

## How to Set Up a Discussion Board or Chat Facility

Discussion boards and chat sessions can be an effective way to develop learning communities when you can't get a group of people physically together. It's also a good way to use technology for communications between groups of more than two people; if you've ever tried to follow a conversation over e-mail, you know that it can quickly become difficult to follow.



You can also use these tools to continue discussions outside of regular meeting times. You can use them with a group of peers at your program, with adult students, or as part of a training program for your volunteers.

Discussion boards are places where you can post questions or information and other members of your group can respond when they are able. Since the board is available anytime, you don't need to have everyone online at the same time to take advantage of it. You can discuss several topics simultaneously using different "threads," which make it easier to follow the conversation. Discussion boards should be moderated to ensure information is accurate and postings are relevant to the topic.

Chat is another online communication tool. To participate, members need to be signed on at the same time. Chat is a good way to facilitate a virtual conversation. It can become confusing if you have a lot of people chatting about multiple topics at the same time.

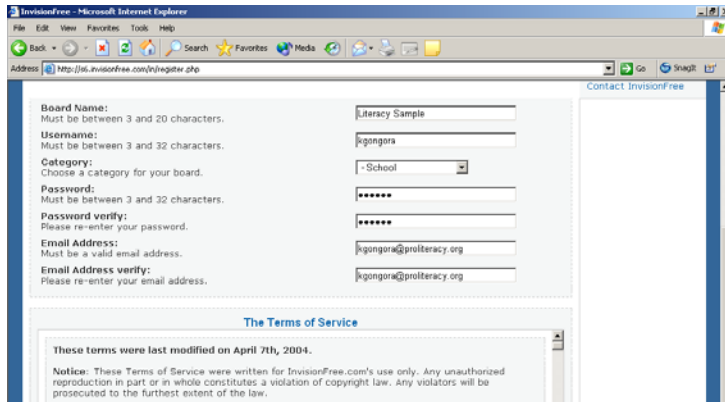
Some places where you can create free discussion boards include [Yahoo groups](#), [InvisionFree](#), [Raidersoft](#) and [VizionBB.net](#).

The most commonly available chat tool is [America Online IM](#) (Instant Messenger). You do not need to have an AOL account to use it, however you will need to create a user id. [Sigmachat](#) is another free chat facility you may like.

## Discussion Boards

It takes a little advance planning to set up a discussion board, but the results are worth it! Before you pick a discussion board to use, see if you can access one that has already been developed so you can see how it is organized. Usually, you can create categories of subject matter as an administrator, and members of your board can post topics related to that subject.

In this example, we'll set up a discussion board using a provider called InvisionFree. There are several providers of this type of free service, and they will all look a little different, but the concepts are very similar.



First, you'll register and set up your board. (Each organization's setup will look a little different from this.)

You'll receive two Web addresses for your board: one so people can use it, and one so you can maintain it.

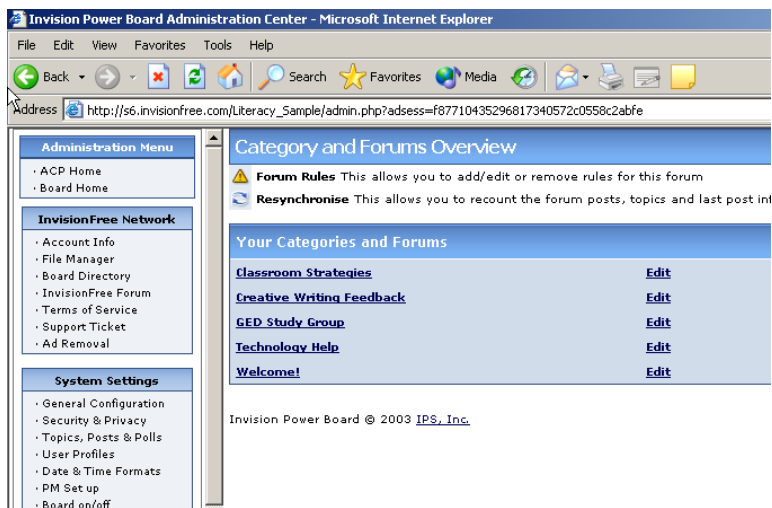


**INVISIONFREE**  
ONE FREE FORUM.  
UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Your board is now activated.

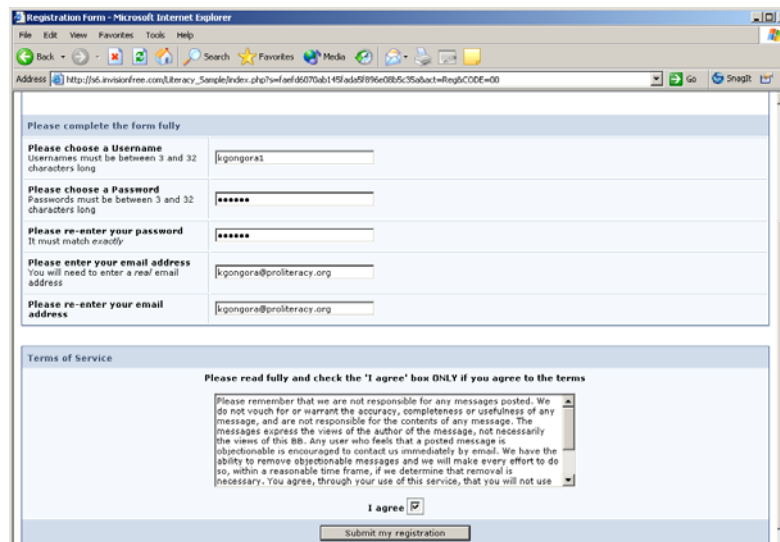
**Board Information:**  
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Board URL: [http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy\\_Sample/index.php](http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy_Sample/index.php)  
Admin Control Panel URL: [http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy\\_Sample/admin.php](http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy_Sample/admin.php)  
Username: kgongora  
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We hope you enjoy your board and have a successful community.  
If you need any help, register at the [support forums](#)  
-The InvisionFree Team



As an administrator, you'll add categories for discussions your users will be having. (It's a good idea to have a "welcome" category where people can learn the rules of using your forum.)

People who will be using your forum (members) will also need to register. (Again, all registration forms will look a little different from this example, but the process is essentially the same.)

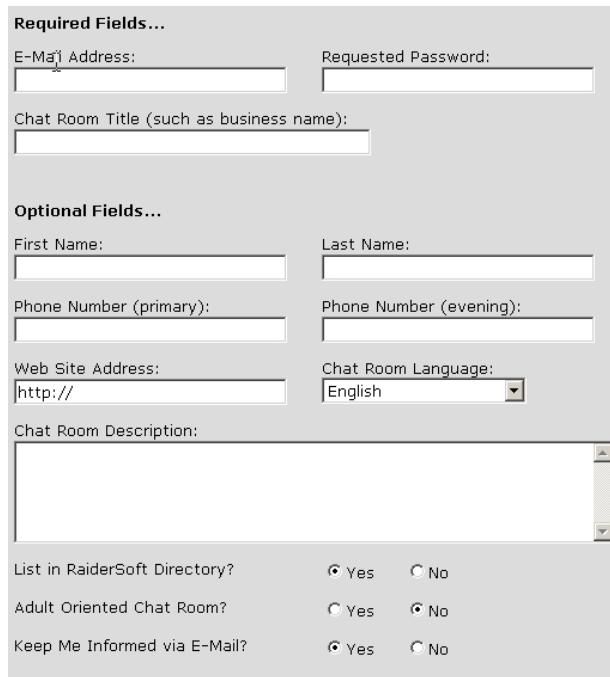


Your forum members, when they sign on, will be able to post topics and responses in each category that you set up. You can always add additional categories as you decide on new topics to discuss.

If you want to practice using a discussion board, go to [http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy\\_Sample/index.php?act=idx](http://s6.invisionfree.com/Literacy_Sample/index.php?act=idx) and register to participate. Try posting topics, and respond to topics that are there!

## Chat

Here's an example of the information that is required to set up a chat room using Sigmachat. Once you've completed the information on the screen, you'll be given the URL for the chat facility you've created, and you're done!



The screenshot shows a registration form for Sigmachat. It is divided into two sections: "Required Fields..." and "Optional Fields...".

**Required Fields...**

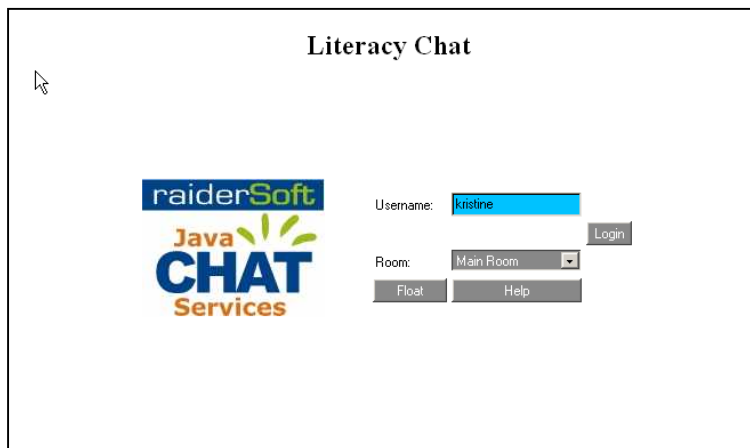
- E-Mail Address: [text input]
- Requested Password: [text input]
- Chat Room Title (such as business name): [text input]

**Optional Fields...**

- First Name: [text input]
- Last Name: [text input]
- Phone Number (primary): [text input]
- Phone Number (evening): [text input]
- Web Site Address: [text input, contains "http://"]
- Chat Room Language: [dropdown menu, set to "English"]
- Chat Room Description: [text area]

At the bottom, there are three questions with radio button options:

- List in RaiderSoft Directory?  Yes  No
- Adult Oriented Chat Room?  Yes  No
- Keep Me Informed via E-Mail?  Yes  No



A user simply needs to type in a username and click login, and they've entered the chat room.

If you want to try to chat, get a partner (or several!) and go to: <http://client0.sigmachat.com/sc.pl?id=76121> Type in your name in the username field and click **Login** to connect.