

From the LLC Guide to Collaborative Learning, Pg. 13-15

Email and E-Discussion lists
Role of the Coordinator VI - Technology Options:

This tip sheet offers advice on using Email and E-Discussion lists to enhance communication with the class.

Email

Email enables coordinators to write one message that is distributed to all members of the class with the click of the send button. It is an efficient means of communication with the class, and most LLC members are familiar with email. To enable coordinators to send email to the whole class, LLC provides the following information each semester: A link, a username/password, and instructions that show how to access LLC's online registration software (ProClass), where coordinators can download up-to-date course rosters at their convenience. The roster also lists the email addresses of class participants, their phone numbers, and their home addresses. The coordinator can then communicate via email to: Welcome participants, preview the class, and distribute class documents (such as the syllabus) via the email attachments feature. To facilitate continued communications, the coordinator can set-up a 'contact list' or 'contact group' within his/her email contacts directory, enabling rapid emailing to the entire class. This kind of email contact group is best used for class announcements and for distributing documents.

User tips:

- Keep your messages relatively short
- Make the message relevant to the whole group (rather than to just one or two people)
- Preview the contents of any attachments

Email Discussion Groups ('e-discussion')

E-discussion groups facilitate on-going discussion among all members of the class beyond the walls and time limits of the classroom. In an e-discussion group, an email message posted by anyone automatically goes to everyone in the group, as do the responses to such postings, because the group (or 'list') has *its own address* (and is not based in the coordinator's computer contact list).

The advantage and excitement of an e-discussion group is that participants can continue to discuss course content and ideas at any time—before and after the face-to-face sessions, and even between semesters. Also, discussions on several different course-related topics can occur at the same time. E-discussion increases the social nature of the class and gives participants more time to share ideas and analyze material together. Sometimes participants who are quiet in class are more forthcoming in an e-discussion environment.

User tips:

- An email discussion list should be set up and initiated by a coordinator, who uses a discussion-list feature offered by the coordinator's email service provider—such

as Google, Yahoo or Cox Cable Co.

- Usually, the coordinator starts by setting up a membership list (a list of the names and email addresses of the people in the class) that is then entered or loaded into the service provider's discussion-list protocol. The coordinator can choose whether or not to 'moderate' the list, meaning whether to screen all posts before they are distributed to all list members. Also, the coordinator can set the privacy level of the discussion, limiting it only to preapproved members (thus eliminating advertising and spam.)
- The service provider then sends a notice to all class members, with the address of the list and with instructions about participating.
- Usually, the coordinator starts the e-discussion with a welcome email and with a discussion question, but over time, the energy and array of topics usually shifts to the group, itself.
- For a high-quality discussion, the coordinator should set some **guidelines for the posts** that should appear, and the coordinator may have to remind members of the guidelines.
 - Members should be urged to keep their messages relatively short, to the point and friendly. They should never be rude.
 - Members should write to the whole group (rather than to just one or two people). Email to individuals should not be sent via the discussion list.
 - Members should observe the subject line of each post, and they should stay on that topic. If they want to discuss a different topic, they should create a brand new post with a new subject line.
 - Members should read all the posts on a topic before responding to any single post.
 - The messages should invite more discussion rather than trying to end discussion.