



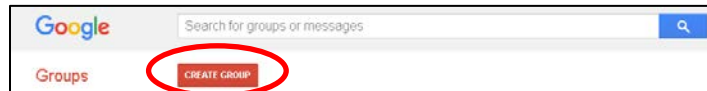
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Using Google Groups for Online Discussions

Google Groups is an online platform that can be used to create online discussions between the teacher and students.

Get Going with Groups

To start using Google Groups, [click here](#). Use the **Sign in** button at the upper right-hand side to sign into your Google Account. To create a group, click on the **Create Group** button at the top.



A form appears prompting you to enter the following information.

1. **Group name:** Enter a name for your group. For example, Mrs. Smith's 5th Grade Classroom.
2. **Group email address:** Create an e-mail address for the group. This e-mail address is used to facilitate discussions within Google Groups. Google Groups automatically creates an e-mail address for you depending on the group name you enter. However, you can manually change this if you wish.
3. **Group description:** Enter a short description to help parents and students locate and identify your group.
4. **Group type:** This determines the platform in which users can contribute to your group. You can always change this later. For the purpose of creating an online discussion group for you and your students, choose **Web forum**. Similar to other online discussion boards, this type of group allows group members to communicate in an online-based forum by using the Google Groups user interface. Or, choose **Q&A forum**. This type of group also uses the Google Groups user interface but is more appropriate for communication that is based on general questions and answers such as an online homework help desk. We utilize the **Web forum** as the basis for the following example.

5. **Basic permissions:** Here you control who can view the group, the topics, post in the forum, and join the group. Select **All members of the group** for the first three categories and **Only invited users** for the fourth category. This is to protect the privacy of the students and parents that contribute to this classroom forum. You will not want the forum to be public for everyone on the web to see.
6. Then, click the red **Create** button at the top. You may be prompted to verify that you're not a robot.

The screenshot shows the Google Groups 'Create' form. At the top, there are 'CREATE' and 'Cancel' buttons. The form fields include:

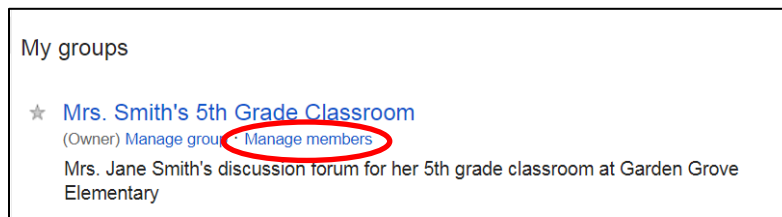
- Group name:** Mrs. Smith's 5th Grade Classroom
- Group email address:** smith5thgradeclass@googlegroups.com and https://groups.google.com/d/forum/smith5thgradeclass
- Group description:** Mrs. Jane Smith's discussion forum for her 5th grade classroom at Garden Grove Elementary (211 characters remaining)
- Group's primary language:** English (United States)
- Group type:** Email list (selected)
- Basic permissions:** Group visibility: All members of the group

The 'Basic permissions' section is expanded to show the following settings:

- Group visibility:** All members of the group
- View Topics:** Select groups of users (checked) All members of the group
- Post:** Select groups of users (checked) All members of the group
- Join the Group:** Select who can join (checked) Only invited users

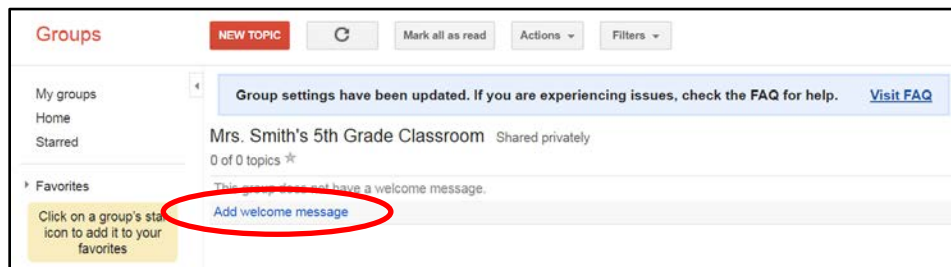
Then, click on the first link to begin inviting people to your group. For this group, enter the e-mail addresses for your students and/or their parents and compose a message to be included in the e-mail invitation that will be sent to them. Click the **Send invites** button.

When you are finished click **Done**. If you wish to invite additional members to your group at a later time, return to the Google Groups dashboard and click on **My Groups**. Click on the **Manage Members** button underneath the appropriate group name and select the **Invite members** link in the left panel.



Creating New Discussions

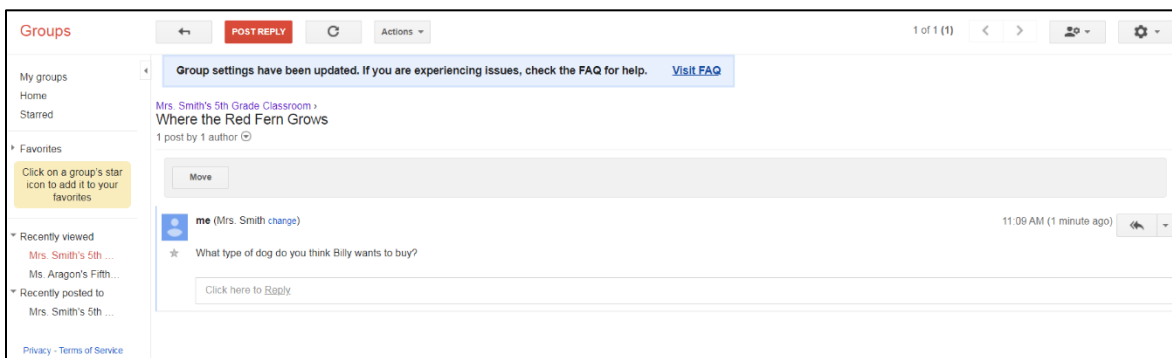
Once you're done inviting members to your group, return to your Group's dashboard. In the left panel, click **My groups** to view a list of your groups, as you have the capability to create and manage multiple Google Groups under one account. Click on the title of the group you just created. Google may ask you to confirm your settings. Then, click the **Add welcome message** link to compose a welcome message for members of your group to see upon arriving at your forum.



Once you're done typing your message, use the tool bar at the top to edit and format your text. Then, click the **Save** button at the bottom of the text box to return to the dashboard.

To create new discussions, click the **New Topic** button at the top. Enter a subject for your post and then enter content for the post. Use the tool bar to edit and format your posting. Notice that the tool bar is very similar to that of Google Docs and other composing windows you've used in various Google apps. You can also add images and attach files. This is very helpful for students who are collaborating on schoolwork or if you need to share forms and documents with parents. When you are finished and ready to publish the message, click the red **Post** button at the top of the screen.

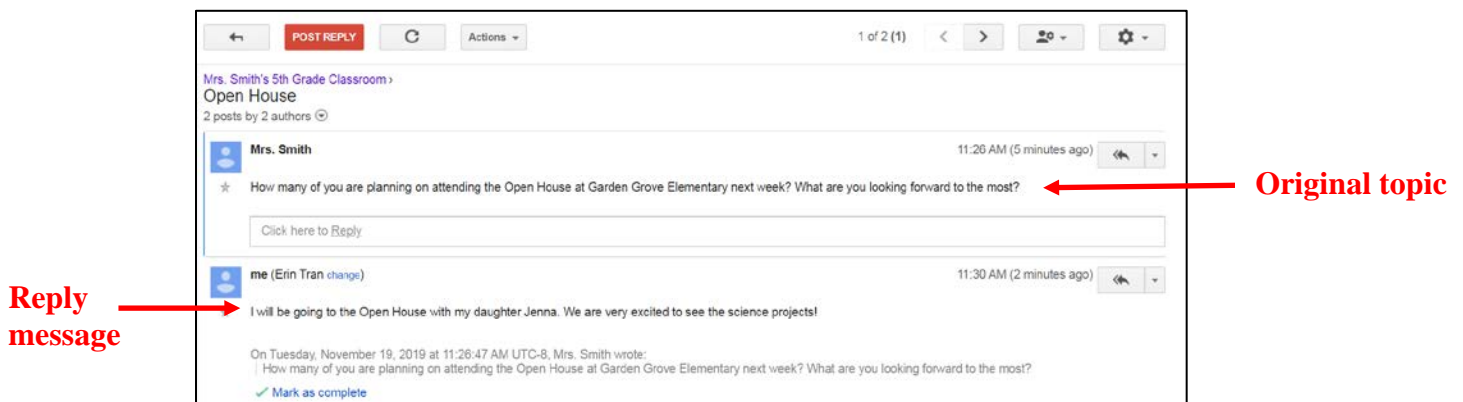
The image below shows an example of how a new topic is displayed.



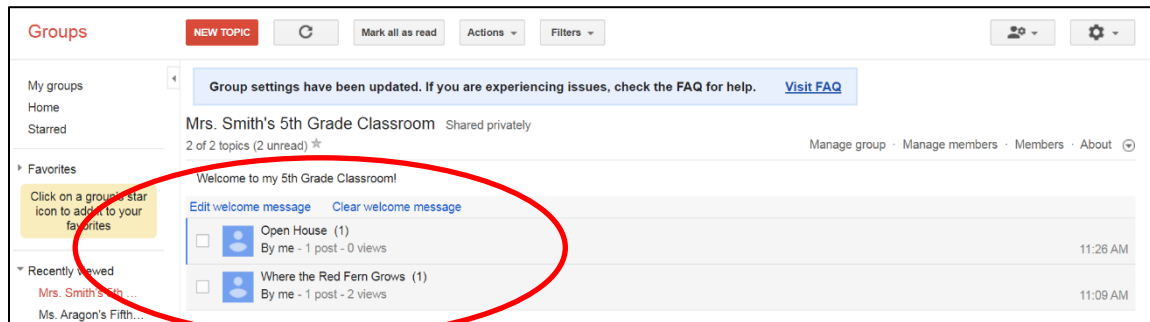
Other members of your group can create new topics within the forum or respond to existing topics.

Organization of Postings

Any member of your group can contribute to the forum. Below is an example of how the postings within a topic appear in your forum. Notice that the postings are displayed in a threaded format very similar to Gmail.



Members can click on the back button (arrow) at the upper left-hand side to return to the Group dashboard at any time. Doing so leads them to the area where they can view all the current topics in the forum as displayed below.

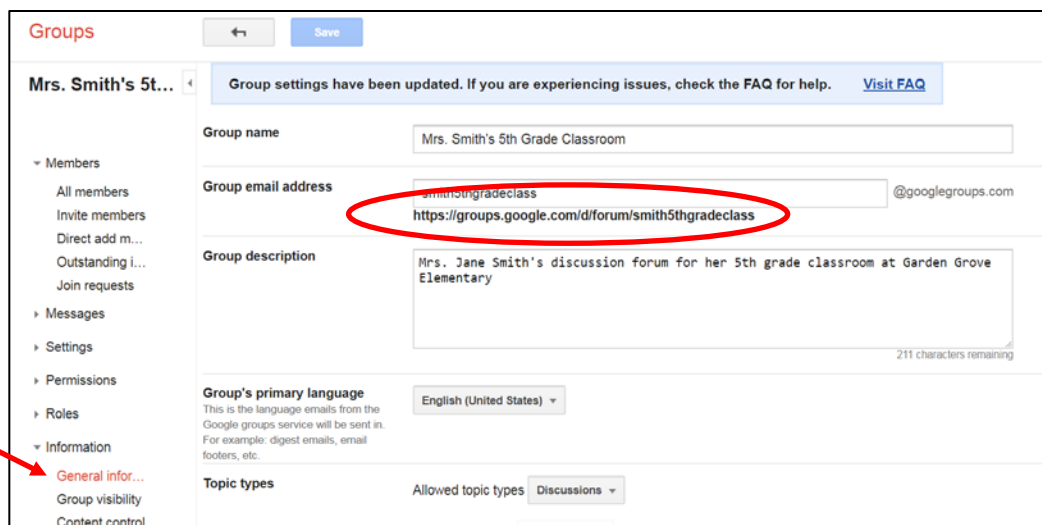


Notice there are two topics in the forum. The most recent topic is shown at the top. In the dashboard area, members can add new topics to the forum.

Share Your Group

To share the link to your Google Group on your classroom website or blog, follow the steps below.

1. Return to the Google Groups dashboard and click on **My Groups**. Click the **Manage group** link under the appropriate group name.
2. In the left panel under **Information**, select **General information**.
3. Below the Group e-mail address, copy the web address to your Google Group.
4. Paste the link into an e-mail message and send it to those you wish to share your forum with.



This excerpt is from the PDI online course Google as a Classroom Tool for Learning (K-12). This course is worth 3½ units of graduate-level credit from UCSD, Extension. For more information on this online course, [click here](#).