



THE USE OF ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS TO FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING SKILLS IN B2 STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Online discussion forums have increasingly proven to be a valuable instructional tool for developing both critical thinking and writing abilities in B2-level learners. These digital spaces create an interactive and flexible environment where students participate in meaningful exchanges, consider multiple perspectives, and form logical, well-supported arguments. Because forum communication is asynchronous, learners have more time to reflect on content, assess evidence, and craft thoughtful responses to their peers. The written nature of this medium also offers ongoing practice in structuring ideas, enhancing coherence, broadening vocabulary, and strengthening grammatical precision. Furthermore, regular exposure to authentic peer interaction boosts learners' motivation, independence, and metacognitive awareness, helping them produce more intentional and audience-oriented writing. Consequently, online forums function as an effective means of promoting linguistic development as well as the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills among B2 students.*

Keywords: *online discussion forums, critical thinking development, academic writing, B2-level learners, digital pedagogy, asynchronous learning, EFL context.*

Introduction. In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the way learners interact, communicate, and develop language skills. Among the various tools available in modern educational environments, online discussion forums have gained particular attention for their potential to enhance both critical thinking and writing proficiency in foreign language classrooms. For B2-level learners, who are expected to express opinions clearly, analyze information, and produce coherent written texts, these platforms offer a rich space for sustained practice and intellectual engagement.

Unlike traditional face-to-face discussions, forums allow students to participate at their own pace, providing them with the opportunity to reflect deeply before responding. This extended processing time supports the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as evaluating arguments, comparing viewpoints, and constructing evidence-based reasoning. At the same time, the written format of forum interaction enables learners to organize their ideas more effectively, revise their language, and experiment with new vocabulary and structures in a low-pressure environment.



Online forums also promote learner autonomy and collaboration. Through authentic exchanges with peers, students become more aware of their audience, refine their communicative intentions, and take greater responsibility for the quality of their contributions. These features align with contemporary pedagogical approaches that emphasize student-centered learning, interactive communication, and the integration of digital tools into language education. Given their capacity to support both linguistic and cognitive development, online discussion forums represent a promising method for fostering critical thinking and writing skills among B2 students. This paper explores their pedagogical value, examines the mechanisms through which they enhance learning, and highlights their role in creating dynamic, reflective, and meaningful learning experiences in EFL contexts.

The use of online discussion forums has become one of the most influential tools in modern language education, especially for B2-level learners who are in the transitional stage between intermediate and advanced proficiency. As students at this level are expected to develop both the depth and accuracy of their written communication, online forums offer a unique environment where critical thinking and writing skills can naturally evolve through meaningful interaction. When learners engage in online discussions, they are not only practicing language use but also participating in a dynamic process of reasoning, reflection, argumentation and idea-building, all of which are essential components of higher-order thinking.

Online forums create an environment where students can read diverse viewpoints, analyze the arguments of peers and construct their own responses thoughtfully. This process is inherently conducive to developing critical thinking. Unlike traditional classroom discussions where students must respond quickly, often with limited processing time, online forums allow learners to reflect thoroughly before crafting a response. They can review texts, search for evidence, compare arguments and consider counterpoints. This asynchronous nature reduces pressure and encourages more deliberate cognitive engagement. As a result, B2 learners become more aware of their reasoning process and start to articulate ideas with greater clarity and logical structure. They learn to support their thoughts with examples, justify their claims and evaluate the validity of others' opinions, which are all markers of strong critical thinking ability.

The written nature of forums directly enhances writing skills as well. Since B2 students still face challenges in grammatical accuracy, cohesion and lexical choice, online discussions serve as authentic writing practice without the formality and anxiety associated with essays or tests. Students write to communicate, not simply to complete an assignment, which makes their writing more purposeful and motivated. They become conscious of how tone, clarity and style affect the interpretation of their message by peers. Moreover, they repeatedly produce paragraphs of writing during discussions, which strengthens fluency, coherence and overall confidence. Exposure to peers' writing also acts as a model for





language input. Students can observe new vocabulary, natural expressions and structural patterns that they can adopt and adapt in their own posts.

Critical thinking is also strengthened through the need to interpret multiple perspectives. Online forums often include participants with different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. When B2 students encounter contrasting viewpoints, they learn to question assumptions, recognize bias, evaluate evidence and consider alternative explanations. This exposure pushes them beyond surface-level thinking and encourages deeper intellectual engagement. Teachers can guide this process by asking open-ended questions, encouraging justification of opinions and promoting respectful disagreement. These prompts help students move from descriptive writing toward analytical and argumentative writing, which is essential for mastering upper-intermediate proficiency.

Another important element is autonomy. Online forums encourage self-regulated learning as students choose when to participate, how much to write and what kind of reasoning to apply. They take ownership of their learning process and become more independent thinkers and writers. This self-directed involvement not only improves motivation but also fosters metacognitive awareness, enabling students to evaluate their own thinking and writing. When learners re-read their posts, compare them with others and reflect on feedback, they naturally identify areas for improvement.

The integration of online discussion forums also supports collaboration. Peers interact, negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge, which reinforces the social dimension of learning. When students work together, they learn to articulate ideas more clearly, provide constructive feedback and engage in academic dialogue, all of which strengthen both critical thinking and writing. Teachers play a vital role by moderating discussions, modeling effective argumentation, setting expectations for respectful communication and providing timely feedback to guide students' development.

Conclusion. Online discussion forums represent a highly effective digital tool for strengthening both critical thinking and writing skills among B2-level learners. Their asynchronous nature gives students the time needed to reflect, evaluate information, and formulate well-reasoned responses, which directly contributes to the development of higher-order thinking abilities. Through continuous written interaction, learners practice organizing ideas, improving textual coherence, enriching vocabulary, and enhancing grammatical accuracy.

Moreover, forums encourage autonomy, collaboration, and purposeful communication as students engage with authentic peer input and respond to diverse viewpoints. This interaction increases motivation and metacognitive awareness, making learners more conscious of how they construct arguments and express themselves in writing.

Overall, the integration of online discussion forums into the language learning process provides a dynamic and supportive environment that promotes both linguistic growth and cognitive development. For B2 learners, these platforms not only enhance academic writing



competence but also cultivate the critical reasoning skills essential for effective communication in modern educational and professional contexts.

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