How do Forums (aka Discussion Boards) function in Moodle?

Forums are divided into two main categories: General forums and Learning forums (forums for specific parts of class, ie: weekly, topic, etc)

There are 4 different forum types:

1) single simple discussions- single topic on one page, useful for short focused discussions
2) standard forum for general use- open forum
3) each person posts one discussion- each person can post ONE new discussion topic, but everyone can reply to them (sounds like a blog)
4) Q and A- only teachers can pose a question in the initial post, students can reply with an answer, but will not see other students' replies until they have replied to the posting first (much like SSC's Homework Board)

There are 4 ways teachers can restrict students actions in forums

1) Discussion and replies are allowed
2) No discussion, but replies are allowed
3) No discussions, no replies (Moodle sites says this is useful for the News Forum when you only want teachers to post new items that appear on the course main page)
4) You can also restrict student's to posting between certain dates

Subscribing to a Forum

When a teacher subscribes to a forum, the they will be emailed copies of every post 30 mins after the post is written, but can usually choose to unsubscribe. The 30 mins time limit is changeable, but by default, Moodle gives the teacher 30 mins to change what a student has just posted before it is emailed out to the group.
There is a function the teacher can set to force subscribe everyone. When setting up the forum, the teacher can choose "Yes, initially," which will subscribe all the students initially then they can unsubscribe or "Yes, forever," which will force subscribe all the students and disallow them from unsubscribing.
From Moodle 1.6+ the "Subscription not allowed" setting prevents students from subscribing to a forum, and only teachers can choose to be subscribed.

Tracking

If "read tracking" on, users can track and read unread messages in forums and discussions (3 settings: Optional, On, and Off).

Attachments
Yes, attachments can also be limited to a certain file size (restriction set by teacher)

Viewing discussions in forums

Forums can be displayed 4 different ways:

1) Display replies flat, with oldest first
2) Display replies flat, with newest first
3) Display replies in threaded form- only the post starting the discussion will be displayed, replies are reduced to headlines
4) Display replies in nested form- all posts are in full form, replies will be reduced to headlines

Allowing forum posts to be rated
Any user can rate each other's posts.
Any ratings given in the forum are recorded in the gradebook.
You can select whether you want students to see only their own ratings or everyone else's as well.

Can a Moodle Forum allow anonymous postings?

Good question. It looks like students will need to have their names displayed (might be important for subscription and ratings), so anonymous postings are probably not allowed.

These instructions were created by Caroline Tam and added to the knowledgebase by Stacey Rosborough