



COMMUNITY CHECKLIST FOR COURSES

Thank you for trusting Yellowdig to help you create a vibrant learning experience that your students will value. This checklist is to get you setup for and managing a truly successful community. If you need help with this list, are ever not feeling confident about using YD, or are not 100% satisfied with what you are seeing in your community, please reach out and a Community Success Consultant will help (clientsuccess@yellowdig.com).

Pre-Term Prep

- Integrate Yellowdig (YD) into your Learning Management System (LMS).** The status of our integration with your institution may impact how long this takes, so do this first unless you want a standalone community. This is necessary for using grade passback to your LMS.
 - Use *one* graded assignment link for students to access YD. Set it to open in a new window or tab. If integrated, do not invite students into YD via our email or invite links. [Note: If using Canvas, we recommend hiding the sidebar link to YD until all grades are passing because it is not a graded link.]
 - Once integrated, click the assignment link in your course to actually create your YD community, then follow the steps under "Community Setup" below. If you cannot integrate YD or the launch does not work, please email support@yellowdig.com and possibly copy your LMS admin or other IT staff.
- Carefully consider your goals and how you and your students will benefit most from using YD.** A YD community will thrive when students feel their participation is meeting their needs and interests. This is often achieved in flexible, multi-use communities supporting open conversation, info sharing, course Q&A, etc.
 - Plan to tie YD conversations into your course. [Pass out accolades](#) then bookmark those posts to talk about in class or use permalinks to share specific posts and comments with students.
 - Change standard discussion prompts into [Conversation Themes](#) if you are "converting" a course that previously used an LMS discussion board¹.
 - Choose [community management](#) strategies that build instructor presence and that you can realistically maintain given your class size².
- Introduce Yellowdig in your syllabus.**

- Keep a focus on the goals of your community. Typically you'll want students thinking about sharing knowledge and helping one another more than thinking about posting and collecting points.
- Visit our knowledge base section for "[getting started](#)" where you can find [templates](#) for telling your students about YD.
- Point students to the [Student Orientation Guide](#). Other materials you may find helpful for introducing students include a [one-pager](#) about Yellowdig or this [orientation playlist on Youtube](#).
- Your syllabus is a good place to spell out community guidelines and what could lead to you deducting points from students. Though rarely necessary, being explicit allows you to enforce your expectations if needed.
- Consider giving students a [quick quiz](#) about YD to ensure they paid attention to your instructions and how the system works before giving them access.
- Encourage your team to learn about YD.** TA's or other people who will be helping you manage YD can take our [Facilitator & TA Certification Module](#).

Community Setup

- Create your community in the community creation form.** You will see this upon launching the first time from your course or if you create a community inside YD.
 - Name your community
 - Choose the "organization" for your community (usually the most specific applicable unit; e.g., your department's name vs. college's name)
 - Set the community to "Private" and make sure it is not displayed in the discover tab (these should be the defaults)
 - If you want to copy settings or content from a template or prior course, you can select from communities you own in the form or you can paste a template link (found at the bottom of Settings → Basics in all YD communities)
- Complete the steps in the "Getting Started" flow as you enter your community**
 - Add the course start and end dates for point earning. Your point setup will be pre-set by the template or network defaults (change in Settings → Points³).
 - Configure your [topics](#). We recommend making topics required and editing the defaults to the themes you want students to discuss (often the themes of modules in your syllabus). It is possible to disable point earning for certain topics. Having a "coffeehouse" topic can be a good way to encourage light-hearted interaction in YD without earning points.
 - Watch the videos (2.5 min. total) to learn about managing a YD community.

- Set expectations for the community.** There are already default posts in most communities which introduce aspects of using YD, but we recommend editing them to be specific for your course and to consider [adding a video](#) where you:
 - Introduce yourself.
 - Tell students what is expected of them.
 - Tell students what they should expect from you.

As the Community Starts

- Get the ball rolling.** Do some things to model what you'd like to see students do:
 - Have the first week just be introductions so students get comfortable with the system and get to know each other.
 - During that week, model a couple of good posts using current and interesting events so that students know the kinds of things you hope they share.
 - Ask a question about something that came up in class and try to extend that conversation in YD.
 - If a student seems eager or you know them from a prior class, ask them to post something substantive early as a favor and give them some extra points.
 - Offer an "early bird" accolade as an incentive for people who post and comment in the first couple of days.
- Share information about [how to solve access issues](#) with your students.**
 - If they have trouble encourage them to submit individual support tickets directly to support@yellowdig.com. Most access issues are related to individual student technology and we can solve them quickly.

Throughout the Term

The most important things you can do to build community health involve making the community a valued part of the learning experience to your students:

- Continue to model the kinds of things you want students doing**, especially interacting with them as an excited expert on the topic.
- Mostly participate by taking part in conversations students start and that they are interested in**, contributing by extending and building on them, rather than trying to create and drive all of the conversations yourself.
- Consider the impacts of your presence** on student conversations. If a conversation is going well, sometimes *not* participating and just accolading or reacting to comments will show you are interested and attentive without interrupting.
- Recognize exceptional contributions with accolades** so students understand expectations and know what to model their behavior after.

- Continue to find ways to celebrate and incorporate good conversations from YD in other parts of your course.**

Become a Yellowdig Power User

- Take our ~1 hour [instructor certification module](#).** It is a great introduction to “community pedagogy” and often saves instructors a lot of time.
- Learn about various of our [proven practices and tips](#)** from our Knowledge Base section.
- Complete all of the advanced modules at learn.yellowdig.co.**
- Check out our upcoming [events](#)** to see if any suit your use case and learn from our community-building experts and other industry leaders.
- Join [YD’s Instructor Support Community](#)** to talk to and share tips with our experts and YD instructors across the globe.

Helpful Tips (Footnotes)

¹Be sure your Yellowdig instructions invite students to continue and create conversations. If you are using [Conversation Themes](#) or any other directives for students to post about specific topics be sure to have students **create their own posts** with the proper topic tags to relate posts to your themes. Generally students should **not all respond to a single post**; it makes conversations harder to follow, information harder to find, and negatively impacts the point incentive system.

²According to the [Community of Inquiry Framework](#), Teaching Presence is defined as, "The design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes."

Not surprisingly, **some instructor presence is important** for motivating students and making a YD community a great learning experience. Students also clearly appreciate good instructor feedback and affirmation of what they are doing. However, **do not try to read and respond to everything** in YD. In fact, if you try YD will probably feel like a lot of work and you risk actually hindering student interactions.

To maximize the impact of the time you are able to spend, plan to **spend your time on actions that are clearly visible** to most students and that **encourage continued conversation or the sharing of better material**. We generally encourage the following:

- Visit often for short amounts of time rather infrequently for longer times:
 - Allows you to interact with more students and spread your interactions out so they perceive you as paying more attention in less time spent.
 - Active conversations and new material go to the top of the community, so you maintain a sense of what is happening without "backtracking".
 - A few quick interactions that are timely can provide faster, more relevant, and more motivating input than "better" feedback given at longer intervals.
- Use a few accolades per week on exemplary content other students should mimic. Aim to give out about as many points in accolades to the class as an individual student is being asked to get on a weekly basis. Remember also that your reactions are visible to students and grant them points.
 - Put on comments that extend conversations or ask good questions
 - Put on timely, relevant posts that invite conversation with others
- Comments that respond to what students are talking about in context or refer to things currently happening in the class or the world do more to build a sense of presence than posts that were pre-written months ago. The former often feel responsive to student needs and interests whereas pre-written posts will typically

appear tone-deaf to what the community is focused on and less relevant to the students who are participating.

- Comment on good conversations by adding additional resources or asking a good follow-up that fits the context of the conversation. Simply commenting “good job” does not encourage discourse and will often actually shut down a conversation.
- Mention things happening in Yellowdig in other aspects of your course and mention things happening in other aspects of the course in Yellowdig.
- Do not try to grade every post and comment. Instead, incentivize and encourage the participation you want to see by adding accolades and points beyond the automatic system. If your data reports show a student is posting or commenting but others are never responding or reacting, those are the students worth taking a closer look at and that may need your help or corrective action.
- Check out our handout for more tips: [5 Tips to Improve Faculty Presence](#)

³ Giving adequate points for comments relative to posts and **keeping on the “social” points** (i.e., those for reactions and receiving comments) will encourage early and high-quality participation with a strong focus on commenting, which is essential for good conversations. These are essential to good community health and using the point system appropriately **is among the easiest things you can do to ensure better outcomes**. Though you can edit the point setups, the chosen defaults for YD communities are well-researched for course use cases and **significant deviations in the relative values of the point earning rules should be considered with care**. If you are a first-time user of Yellowdig and you’d like to have students need to make about 3-4 posts or comments per week, start with the standard defaults and adjust the point earning rules after you’ve tried it. We are happy to consult on alternative point setups or help you achieve a specific outcome if you email us at clientsuccess@yellowdig.com.