You don't have to prove a point, you only need to convince (with your writing) that the position you take has merit, so referencing and examples are important. So how to get started?

1. Read widely - you need to know what the arguments are from all sides of your topic and you need to understand each position. Some questions to ask yourself at this stage:
    - Who are the key thinkers in this area?
    - What evidence do they call upon to support their theories?

- What are the gaps in their evidence, what don't they talk about?
- What is your position, and why - what are the gaps in your thinking also, can you explain these?

2. Form your own position - what you understand and why (be clear about this).
3. Then begin with a statement of your assertion (what you are claiming / a position statement), why you think this is significant, and its relevance in relation to what you are going to discuss.
4. Review critically the literature about that your theory (or opinion) - remember your process word CRITICALLY (you need to make an informed judgment).
5. Lastly illustrate how your assertion "has more weight" than others. You need to be clear about why you think this and you need to support your assertion with the evidence, this could be literature or data (examples) as well as personal anecdote.
6. Be careful about *facts* and making statements to support them. Remember facts change with time, historical circumstance and fashion.
7. Remember to consider your audience when you are writing. Are you writing for practitioners, academics or both?

Learning to make an argument in writing takes time and practice. It sounds a lot easier than it is. You will find what you thought was a straightforward issue becomes complex, so don't be surprised if in the beginning you find this challenging. The challenge is all part of the learning process.

4.6 Plan your essay

Your essay map will have helped you to focus on what you know as well as the gaps in your knowledge. It will also have helped you develop a focus. Now it is time to draw up an essay plan with more structure and detail than the initial plan you created at the mapping stage. It should give you a step-by-step overview of the assignment. However, at this stage, it does not have to be too detailed.

The outline plan should indicate:

- The focus point of each paragraph
- The sources you will refer to
- Your own interpretation/analysis of the point

A good outline plan should also help you develop an introduction and conclusion.

It is useful to keep the outline plan to one or two pages. This will provide you with a quick reference source and checklist as you write the first draft.

When you have completed your research you should be in a position to prepare an outline plan for the assignment.

4.7 Writing a draft assignment

You have done your reading, you have your map. Now it is time to write. The most important point to remember about this stage of the process is that:

It is the first draft!

Try to resist revising and editing at this point, just write. Once you have the completed first draft down on paper you will be in a better position to identify what needs to be changed, developed and improved. If you have time leave it for a day or two and then read through it. At this stage put a critical hat on and as you read ask yourself:

- Does it follow a logical structure?
- Does it follow a clear and fully developed understanding of the issues?
- Does it contain only relevant information?
- Is it fully referenced?

Make all the necessary changes. This may involve both adding information and removing information.

5 Referencing

When you are studying you are continually engaged with other peoples' ideas: you are reading texts, discussing on-line with other participants, and at the end of the module you are incorporating these ideas into your own writing for your assignment. Indeed it is a requirement of the module to incorporate the ideas of others, both from the module readings, the units and other reading you have engaged in while studying your assignment. As a result, it is very important that credit is given for all the reading you have done and how you engage with it when you write your module assignment. When you do this you are expected to conform to the recognised standards of good academic practice. This means ideas, findings, phrases and sentences taken from the work of others must be explicitly acknowledged. Acknowledgments identify the intellectual owners of the ideas you have used, and this can be from any source. This includes:

- Summarising a particular author's ideas or drawing on evidence that she or he presents;

Chaplin (1989) claims that change in education is frequently not change at the level of the system, but change in the ways in which power relations in the system are expressed and justified.

The second way is to quote directly as follows:

As Chaplin (1989; 267) says, "Educational change is often not change at all, but shifts

in the rhetoric about who does symbolic violence to whom under what justifications."

Whichever method you use, you need to give the full reference to the author in your bibliography at the end of the essay.

There is a full guide on referencing in the MA Study of Religions Common Room Moodle area. Additionally a useful text on referencing is noted below and again available in the Learning Resources Centre (LRC).

> Pears, R.,& Shields, G. (2010) *Cite them right: the essential referencing guide,* London, Palgrave Macmillan

5.1 Refworks

RefWorks is an online research management, writing and collaboration tool, designed to help researchers easily gather, manage, store and share all types of information, as well as generate citations and bibliographies.

http://www.refworks.com/refworks

To access RefWorks you will need an Athens account, which will have been given to you at registration. For help with using RefWorks there are many useful online tutorials.

http://www.refworks.com/tutorial

Learning to use Refworks early in your studying is time well spent as it supports not only your growing understanding but also note taking and reading management.

6 Plagiarism

6.1 What is plagiarism

We have talked about the importance of citing where your ideas have come from above. Plagiarism happens when writers fail to cite the ideas and words of others without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. All forms of plagiarism (whether from books, articles, the internet, other students) is considered a very serious academic offence. There are very strong penalties and ignorance of proper procedures or good practice in academic writing is considered no excuse. All forms of suspected plagiarism will be dealt with according to the Unfair Practice regulations. A summary of the regulations is provided in Appendix 4, and full details can be found in Chapter 7 of the Academic Quality Handbook, which is available from the link below and from the MA Study of Religions Common Room on Moodle.

http://www.trinitysaintdavid.ac.uk/en/qualityassuranceunit/

6.2 How to avoid Plagiarism

Having issued these warnings we need to say that most students do not plagiarise intentionally. It is usually a result of inexperience when taking notes and referencing when writing assignments. We have included examples on how to reference above. It is important you take time to read this and ask your tutor or the administrator if you have any questions or concerns. You will be asked to complete and submit a plagiarism form with each module assignment (and your dissertation) as proof that you understand the University plagiarism rules. Obviously you will use the work of others. All scholarship builds on the work of others. The important thing to remember is always to acknowledge your sources. Observe the following guidelines:

- *Anything that is copied or quoted from another source, including electronic sources such as the internet, must be in quotation marks and attributed to the original author. This may be in the body of the text or as a footnote. Full details of a source should be contained in a bibliography. Whatever method is used, always acknowledge your source and give full details of it (i.e. author, date, page number).*
- *Synthesising the work of others involves putting their ideas into your words. This is fine, but again, acknowledge your source. This can be done in a number of ways depending on the context. For example: 'Hart (2003, 52) maintains that...' 'Hart (2003, 52) provides evidence for..': 'It is argued, or submitted by Hart (2003, 52) that...' Then give the source of the original work.*
- *Where you are generally indebted for your ideas to one or two main sources, this can be a bit trickier. If the ideas or the way they are presented come from one or two sources, make this clear. Do the same if they come from lectures. It is important not to claim originality where it does not exist but to indicate in general where the information comes from.*
- *Full citations in timed unseen examinations are obviously not expected, but you should indicate general indebtedness and always credit any quotations you have managed to remember.*

The golden rule is; **`if in doubt, provide references'.** Consult your tutors if you have any problems, in particular with the method of citing books and articles, which may differ from subject to subject. There are no penalties for asking for advice and guidance; there are severe penalties for plagiarism!

7 Finding your voice - positionality and reflexivity

Throughout your time studying and as you progress you will find your own voice when you write and discuss… what does this mean? Well we all have opinions but when we study, we need to reflect on what we think and ask ourselves why we take that position. This will come over time but it is worth spending a moment now thinking about what we mean.

When reading you are listening to other writers' voices and you unpack these through questioning and note taking. The same is true when thinking about your positionality

in relation to your own writing. You need to reflect on what you think and begin to unpack it by asking yourself why you think this. After considering all the arguments you should be able to put your hands on your hips and make a statement - *this is my position, my voice.* But remember, position statements need backing up with reason and evidence, you are not standing on a soap box in the rain!

To do this begin by asking yourself some questions:

- What is relevant and important about me? Can I stand back and take a *'helicopter view'?* Can I see all the arguments? Can I think clearly and rationally why I agree with some and not others?
- What are my values and interests that might influence my view? For example, age, gender, culture, or politics. All these personal life roles and experiences influence the way we think and view the world / issue under consideration. Ask yourself is any opinion absolutely value free?
- Is my professional lived experience of importance or relevant? Remember you are undertaking this course as a professional (so you are an insider) and you will have many experiences that will influence the way you see and feel about other people opinions.
- I am an insider, yes, but at the same time I am a researcher standing on the outside making a judgement about the inside. Yes, it is complex but in your writing you need to acknowledge your position and make clear how your experience, values and judgement add to your position.

Part of studying at postgraduate level is about questioning our own position, being challenged and asked to reflect on what we previously thought and why. This can be difficult and does take time, but it is one of the most interesting and enjoyable parts of studying.

8 Residentials

There will be a Graduate Summer School (usually in July) for MA and research students. These residentials will you the opportunity to meet other course participants and tutors, putting names to faces and getting to know each other, in addition to meeting other members of the university staff who you may need help from in future, for example the subject librarian.

9 Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment - VLE)

Most of your discussion, communication and materials will take place and be available via the learning environment Moodle. The website has been specifically designed for the course and each module has its own specific area plus a general MA Study of Religions Common Room for all students to share information, ideas and chat, notice boards and other general and module useful information. The worksheet in Appendix 5 takes you through how to access the Moodle site along with how to use

the discussion board. Effort and time invested at the beginning of the module negotiating your way around the site will save time later when you are online.

9.1 Module and programme common room areas

The module site is where your module resources and discussion will take place. This is also where the module discussions will take place using peer discussion forums. Each module is divided into Blocks of learning and, in most instances, you will have a two-week period to read, discuss and respond to the study tasks in each Block. You will only have access to the module you are studying at any one time and you are advised to save the resources from this site to your own computer and to make full use of the Block Reader hardcopies.

The programme area is called *MA Study of Religions Common Room*. It is for all participants on the programme and here you will find additional study resources, materials, a café forum for 'off topic' chat, an area specifically for LRC information and questions (we will come onto this) and more. This site is designed for you to 'meet' and keep in touch with all the programme participants. Overtime, we hope it will become an area that contains a lot of useful information and we hope you will support us with your feedback to build this.

9.2 Discussion forums - leading, summarising & contributing to the discussion

The discussion forums are where you will 'talk' to your tutors and peers about the readings and other academic content. At the residential we will discuss how to use the discussion forum and specifically the roles of leading and summarising the discussion. You will need to read the relevant resources in your module reader, before you discuss the topic or question posed by your tutor. You will also be expected to bring some wider reading and your practitioner knowledge to each session, either based on the list provided in the support packs or located independently.

Typically there will be a **lead discussant** for each Block who has a specific task agreed at the start of each Module. This is an important role and the quality of discussion will be affected by the time and effort each lead discussant puts into her/his task. Leading the discussion entails ensuring you make the first 'post' to the forum and responding to the question posed. This requires you to have read the appropriate articles, formed an option and written/posted your response. Once you have posted your piece others will then respond. It then becomes your role to ensure you respond to any questions, comments or make further remarks related to the question.

If you have been asked to **summarise the discussion**, you will need to read all the comments and remarks and draw out the main points of argument at the end of the discussion period. Taking the summary role does not mean you should not participate in the conversation. All it means is, it is your role to round the conversation off.

If you are not a leading or summarising for a particular Block, you are required to read the lead discussant's posting and contribute. The advantage of contributing regularly to the posted discussion forum is that it helps organise your thoughts and

ideas in a systematic way. It also helps you to digest and make links across the readings and units.

9.3 Notice boards

There are 2 notice boards. One in the module page and a second in the Common Room area. The module notice board contains information that is related to the individual module. The second notice board in the Common Room area contains information that is relevant to all modules and is the place where the administrator will put all the general programme notices. It is essential that you check both these notice boards on a regular basis as important (and we hope interesting) information will always be placed there first.

9.4 Study Resources

In the programme area there is a section for study skills and resources. Within this area you will find this booklet plus additional information on referencing etc. There is also information and links to other useful resources, such as e-journals and databases. Please take time to look at this area as knowing what is here can save you a lot of time in the longer term. If you find something that you feel has been useful please send it on to your tutor who will be happy to put it up onto the site for others to use.

Study Skills Tip

When you are downloading and printing documents for example discussion posts from the VLE, remember to make a note of the date, author and the module that it came from as all this information that is logged onto the VLE may not be on the documents themselves.

10 Learning Resources Centre (LRC)

The Learning Resources Centre (LRC) has many essential services you will use throughout your study. Information below is complemented by a specific space on the MA Study of Religions Common Room on Moodle and their website.

http://www.trinitysaintdavid.ac.uk/en/lrc/

10.1 Borrowing

Online catalogue

Our catalogue allows you to search for all print, multimedia and electronic materials held in the LRC or accessible via the University network. Please see the LRC website for further details and to access the catalogue:

www.tsd.ac.uk/en/lrc/

How many items can I borrow?

Undergraduates	15
Postgraduates	20
University staff	30
External borrowers	5

How long can I lend items for?

Standard loan (no band)	*see below*
Red band	1 week
Yellow band	1 day
Blue band	Reference: 3 hours only
Bound journals	1 week
Unbound journals	Reference: LRC use only
Laptops / netbooks	2 weeks

Standard loan length

Please note that the standard loan length below only applies to **no band** resources.

Undergraduates	2 weeks
Undergraduates (special loan)*	4 weeks
Postgraduates	8 weeks
University staff	8 weeks
External borrowers	2 weeks

The special loan status is granted automatically to any students registered as having additional needs.

10.2 Renewals

You may renew no band and red band items an unlimited number of times, providing materials have not been requested by another person. A self-renewal service is available from our catalogue. Items can also be renewed in the LRC, or by telephone (see below for contact details). Please have your card with you when you phone.

Telephone: (01570) 424798
E-mail: lampeterlrc@tsd.ac.uk

10.3 Holds and Recalls

If an item you want is not immediately available our catalogue allows you to place a hold. You can either place your own hold or ask for assistance in the LRC.

Items issued for more than 2 weeks may be recalled for use by another borrower before the return date. To recall an item, please contact the LRC.

10.4 Fines

Fines can accumulate to a maximum of £10 per item, per loan. During term time, you may not be permitted to borrow new material if you have fines outstanding. You may also be restricted from renewing any items which are already on your account if you have excessive fines outstanding. Towards the end of each term, you may be asked to pay off any outstanding fines before the vacation periods. You will also be asked to completely clear any fines on your account at the end of each academic year.

Fines will be charged at the following rates:

Standard loan	20p per day
Standard loan - recalled	£1 per day

Red band	£1 per day
Yellow band	£2 per day
Blue band	20p per hour (or part of an hour)
Journals	£1 per day
Laptops and netbooks	£10 per day

10.5 E-resources

E-Resources provide indexes to journals and sometimes to books and reports. Some e-resources provide full-text e.g. a journal article; others provide abstracts and references. To access these resources off campus you will need an Athens login.

Contact athens@tsd.ac.uk to obtain Athens login details.

There are two ways to use your Athens Account.

You can either go directly to the resource you wish to access via the LRC website or LRC Moodle page.

Type in your Athens username and password when prompted, or you can log in to My Athens at http://auth.athensams.net/my/.

If you log in to My Athens, you will see a list of all the resources you are entitled to access with your Athens Account. My Athens also allows you to change your Athens password, view your account details and expiry date and access online help.

10.6 SCONUL access

SCONUL Access is a reciprocal service supported by most of the higher education libraries of the UK and Ireland, and provides borrowing privileges for most distance learners from. You can apply for a SCONUL card at the LRC. Further details of participating libraries and about the scheme itself can be found from the SCONUL website

http://www.access.sconul.ac.uk/

11 Yours and fellow participants' experience

You bring with you a wealth of knowledge and experience that will enhance both your own and your fellow participants learning experience. Take full advantage of other course participants' specialist area knowledge, by asking each other questions and fully participating in the Graduate Summer School and forum discussions and you will gain a rich and varied understanding of the variety of areas that study of religions covers. As some students are from outside the UK, it will be very interesting for other students to learn from your experiences.

12 Resources from outside the programme

There is lot of information and resources that can be used outside the programme materials. These resources will enhance your understanding of the area, giving you other people's points of view on the issues. If you can, get resources from other places and pass on information to your fellow students, discuss and debate what you read in the media. Do take advantage of additional resources if you can, but do remember if you are short of time (and none of us have enough of that these days!) concentrate on the materials provided as these have been specially written and chosen for you.

Appendix 1 - Understanding the question

Before you start your assignment, look carefully at the question. Make sure that you understand what it is asking you to do. This will help you stay focused and decide on appropriate content and how to tackle it choose the correct writing style for your assignment set out your content in a sensible and coherent way.

Key words

All assignment questions have key words or phrases that indicate how and what you should write. There are two types of key words to be aware of.

'Process words' tell you what you need to do with your content.
'Content words' tell you what topics you need to focus on.

Process or command words

Process word	Meaning
Account for	Give reasons for something, or explain why something has occurred. You will usually be replying to the question 'Why?' **Remember**: Don't just describe, explain and explore
Analyse	Resolve into its component parts, or minutely Dissect the point in question into its key components or parts, then examine critically **Remember**: Identify and explain any relationships which exist between these parts and be clear as to why there are links….
Argue	Present a case for and/or against a concept or situation. At PG level you should support a viewpoint (position) but you will need to use evidence and logical reasoning for your position. **Remember**: Don't simply describe the issue, by recounting what you know, or you have just read…. But do acknowledge the limitations of your position, and remember to define any key terms or concepts.

Assess	Take a position upon the issue, then give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of what you are assessing (this would be particular person, perspective, or technique) **Remember**: Make your position clear and provide supporting evidence and/or logical reasoning for your position, but note the limitations of your position
Compare and contrast	Note the similarities AND differences. Usually the emphasis will be upon similarities, but not necessarily, Then assess the degree to which those similarities and differences are always present. Notice the differences over time do people come to agree more or less with each other? **Remember** At PG level you should be looking for the gaps and blank spots in the work you read, ask yourself what is missing as you read
Comment on	State your opinion on a topic, situation or idea. Your opinion and writing should be informed by your reading. To comment on means more than "describe" or "summarize" it is closer to "analyse" or "assess". **Remember** Your views and opinions need to be supported with reference to suitable evidence or explanations.
Criticise	Make a judgement about a statement of body of work backed by a reasoned discussion of the evidence involved, describe the merit of theories or opinions or the truth of assertions **Remember** Be specific in your examination and indicate the criteria on which you base your judgement, citing specific instances and arguments as to how the criteria apply in this case.
Define	Give the exact meaning of a word or phrase, perhaps examine different possible or often used definitions giving sufficient detail to allow it to be distinguished from other similar (but subtly different) things. **Remember** There may be more than one definition, so note multiple meanings if they exist and if asked form an opinion on which you think is most clear stating why

Describe	Give a detailed and comprehensive account of an idea or topic, or the sequence in which a series of things happened.
Discuss	One of the most common terms to appear in essay titles, usually requiring analysis and evaluation of evidence as well as weighing up arguments and drawing conclusions. Explore the implications and the advantages or disadvantages. Debate the case and possibly consider any alternatives. **Remember** At PG level you are invited to say something interesting in response to the topic in question and can usually choose your own approach.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth / validity / effectiveness of something **Remember** Your personal estimation is valuable but should not over shadow the wider literature, cite evidence and argument in support of your case.
Examine the argument	Look in detail at this line of argument. **Remember** Look and investigate closely into something and always use examples to support your line of thinking.
Explain	Give details about how and why something has come to be **Remember** The devil is in the detail when you explain, you may also need to describe and to analyse.
Illustrate	Make clear and explicit your argument and give carefully chosen examples **Remember** Always support your case - the use of examples is important
Justify	Give valid reasons that support a point of view, decisions or conclusions, and mention any main objections or arguments against. **Remember**

	You don’t have to agree, but if you don’t you must be clear why
Outline	give the main features or general principles of a subject, topic or sequence of events, omitting minor details and emphasising structure and arrangement **Remember** You need to set these within a clear structure or framework to show how they interrelate.
State	Present in a brief, clear way to show have things connect and how they possibly affect, cause, or resemble each other. **Remember** You need to back this up with references and details
Summarise	Give a clear, short description, explanation or account, presenting the chief factors and omitting minor details and examples - see also Outline **Remember** Summarise usually have tight word limits - so be clear in your own mind what your explanations are.

Content words

- Tell you what topics you need to focus on (the topic area)
- Limit and define the essay, making it workable.
- Help you to focus your research and reading on the correct area.

Appendix 2 - Active Reading Guidance

Reference

Date read

What is the purpose of the article (eg is it refuting another article/author, usually found in first paragraph)

What is the author's position? (where do they stand in the wider debate?)

Audience (who is this written for? Practitioners, academics, policy makers)

Subject (what is the article about)

What is the articles argument (usually found in the abstract or introduction)

What evidence is there to support the argument and how well is it used
(qualitative, quantitative, ethnographic etc and was it appropriate)

What are the key concepts/words highlighted

What is the conclusion?

What is missing from the article?

Personal perspective
Do you agree with the article? Why?
Does it add to your knowledge? Why?
Is it useful to you? Why?

Summary

Appendix 3 - Mapping your essay

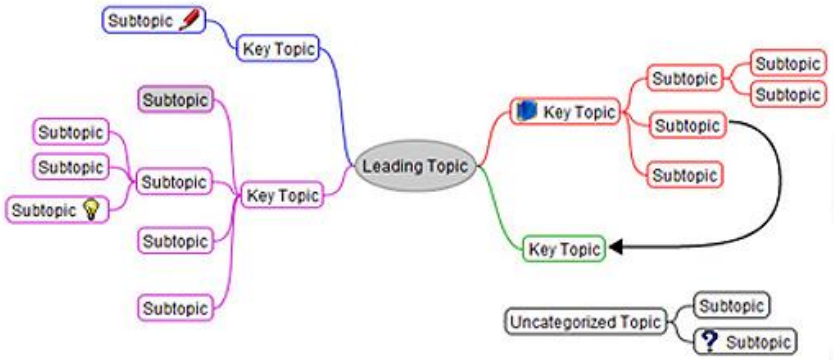
Table mapping

Paper title	Author	Definition	Argument	Evidence Examples	Gaps	My position (agree /don't)

Mind map

Mind maps come in all shapes and colours (Google and you will see), they do suite everyone, however some people find the process of producing the map very helpful in clarifying the main and subsequently sub areas for discussion and writing. Below is a small example:

1. Put main idea or start with your question in the centre
2. Draw branches for each major concept
3. What do you already know? Include this.
4. Look for relationships, use lines, colours, arrows, branches (whatever you like to connect things)



Review the map or table - ask yourself some questions:

- How do the parts fit together, and does it all make sense? why, or why not?
- Is there anything missing, unclear, or problematic about it?
- How does it fit with other course material? How does it fit with your personal experience? Are there parts that do not fit? Why not?
- What are the implications of the material?
- Could there be other ways of looking at it?
- What more do you need to find out?

Appendix 4 - Trinity Saint David plagiarism rules

Plagiarism is passing off, or attempting to pass off, another's work as your own. It includes copying the words, ideas, images or research results of another ***without acknowledgement***, whether those words etc. are published or unpublished. It is plagiarism, for example, to copy the work of another student, of a member of staff or a published article without crediting the author. Persons who allow their work to be plagiarised are also guilty.

Plagiarism is one of the worst offences in academic life, and its consequences can be severe. It undermines the integrity of scholarship, research, and of the examination and assessment process. The guidance that follows explains what is meant by plagiarism, describes the University's regulations for dealing with it, and provides help in avoiding it.

When registering as a student at University of Wales: Trinity Saint David you have consented to your work being scrutinised both electronically and in person to check for cases of plagiarism. In many Schools your work will be submitted electronically via Moodle. Academic Staff may have been required, as part of your Moodle induction to alert you to JISC Turnitin software, through which both the student and the tutor can check for instances where the assignment contains sections that exactly mirror material found elsewhere on the internet. It is important that you use this system to check your work prior to final submission. In this way you can ensure that you have properly acknowledged all of your sources of information.

For submissions outside of the Moodle platforms, it is equally important that you reference your sources accurately. In some cases you will be expected to submit both hard and electronic copies, which can be checked against the database of the UK Higher Education Plagiarism Detection Service. For handwritten, portfolio and process workbook submissions check with your module tutor if you are in any doubt about whether you have infringed the regulations. They are here to assist you; ensure that you take advantage of their expertise.

Plagiarism: regulations, procedure, and penalties

If a module tutor believes that plagiarism has occurred the student concerned will be informed of the allegation and an initial meeting with the Dean of Faculty or relevant Head of School will be arranged. At the meeting, the student will be presented with the evidence of plagiarism, and will be invited to offer an explanation for the alleged incident.

- If the student accepts the allegation of plagiarism, and if the student has not been found guilty of plagiarism by the University on a previous occasion, the module component that contains plagiarised work shall not be marked and the student may be allowed to undertake reassessment of a module component(s), and a re-examination fee may be payable. A new task will be determined that is clearly distinct from that originally presented for assessment.
- If the student denies the allegation of plagiarism and/or the student has been found guilty of plagiarism by the University on a previous occasion, the case will be considered by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). If, after

consideration, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) considers that there exists a case that requires further investigation, he/she shall inform the Vice-Chancellor and a Committee of Enquiry will be established to investigate the allegations. The procedure thereafter is laid out in the Unfair Practice Procedure (see Section 7.8 -7.11 of the *Academic Quality Handbook*).

- If the allegation of plagiarism is upheld, then the penalties available to the Committee of Enquiry range from the issue of a formally recorded verbal or written reprimand to the candidate, to the cancellation of the candidate's marks in all of the modules for the particular level of study and the disqualification of the candidate from any future University examination.

Full details of the University's procedures for dealing with issues of plagiarism can be found in Chapter 7 of the *Academic Quality Handbook*, which can be seen on the University intranet, obtained from the Faculty Offices or on the Programme Common Room site in Moodle. These details are also available in Chapter 3 of *University Regulations - Student Guide*.

Appendix 5 - Moodle VLE

This short document will help you get started with Moodle. It will start with a very brief overview of what Moodle is and why it can help you with your studies. It will then take you though where to find Moodle on the internet, explain how to log on and navigate around the site.

Before we start, please note:

Moodle works well in Firefox and Internet Explore,

Moodle does not work well in Google Chrome and Opera

What is Moodle

Moodle is a Virtual Learning Environment, commonly referred to as a VLE. There are many VLEs on the market. Put simply Moodle is a secure and controlled web space used for learning and teaching, tutors and students can use the space to hold materials, communicate and collaborate with each other and is especially valuable for distance learning.

The benefits for students can be summed up as:

- **Flexibility -** a tool for studying at suitable times leading towards a better work/life/study balance;
- **Peer support and communication reducing isolation -** this is especially valuable for distance learning students who may never meet their peers face to face;
- **Learning style -** provides a learning tool that can accommodate many learning styles, auditory and visual with the possibilities of recording lectures;
- **Learning reinforcement -** students can revisit materials multiple times in the run up to exams or simply for interest and pleasure;
- **Team and group work -** peer collaboration on project work that can take place at a distance;
- **Building a community of practice -** engenders a sense of identity related to the course and institution that is especially valuable for distance and research students;
- **Security -** provides a space for students to experiment, learn and develop thinking, analysis of difficult complex concepts in a safe and secure environment;
- **Assessment -** provides tools and a space for formative assessment through quizzes and reflection on learning with blogs.

The benefits for Tutors can be summed up as:

- **Administrative -** a place to organise and store course materials;
- **Support -** allows students to be supported at a distance from the university, this could be distance students or students on placements;
- **Information and communication -** ability to send and hold information for students to use and refer to when needed.

Where to find Moodle

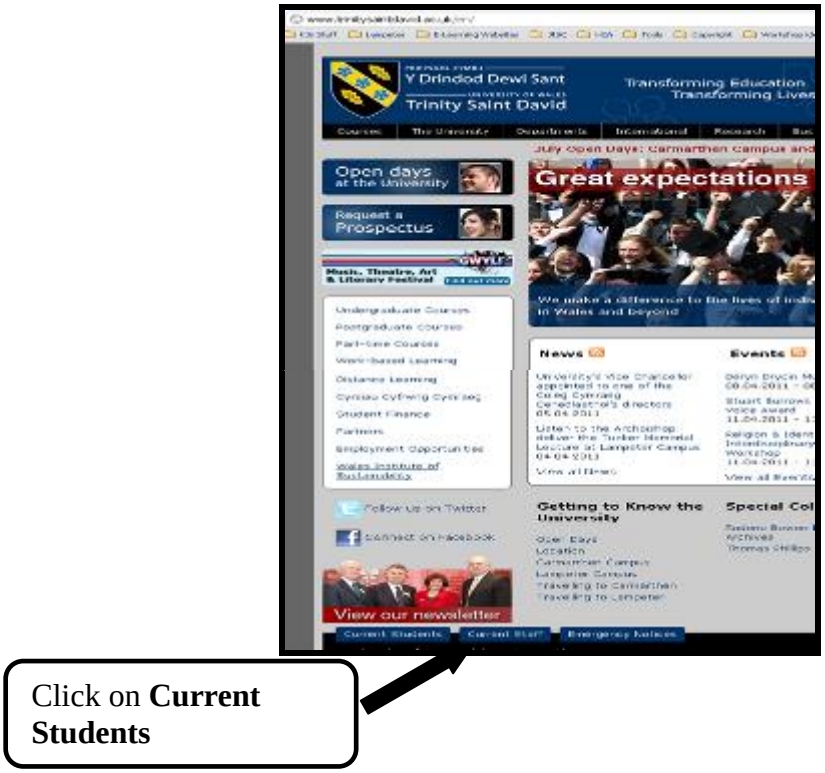
Moodle is an internet-based environment so you can access anywhere in the world, all you need is internet for access.

There is no need to remember the address:

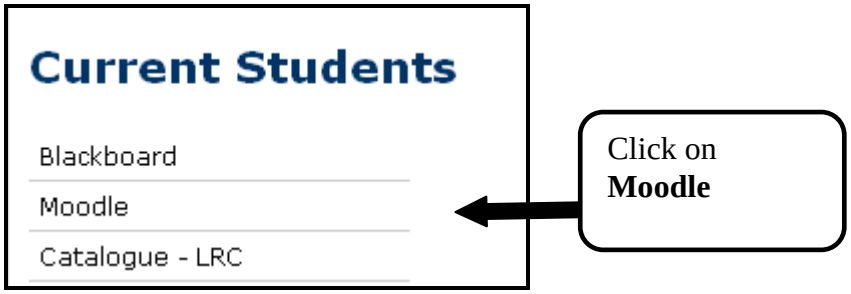
Go to the **University home page**

go to the link for **Current Students** (at the bottom on the left side, see below), f

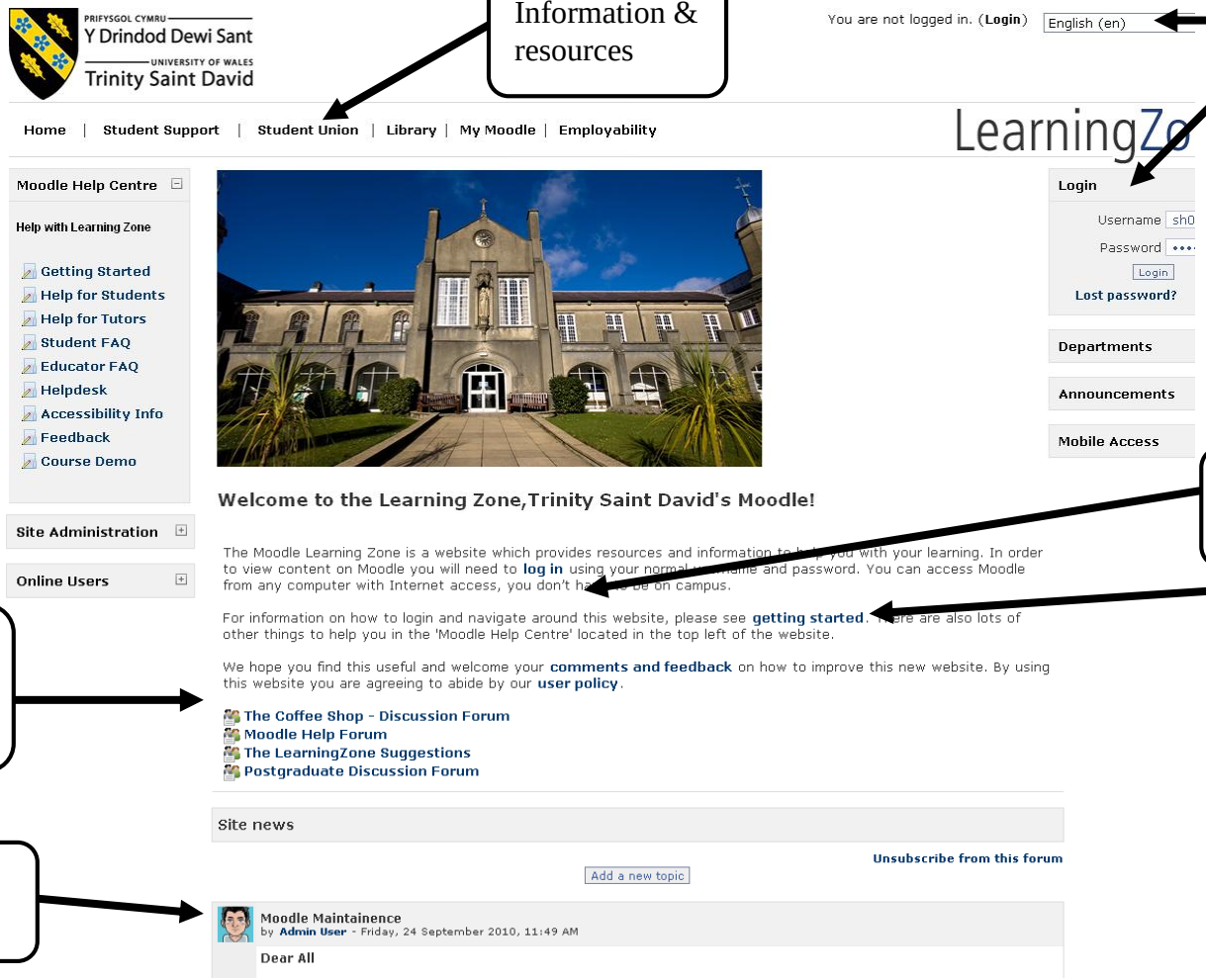
From here you will see Moodle second from the top on the left side link list (see below):



From here you will see **Moodle** second from the top on the left side link list:



What is on the Moodle Home Page?



Information & resources

Enter your TSD details to log on

Online help, FAQs & support

Additional Log on

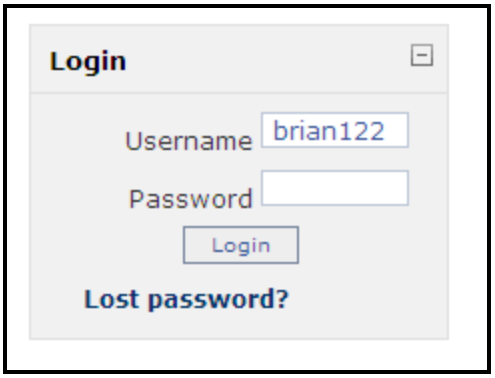
Information on getting started with Moodle

Discussion with other students & feedback to us on the Learning Zone

Moodle news and announcements

Logging onto Moodle

You can log on in a number of ways; **Login** at the **right side of the screen near the top**

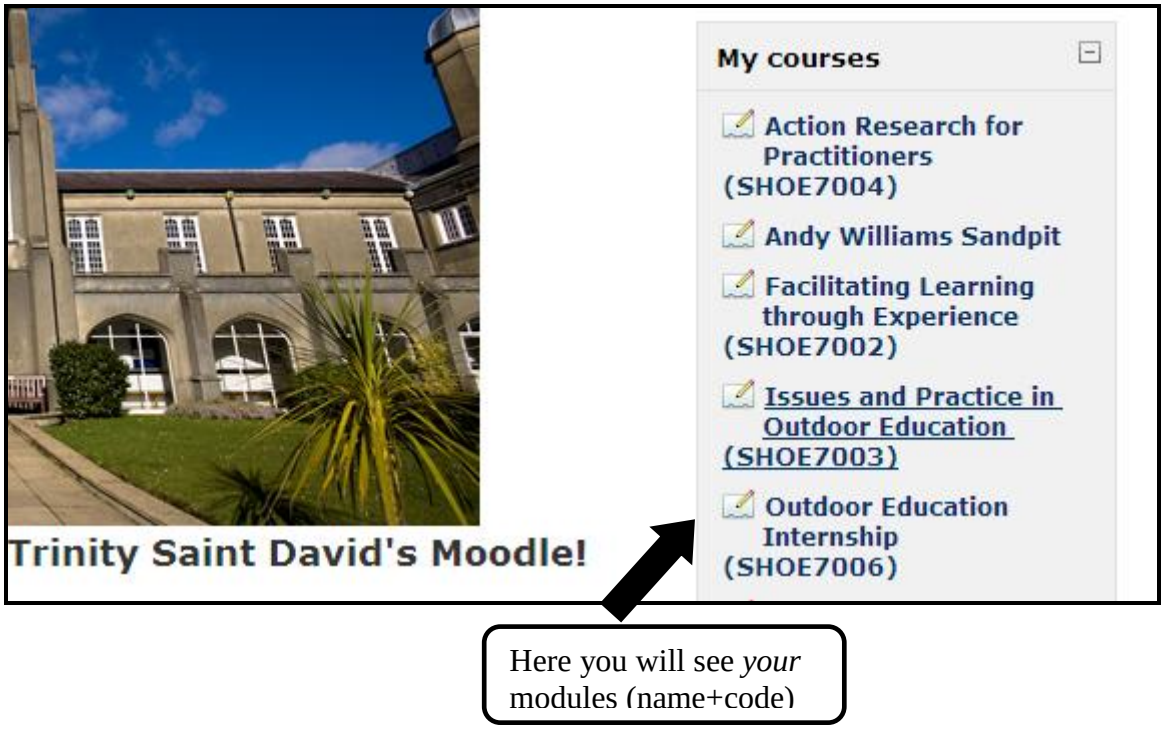


Your Username and Password are the same as your logon to the Trinity Saint David network. This is important, only these details will work.

If you do not have (or have forgotten) a university username and password, please contact the itservicedesk@tsd.ac.uk who will help you.

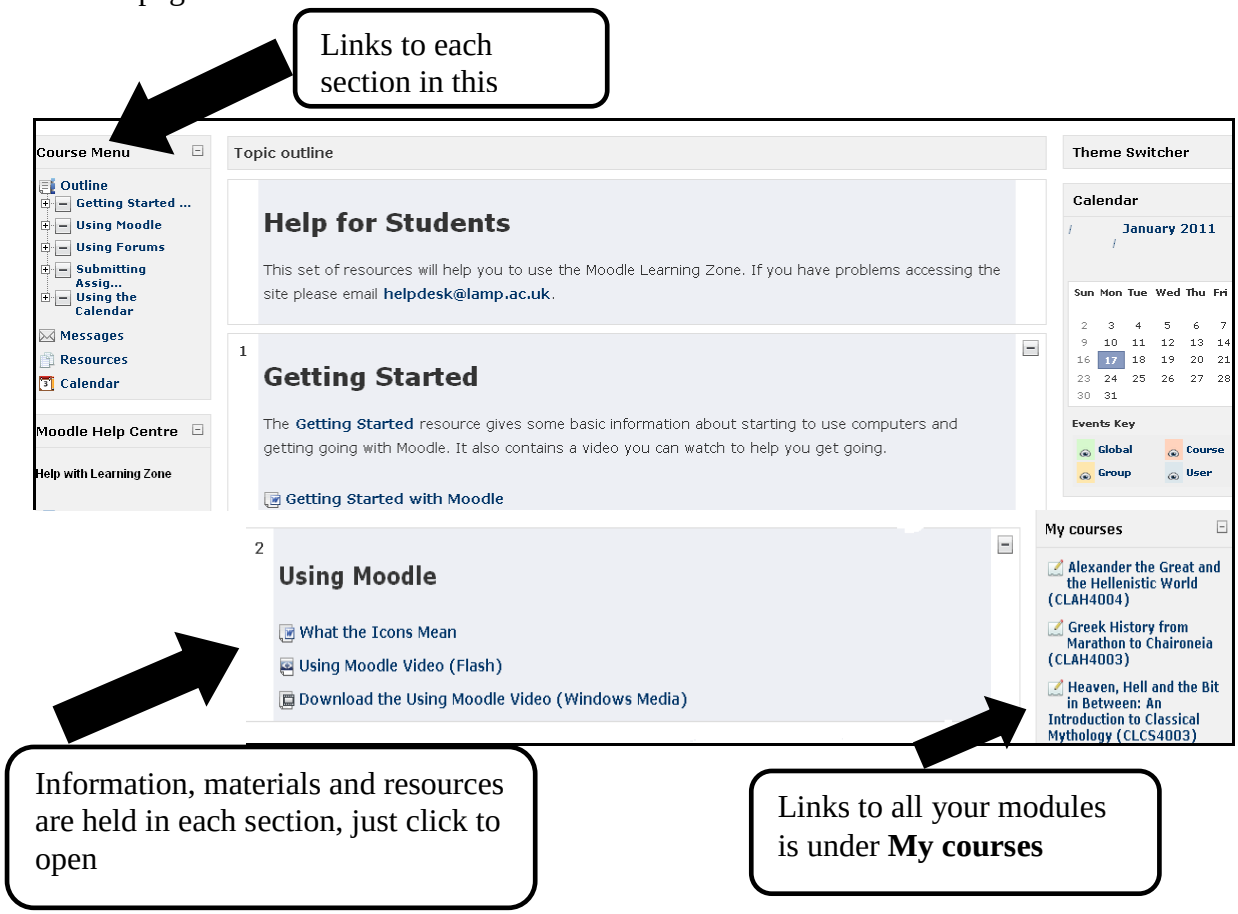
Your Moodle Homepage

You will notice the front page does not change that much, the options are now more directly related to you and your needs.



Your Module page

Click on your module under My Modules
You module page will look slightly different, the example below is the *Help for Students* Module page



Practise makes perfect, so it may take some time to learn to navigate around the VLE Moodle.

Where do you go if you need help?

If you need help with understanding what is available on Moodle and why you are using it please do contact your tutor or administrator.
If you are having technical problems with Moodle then please contact the itservicedesk@tsd.ac.uk

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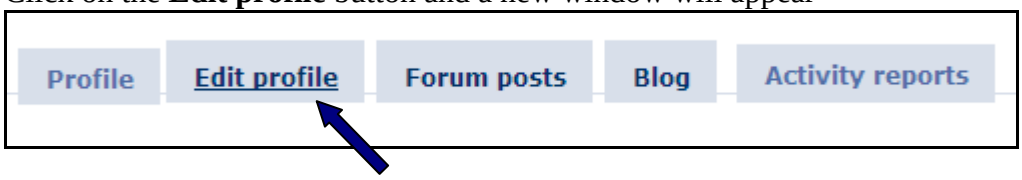
Editing your profile in Moodle

Log on to Moodle, look at the top right side of your screen and your name appears. **Click on your name** you will come to your profile

Click on the **Edit profile** button and a new window will appear

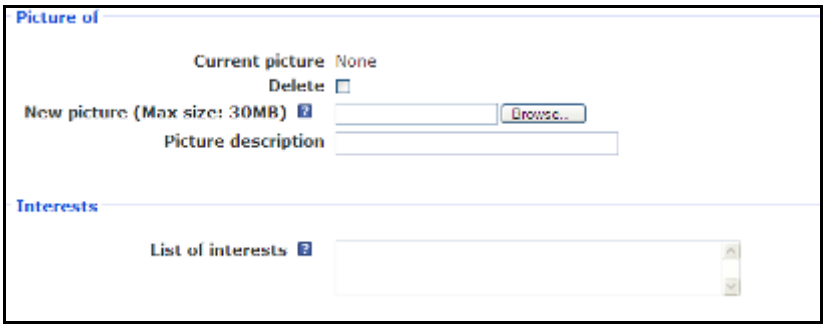


Edit or adding to your profile

- A new window will appear as below
- Complete as many or as few as you wish details as you wish

Remember this is a chance to get to know people within the community and it is nice to know a little more than only your work role, so do add your picture and interests.

Adding a picture & Interests



Upload an image in the same way as you would any document to an email:

1. Browse > Search and find on your computer > Open >
2. Add a description
3. Completed your interests and other information (perhaps where you live)
4. Scroll down and save, click on **Update Profile**

Discussion forums

As a distance-learning student this tool is especially valuable for you to keep in contact with your peers and tutors and you will use of for many of the activities throughout your course, and you will be using it a great deal. This short document will guide you through;

1. What is a discussion forum?
2. Why do I need to use the discussion forum?
3. Where do I find the discussion forum?
4. How to I use the discussion forum?

What is a discussion forum?

A discussion forum, also be called a message board, or internet forum is a tool used for communication, it is an internet based where 'talking' via text occurs asynchronously (where communication happens at different times). There are many of these on the internet now on as many subjects as you can think off (try looking in Google Groups). Within Moodle VLE it is as a tool and space where you can 'talk' (type) to your tutors and peers.

Why do I need to use the discussion forum?

As a distance-learning student, you will use the discussion forums a great deal, as it is the easiest and most convenient way to keep in contact with your peers and tutors. Examples of topic discussion can be;

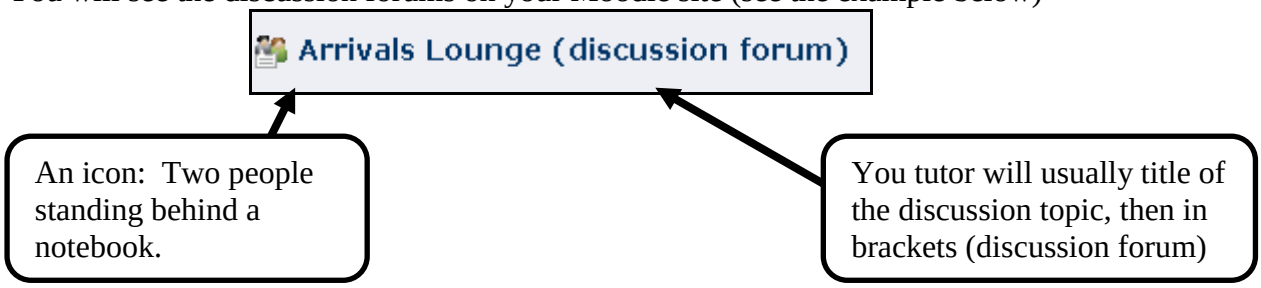
- Your thoughts and understanding on your subject theories, concepts and ideas
- Questions about your assignments or other aspect of your course
- Café space, for off topic conversation

You will find over time you will use the discussion forum these and many other topics. You will get to know your peers quite well through your conversations and they will help you to feel less isolated as you can discuss your achievements and concerns with others.

In addition to your subject and module discussion, there are a number of forums open to all Trinity Saint David on the home page of Moodle. There is one specifically for distance learning students and you are welcome to join you the wider conversation in this.

Where do I find a discussion forum?

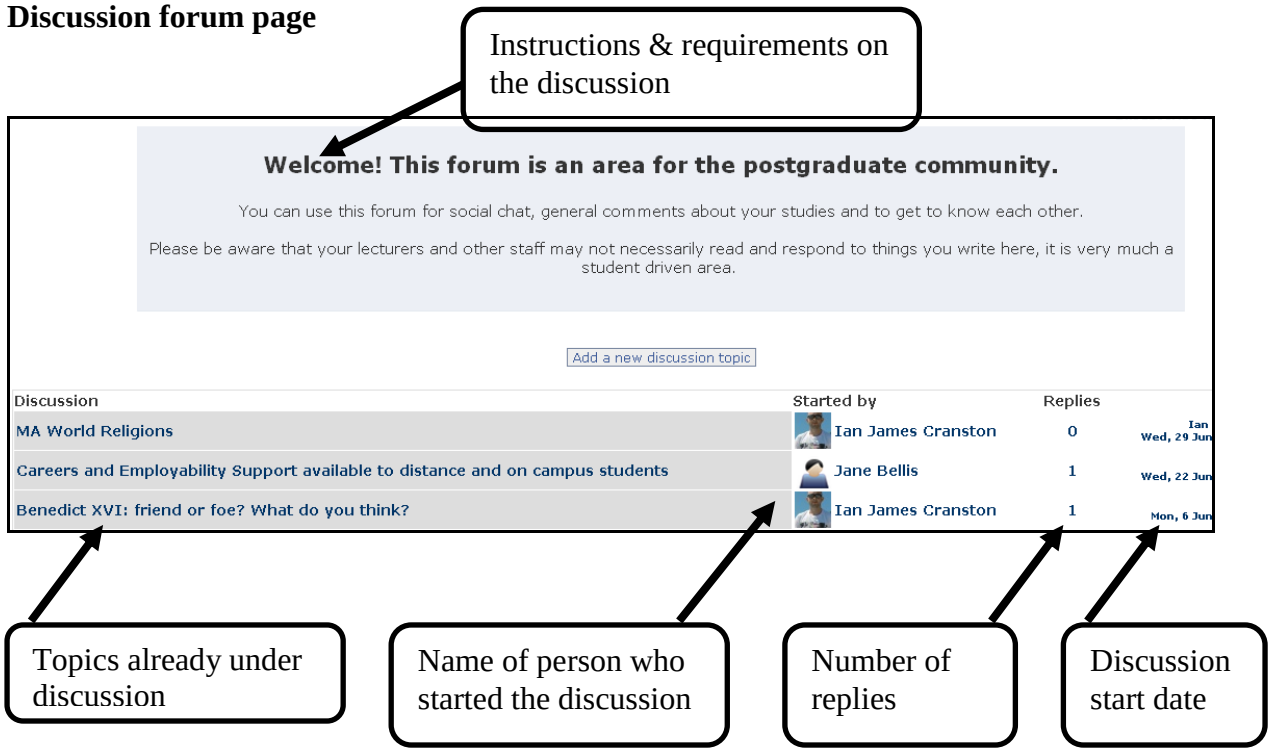
You will see the discussion forums on your Moodle site (see the example below)



How to I use the discussion forum?

Click on the discussion (example above) from your module page or the Home page.
This takes you to another screen:

Discussion forum page

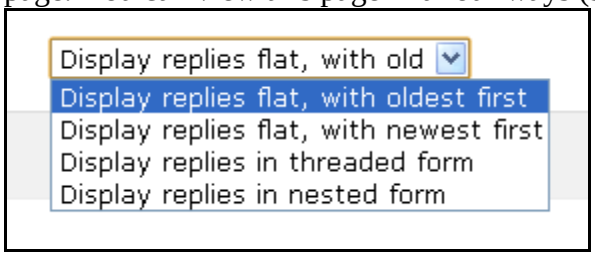


There can be a lot of different topics under discussion dependent on how the system is set up.
You have three options; you can;

1. Read the conversations without comment
2. Reply to a conversation already started, or
3. Start a new discussion topic or conversation.

Reading the conversation

Click on the conversation you wish to read, this will take you to the conversation page. You can view this page in a four ways (see below)

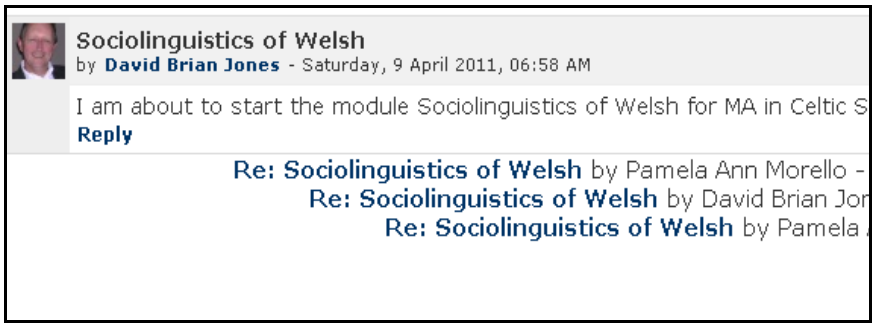


Display replies flat, with oldest post or newest first

This allows you to see the whole discussion in whichever date order you wish

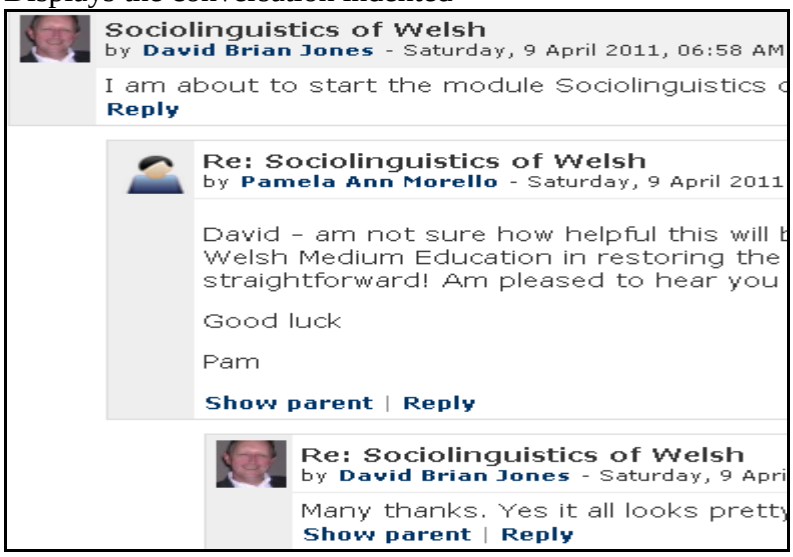
Display replies in threaded form:

You are able to read the first post then the details but not content of the conversation



Display replies in nested form:

Displays the conversation indented

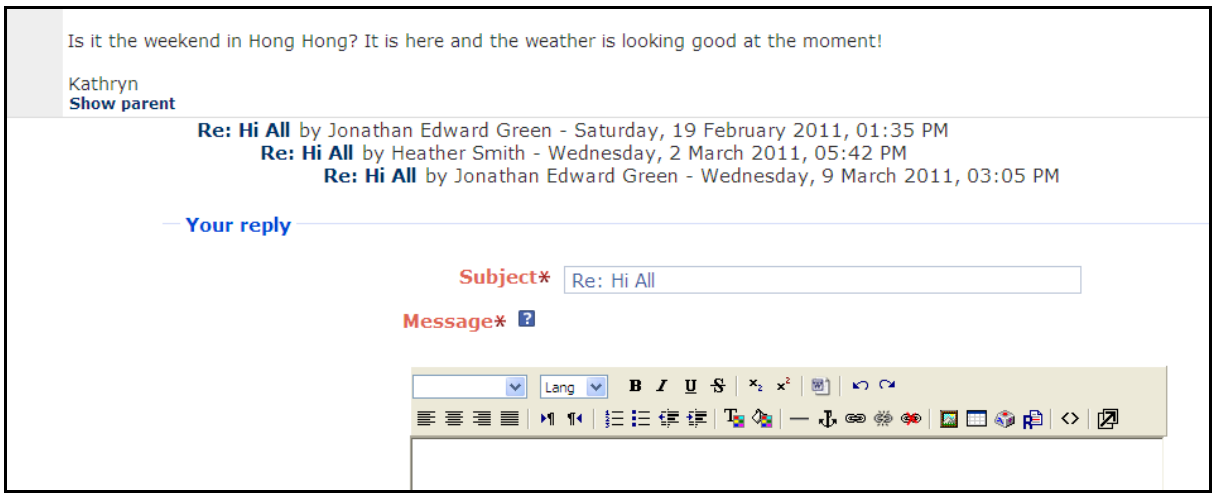


Replying to a conversation

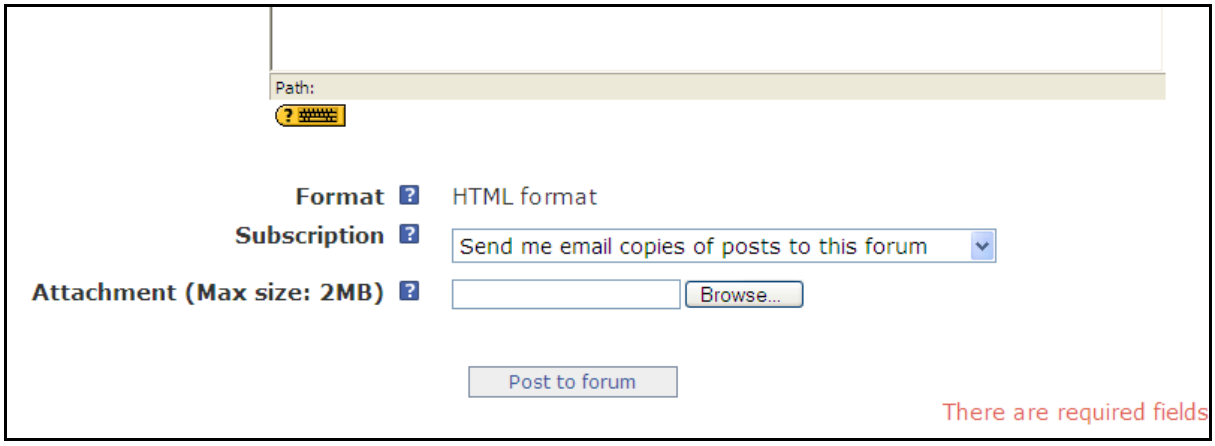
1. Click on the conversation you wish to reply to, taking you to the conversation page
2. At the bottom of the conversation you have the option to **Reply** - click on this, this takes you to screen where you can edit:
3. Remember Moodle works in Firefox and Explore and not in Chrome and Opera

You will see the conversation (in threaded form) and a box to add your message with the usual Word editing icons.

4. To continue the conversation simply **type into the message box**



5. Once you have added your comment you have the option to add an attachment (the same as adding an email attachment) then
6. Click on **Post to forum**
7. The **Subscription** field as it states allows you to subscribe to the conversation thread (useful if you are interested in the topic, or work with others within a group)

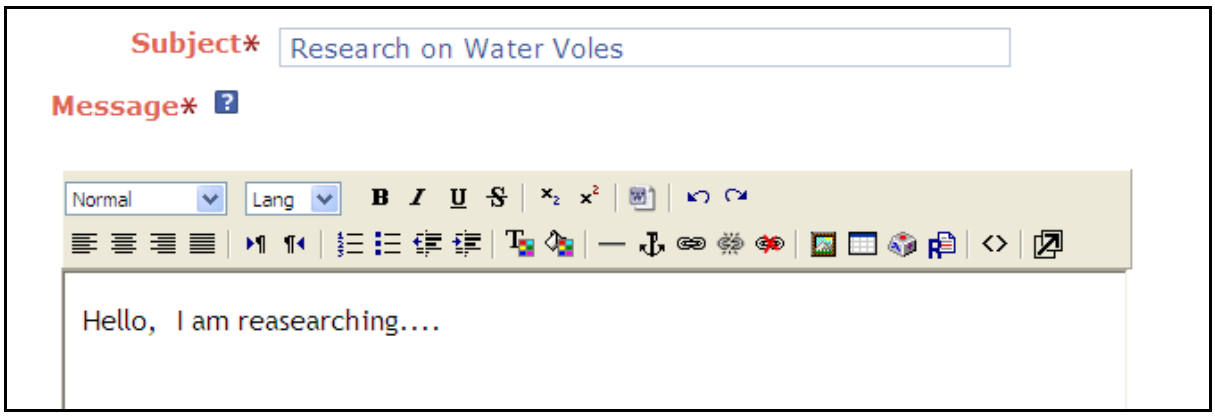


Starting a conversation

Below the discussion forum instructions you will see a link **Add a new discussion topic**

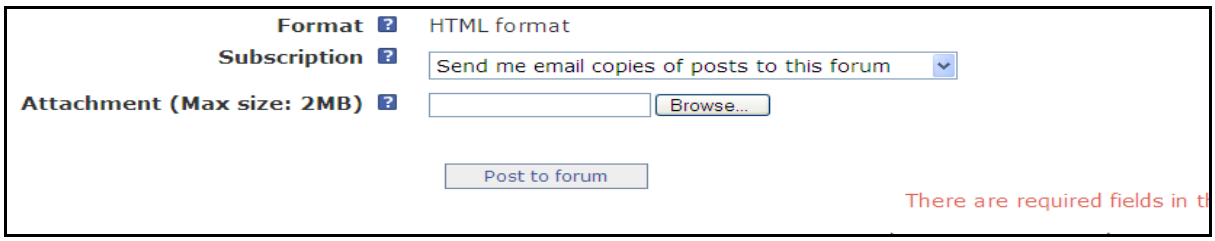
1 Click on **Add a new discussion topic** link, this will take you to a new page:

2 Complete the **Subject** (remember this is what people see so it should make sense) and the **Message.**



3 You can add an attachment if you wish (the same as attaching to an email), then

4 Click on **Post for forum**



You have now posted a new discussion to the forum

Where do you go if you need help?

If you need help with understanding what is available on Moodle and why you are using it please do contact your tutor or administrator.
If you are having technical problems with Moodle then please contact the itservicedesk@tsd.ac.uk