



Using Piazza to run exercise sessions at EPFL

Center for Digital Education (CEDE) and Teaching Support Center (CAPE)

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More information: <https://go.epfl.ch/flexible-teaching>

Piazza is a 'forum' tool that can be used to manage questions in exercises (as well as projects, labs etc.). In piazza:

- students post questions (in text, or using LaTeX, code, files, or by attaching photos of their work from a handheld device)
- students collaboratively build good answers to each other's questions
- students search for already asked and answered questions
- TAs answer questions, or tag good student answers
- Students can ask TAs for a one-to-one meeting (e.g on Zoom)

Using Piazza for exercises involves 4 distinct procedures:

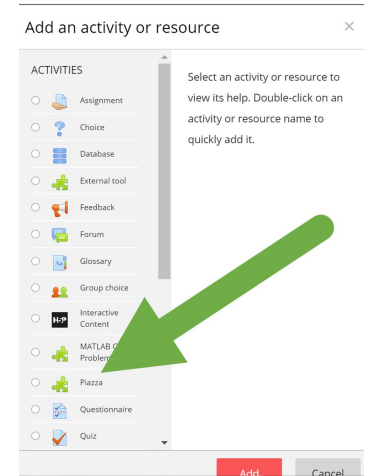
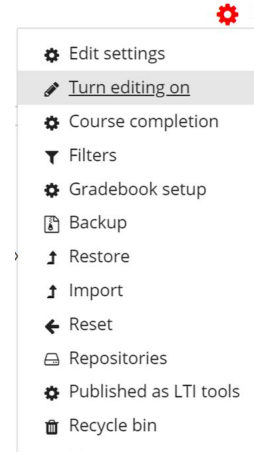
- Create a piazza activity in Moodle
- Set up the piazza activity to match your needs
- Managing piazza forum posts on exercise questions
- Managing a Live Q&A during exercise sessions

Alongside this 'quick start', you will find more details are in the piazza user documentation [here](#)

Create a piazza class in moodle



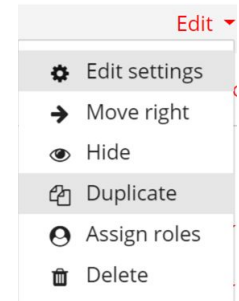
- On your course moodle page, 'turn editing on'
- In the first week of exercises, 'Add an activity or resource'
- Choose Piazza (this will create a piazza activity in your Moodle course)
 - When prompted, give the activity a name (e.g., "Piazza link for Exercises")
 - The first time you click on the piazza link in moodle you will be prompted to 'Create your class on Piazza' (You may need to add the number of students in your class).
 - Designate folder names (see next slide [here](#)) and post a welcome message to students (for advice on this, see [here](#))
- You only need to create one piazza activity in Moodle for all the exercise sets/sessions of your course - you can duplicate the same link to all weeks in which you have an exercise session using the 'Edit' menu for the piazza activity



A screenshot of the 'Create your class on Piazza' form. The form has the following fields:

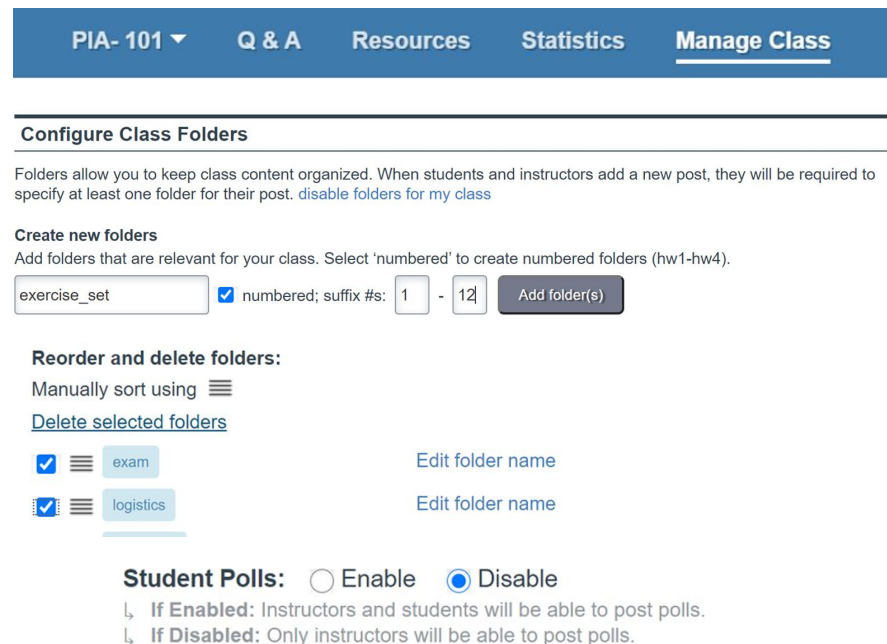
- Class Name:
- Class Number:
- Estimated Enrollment:
- Term:

At the bottom of the form, there is a button labeled 'Create New Piazza Class'. A green arrow points to this button.



Set up the Piazza class to match your needs

- All questions in piazza are assigned to a 'folder'. By default piazza creates sample folders. You can set up piazza to match your course structure when creating the activity or by choosing 'Manage Class' from the top menu.
- To add exercise set/session folders, under 'Configure Class Folders', you can 'create new folders':
 - Write 'exercise_set' in the space, select the checkbox called 'numbered', and indicate how many exercise sets/sessions your course has (e.g. 1-12).
 - Select 'Add folder(s)'. This will create a folder for each exercise set/session.
- To delete preconfigured folders, you can 'Reorder and delete folders'
 - Select folders to be deleted
 - Click 'Delete selected folders'
- You can also make other settings changes (such as disabling student polls) - ensuring to 'save changes'
- There are posts on your new course page with advice on communicating with students and on piazza functions.

The Piazza logo consists of the word "piazza" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, centered on a solid blue square background.A screenshot of the Piazza 'Manage Class' interface. At the top is a dark blue navigation bar with tabs for 'PIA- 101', 'Q & A', 'Resources', 'Statistics', and 'Manage Class' (which is underlined). Below the navigation bar is a section titled 'Configure Class Folders'. The text explains that folders help organize content and that students will be required to specify at least one folder for their posts. There are two main sections: 'Create new folders' and 'Reorder and delete folders:'. The 'Create new folders' section has a text input field containing 'exercise_set', a checked checkbox for 'numbered; suffix #s:', and two input fields for the number of folders, '1' and '12', followed by an 'Add folder(s)' button. The 'Reorder and delete folders:' section shows a list of folders: 'exam' and 'logistics'. Each folder has a checked checkbox, a hamburger menu icon, and an 'Edit folder name' link. At the bottom, there is a 'Student Polls:' section with radio buttons for 'Enable' and 'Disable' (which is selected). Below this are two explanatory lines: 'If Enabled: Instructors and students will be able to post polls.' and 'If Disabled: Only instructors will be able to post polls.'

Anatomy of a Piazza Post

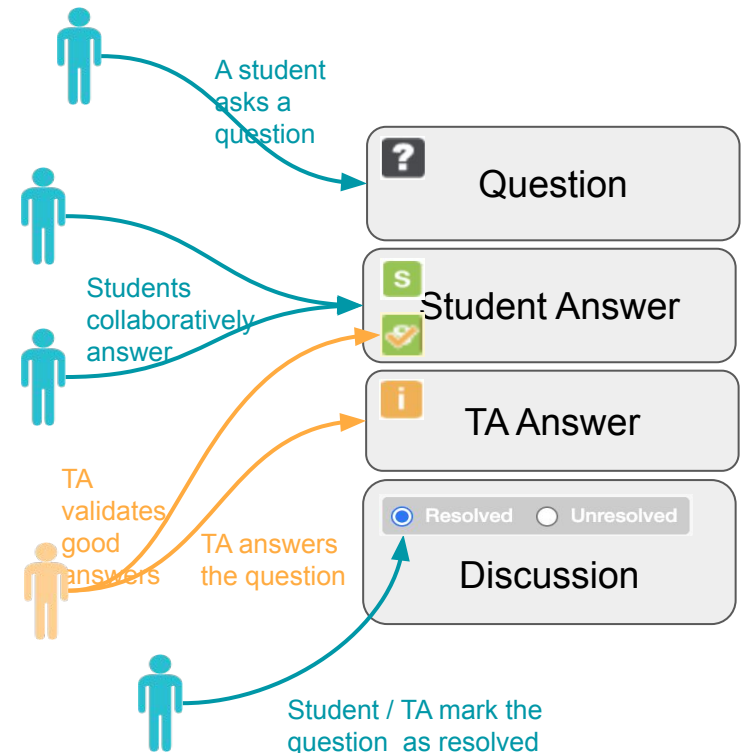
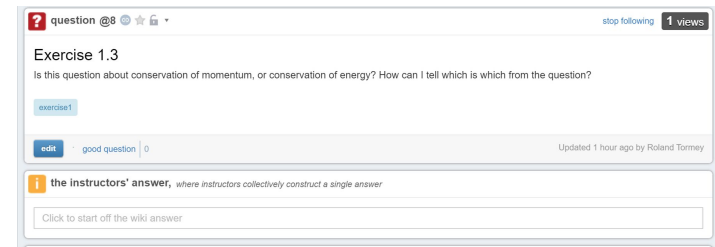
A post is initiated by a student who asks a question. Piazza is slightly different from a plain threaded discussion board (e.g. Slack or WhatsApp group).

- **Student Answer.** Students can collectively edit the answer to a question. The purpose is to encourage students to find the answers by themselves.
- **Instructor's Answer.** TAs can collaboratively build their own answer to a question.
- A discussion following a question automatically has a "Resolved/Unresolved" status which indicates whether it needs further attention.

More advanced settings allow the TA to:

- lock the post to prevent further editing
- change who can see the post
- delete the question

Some ideas on how students can benefit most from piazza are [here](#)



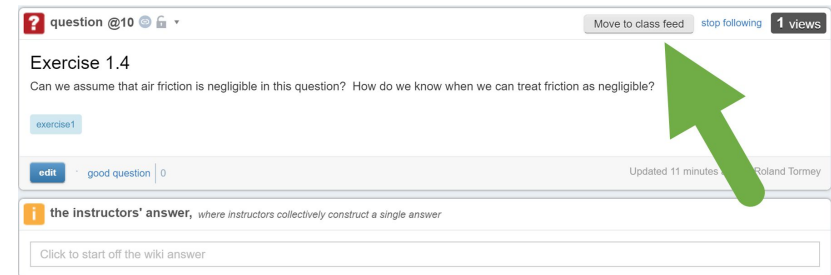
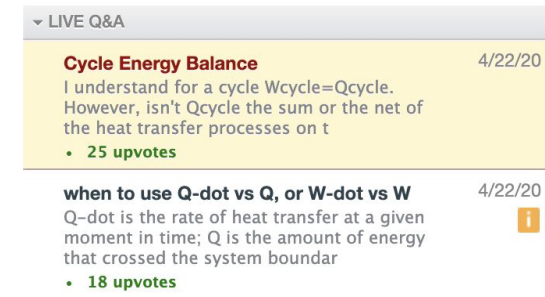
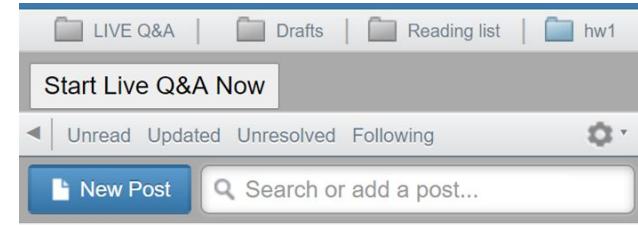
Manage a 'Live Q&A' during the Exercise session

TAs can launch a 'Live Q&A' exercise session clicking on 'Start Live Q&A Now' (the session can be ended using the same button)

In Live Q&A mode, students can upvote important unanswered questions. The number of **upvotes** is indicated in green under the question.

In Live Q&A mode, TAs can:

- identify priority questions by seeing which ones have most upvotes
- move a question to the class feed once it has been answered satisfactorily so that students can still access it after the live session
- Answer requests from students for Zoom calls via 1-to-1 messaging
- use the same functions as in non-Live mode



Maximising student usage of piazza

At the start of the term

- Introduce piazza to students and [explain how it will be used in your course](#)
- Manage **student expectations** by stating, for example, that TAs will read and respond to posts twice per week - during office hours and during the exercise session
- Ask students to try to **answer each others' questions** and to edit/add to an already existing answer (a piazza answer is a bit like Google docs - multiple people can edit/change a post). The goal is to answer the query - **not to provide a whole solution to the exercise.**
- Encourage students to **be constructive** and to avoid offensive or rude comments in the forum (TAs can readily delete offensive posts if required)
- If students email questions to TAs or ask them verbally, post them and the answer to piazza (anonymously)
- Post some questions to piazza yourself to model to students the way you want them to use it (e.g. naming the post with the exercise number, making their question clear, etc.)

During each session, encourage students to:

- search to see if their question has already been answered
- post their question anonymously (this encourages timid students to participate)
- use the exercise name or number as the summary line (so it can be easily found by others)
- try to answer each others' questions and to improve on each other's answers
- be constructive and to avoid offensive or rude comments in the forum
- book a one-to-one Zoom discussion with a TA using the individual messaging option in piazza

Students and TAs can:

- manage email notification settings to avoid getting too many emails from piazza

Student Guide to Posting a Question in Piazza

Piazza is for **posting questions about an exercise**. (Questions about the course or about logistics can go to the relevant moodle forum).

The “students’ answer” is an answer to the question posed by another student. **Students should not post their solution to an exercise.** Students can give hints and ideas, but **should not provide full (or nearly full) exercise solutions.**

1. The default is that questions are posted to the whole class but the student may post directly to the instructors (e.g. to ask for a one-to-one discussion on Zoom)
2. It is important to ask students to use the exercise name or number as the summary line: otherwise the question feed can quickly become chaotic and students will end up posting the same question or comment multiple times
3. Students and TAs can write posts in rich text but can also use a LaTeX editor [$f(x)$ on the menu bar] or in code [`{;}` in the menu bar]
4. Students can post anonymously (if all students are encouraged to post anonymously, this may encourage participation from more timid students)

The screenshot shows the Piazza question posting interface. At the top, there are tabs for various exercises (exercise_4 to exercise_10, exam, logistics, other). Below this, the 'Post Type' section has three radio buttons: 'Question' (selected), 'Note', and 'Poll/In-Class Response'. The 'Post to' section has two radio buttons: 'Entire Class' (selected) and 'Instructor(s)'. The 'Select Folder(s)' section shows a list of exercise folders (exercise_1 to exercise_8, etc.). The 'Summary' field is labeled '(100 characters or less)' and contains the text '1.'. Below the summary field is the 'Rich text editor' section, which includes a toolbar with options for 'Rich text editor', 'Plain text editor', and 'Markdown editor'. The toolbar also has sections for 'Insert', 'Format', and 'Table', with various icons for bold, italic, text color, background color, bulleted list, numbered list, link, image, video, and LaTeX editor ($f(x)$), and code editor (`{;}`). The 'Show my name as' dropdown menu is open, showing options: 'Roland Tormey', 'Anonymous to Classmates', and 'Anonymous to everyone' (selected). The interface also shows 'response Time:' and 'Special Mentions' at the bottom.

Support

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