

DISCUSSION BOARD

Overview

This chapter reviews the Discussion Board feature.

In this chapter

This chapter includes the following topics.

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Initiate a Thread	Describes how to start a conversation in a forum.
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Grading Discussion Board Participation	Provides steps for assigning a grade to a Student for Discussion Board participation.
Peer Review Through the Discussion Board	Provides an example of how to use the Discussion Board for users to respond to the work of other users.
Keeping the Discussion Board Content Safe	Gives details on the security options for ensuring safe content.
Delegating Discussion Board Administration	Explains how to assign administrative roles within the Discussion Board to other users.
Incorporating Discussion Board Forums into the Learning Process	Describes how Discussion Boards work within a course.
Discussion Board Statistics	Explains how to access statistics on usage.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BOARD

Overview

The Discussion Board is an outcomes based learning tool that can be applied in a number of ways to enhance learning and measure performance.

Discussion Board Terms

The table below outlines the terms used to describe Discussion Board features.

TERM	DEFINITION
Thread	The initial post and the entire series of replies to that post within a Discussion Board forum.
Thread Detail	The page that displays the threaded view of all posts in a thread along with the selected post.
Post	A Discussion Board entry posted to a thread or used to start a thread. Also used as a verb to refer to the act of submitting a post.
Forum Role	A role type that is assigned to all members of the Discussion Board for each forum and enables specific privileges within the forum. A user may have one role per forum, however, a user's role in each forum may differ.
Blocked	A forum role that blocks the user from accessing the forum.
Reader	A forum role that grants the user the rights to read the contents of a forum. Users with this role may only view content and cannot add or respond to posts.
Participant	A forum role that grants the user read and write privileges in the forum.
Grader	A forum role that grants the user Participant privileges as well as the Grading privileges for the forum.
Moderator	A forum role that grants Participant privileges as well as the ability to modify, delete, and lock posts. If a Moderation Queue is used, the Moderator may also approve or reject posts in the queue.
Manager	A forum role that grants all privileges.
Grade Forum	The process of assigning a grade to a user for their performance in a forum.
Grade Thread	The process of assigning a grade to a user for their performance in a thread.
Rate Post	The process of evaluating a post based on a fixed, 5 point scale.
Collect Posts	The process of selecting one or more posts or threads

TERM	DEFINITION
	for inclusion in on a page that can be sorted, filtered, printed, and saved as a document. The collection is gathered into a format that can be sorted, filtered, printed, and saved as a document that can be viewed in a browser.
Flag	A mark used to call attention to the post.
Copy Forum	The process of creating a clone of a forum or the forum settings in the same discussion board or in another discussion board in the same course or organization.
Save Posts	The act of saving a post as a draft.
Published Post	A post that has been submitted and, if necessary, approved by a moderator.
Post Position	The position of a post in a thread relative to the other posts.
Draft	A post that has been saved for future editing.
Locked Thread	A thread that is visible for reading but cannot be modified. Users may not post to a locked thread.
Unavailable Thread	A thread that is hidden and inaccessible to all users except forum Managers.
Hidden Thread	A Thread that is locked and not visible by default. Users may view hidden threads by enabling the Display Hidden Threads feature.
Moderation Queue	A list of posts that must be approved before they will appear in the Discussion Board.

VIEW AND ORGANIZE DISCUSSION BOARD CONTENT

Overview

Forums can appear throughout a course, in any area where an Instructor chooses. Each group may also have a private Discussion Board with forums available only to those users that are a part of the group. All forums that are not a part of a group are accessible from various points in the course or by going to the Discussion Board tool. The Discussion Board tool centralizes all of the forums in the course.

Please keep in mind that when users open the Discussion Board tool they will only see those forums they can access.

Search

A search function appears at the top of the page throughout the Discussion Board. The search includes a keyword field, date restrictions, and options for where to search. The search function starts at the current level and options exist to work up. For example, in a thread, the default search option only searches that thread but options exist to search the entire forum or all forums. From the search function, users can search all forums in the course, including any forums that appear in the user's groups.

Thread Status

The Forum Manager can change the status of a thread to one of the following:

- **Published:** A published thread is available to users.
- **Locked:** Users may read the thread but not make any additions or modifications. Locking a thread allows Grades to be assigned without users updating or changing posts.
- **Unlocked:** Unlocking a thread allows users to modify and add to the thread.
- **Hidden:** Hidden threads do not display unless the user chooses. Hidden threads may not be modified. Hiding threads removes outdated threads and makes relevant content easier to find.
- **Unavailable:** Unavailable threads are only visible to forum managers. Even then, forum managers must choose to view these threads. Making threads unavailable means that users can no longer view the thread.

Follow these steps to change the status of a thread:

1. Open a forum in the Discussion Board.
2. Select threads.
3. Choose a new status for the selected threads using the **Change Status to:** drop-down list.
4. Click **Go**.

Forum View

The forum view lists the threads in the forum and includes several options for displaying and managing threads. The list of threads can be sorted by clicking the carat at the top of each column. Posts within the thread are viewed by clicking on the hyperlinked name of the thread in the Thread column.

The functions at the top of the page include a Display option to show threads of different status and a search function. There is also an action bar that includes the following functions:

FUNCTION	PURPOSE
Add Thread	Initiate a new thread.
Remove Thread	Remove the selected threads from the forum. Deleted threads cannot be restored. Use the unavailable function to completely hide threads from users without actually deleting the threads.
Collect	Gather selected threads onto one page where posts can be sorted, filtered, or printed.
Grade Forum	This option only appears if grading is turned on for the forum.
Change Status to:	Update the availability status of the selected threads.

Thread View

Clicking on a thread in a forum brings up the Thread Detail The thread view is divided into three parts. Post viewing and management functions appear at the top of the page. The middle of the page displays a list of posts, with replies nested underneath the original post. The bottom of the page displays the current post.

The following options are available when viewing a thread:

FEATURE	DESCRIPTION
Action Bar	
Collect	Group posts into an organized filterable and sortable set.
Flag	Mark a post for later attention.
Unflag	Remove a flag applied to a post.
Grade Thread	Enter a Grade for a user based on their performance in the Thread. This option only appears if the thread is graded.
Message List	
Select Threads	Select each thread using the checkboxes or the select all/unselect all options. Selected Threads are included in Action Bar operations.

FEATURE	DESCRIPTION
Current Post	
Subscribe	Receive an email alert when a post is updated or a user posts a reply.
Reply	Generate a response to a post.
Modify	Change the content of the post.
Remove	Remove the post. Removing a post also removes all the replies to that post.
Rate this Post	Select a score for the post on a 1 to 5 scale.
Previous Post/Next Post	Click these options to navigate through the posts in the thread.

Collections

Collections gather posts into a printable, sortable format. Collections are a good way to organize posts for quick reading. Instructors can create displays of good posts by gathering them as a collection, printing to PDF or saving as HTML, and then loading the file into the course.

INITIATE A THREAD

Overview

Threads are a series of posts related to a similar topic. When creating a forum, the Instructor has the option of allowing or not allowing users to start threads. If threads are graded, users cannot start threads. Generally, the purpose of the forum will dictate whether or not users can start threads. A moderated, graded forum used to evaluate student performance will usually be tightly controlled. In this case, it would not be appropriate to allow users to create threads. Other forums are designed for users to share opinions and thoughts on tangential or unrelated topics. In this case, it is safe to allow users to create threads and spark discussions.

Start a Thread

Follow these steps to start a thread.

1. Open a Discussion Board Forum.
2. Click **Add Thread** in the action bar. The Add Thread page will appear.
3. Enter a **Subject** and a **Message**. It is also possible to attach files to the post.
4. Click **Save** to store a draft of the post or click **Submit** to create the thread.

RESPOND TO A DISCUSSION BOARD POST

Overview

Threads grow as users respond to the initial, and subsequent, posts. Replies build on one another to construct a conversation.

Reply to a Post

Follow these steps to reply to a post.

1. Open a thread in a forum.
2. Find a post.
3. Click **Reply** for that post.
4. Enter a **Subject** and a **Message**. It is also possible to attach files to the post. Only one file can be added using the Attachment function below the text box. When using the Visual Text Box Editor, multiple files may be added.
5. Click **Save** to store a draft of the post or click **Submit** to create the thread.
6. The post will appear in the thread underneath the original post.

GRADING DISCUSSION BOARD PARTICIPATION

Overview

In a classroom setting, students are often expected to participate in class discussions and that participation is part of the equation when assessing performance. Within a classroom, participation performance can be ambiguous. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate the student who is active but does not advance the discussion from the student that speaks less frequently but with greater impact.

Student interactions with the Discussion Board are a permanent record of participation. The Instructor has the option to grade Students at the forum level or at the thread level. In this way the Instructor can accurately compare Student participation to the expectations set forth.

Enable Grading

Grading options are enabled when the forum is created or by modifying the forum. Click **Modify** on the Discussion Board for a forum to change its settings.

The **Grade** settings appear at the bottom of the Add Forum Page and the Modify Forum page. Select **Grade Forum** and enter a point value to evaluate participants on performance throughout the forum. Select **Grade Threads** to evaluate participants on performance in each thread. When the **Grade Threads** option is used, a **Points Possible** option appears each time a thread is started. Keep in mind that users cannot create new threads if **Grade Threads** is selected for the forum.

Grade User Participation in a Forum

Follow these steps to evaluate performance in a forum.

1. Open the Discussion Board. A list of forums will appear. For each forum that may be graded, an icon will appear in the **Grade** column.
2. Click the icon in the **Grade** column. Only users with a forum role of Grader or Manager may enter a grade for a forum. A Grader may not view their own work.
3. A list of users will appear. Click **Grade** for a user.
4. A collection of the user's posts in the forum will appear. Evaluate the posts and assign a **Grade**.
5. Click **Submit** to add the grade to the Gradebook.

Grade User Participation in a Thread

Follow these steps to evaluate performance within a thread.

1. Open a Discussion Board and then open a forum and select a thread.
2. Click **Grade Thread**. This button will only appear to users with a forum role of Grader or Manager.
3. A list of users will appear. Click **Grade** for a user.
4. A collection of the user's posts in the Thread will appear. Evaluate the posts and assign a **Grade**. Click **Submit** to add the grade to the Gradebook.

Disable Grading for a Forum or Thread

Use the Modify Forum feature to change the grading option to select **No Grading**. If Grades have already been entered for the forum or its threads, a warning message will appear that changing the setting will remove the associated Gradebook Items. Click **OK** to continue or click **Cancel** to preserve the Gradebook Items.

PEER REVIEW THROUGH THE DISCUSSION BOARD

Overview

A common learning tool in classrooms is providing feedback to other students on their work. Students prepare an essay, lab report, or presentation and share it with the class. Other students are asked to comment on the work and offer criticisms for improvement. This process helps the student improve their assignment, but is even more valuable to the students that review the work. Reviewing the work of another student enforces classroom learning and helps the reviewer practice important communication skills.

The Discussion Board is the perfect place in a course for peer review. Each student may start a thread and include their work in the initial post. Other students then review the work, assign a rating to the initial post, and include comments in a response. As users respond, the feedback expands as users reinforce and build on points made by other students.

Users can respond to a post using a 5-star rating system. To enable this feature, select **Allow members to rate posts** when creating the forum.

Rating a Discussion Board Post

Open a thread and view the posts. Each post has an **Overall Rating** field with five stars. The stars show the overall rating that the post has received from users. Click on the **Rate this Post** drop down list and select a rating from 0 to 5 stars. Your rating is now included in the **Overall Rating** and your individual rating appears in the **Rate this Post** field. A user may not rate the same post more than once..

KEEPING THE DISCUSSION BOARD CONTENT SAFE

Overview

Discussion Boards give students the freedom to share their thoughts and opinions on class topics with other users. Occasionally, students may introduce material to the Discussion Board that is inappropriate for the class discussion. Depending on the maturity and the sensitivity of the students in the course, it may be important to review student posts for inappropriate content before sharing posts with the rest of the class.

Instructors can assign Discussion Board users to act as moderators. Moderators review posts before they are added to a thread and displayed to the class. The Moderator may be the Instructor or other responsible participants.

It is also possible to prevent an individual user from posting at all. Assigning a user the role of Blocked will prevent the user from accessing the forum. Assigning an individual user the role of Reader will allow the user to view content in the Discussion Board but prevent the user from posting content.

Security Settings

The following settings are available when creating a Discussion Board to ensure that content is appropriate.

SETTING	DESCRIPTION
Allow anonymous posts	<p>If this feature is turned off users are identified by their username whenever they post a reply. Making members accountable for the content that they post is a deterrent for users that wish to post inappropriate content.</p> <p>Be careful when disabling this feature as there are instances where learning can benefit from anonymous posts, particularly when discussing sensitive topics. If this feature is enabled, the forum cannot be graded.</p>
Allow authors to remove own posts and Allow author to modify own published posts	Members are deterred from posting inappropriate content if they do not have control of the content once it is posted.
Allow members to create new threads	Preventing members from starting threads helps focus their posts on the topic.
Force moderation of posts	Moderating posts requires that all posts are reviewed by a responsible party before the content is shared with the class.

Moderate a Forum

Set up a moderator on the Manage Forum Users page. Otherwise, the forum manager must take responsibility for approving posts.

Follow these steps to moderate forum posts.

Open the forum.

1. Click **Moderate Forum**. The **Moderate Forum** button will only appear in the action bar if you have a forum role of Manager or Moderator.
2. The Moderation Queue will appear with a list of posts that are awaiting approval. The posts appear in chronological order. Those at the top have been in the queue for longer than those at the bottom.
3. Click **Moderate** for a post. The Moderate Post page will appear displaying the message.
4. Select **Publish** or **Return**. If returning the post, add a message to the author explaining why the post is being returned and some suggestions for modifying the post so it is appropriate for the discussion.
5. Click **Submit**. If the post is approved it will now be shown in the forum. If the post is not approved, it will only appear to the author and the Moderator in the forum. The post will be marked returned and the Moderator comments when returning the post will appear as a reply.

Prevent a User from Posting

There may be an instance where a user should not be allowed to post at all because of past history of inappropriate posts or if the user has not been participating in discussions throughout the term. Assign a user the forum role of Reader if the user is allowed to view the forum but not add content. Assign a user the forum role of Blocked to prevent the user from accessing the forum.

DELEGATING DISCUSSION BOARD ADMINISTRATION

Overview

Discussion Boards can serve several different purposes in a course. In many cases, the Instructor does not wish to be actively involved in the Discussion Board and would like to pass off some or all of the administration of the Discussion Board to another responsible user. Discussion Board forums include roles for each user involved in the forum. These roles define privileges within the forum. The forum roles with administrative roles that can be assigned to users in a forum are:

- Manager
- Moderator
- Grader

Manager

Managers have full control over the forum. Managers can change the forum settings, moderate posts, and assign grades. The role of Manager should only be assigned to the course Instructor or someone with similar responsibilities. Users with a course role of Instructor or Teaching Assistant are granted this forum role by default.

Moderator

Moderators review posts before they are made available to all users in the course. Moderators may also delete and modify all posts in any forum, even if the forum does not use the Moderation Queue. Make sure that Moderators are responsible and understand the criteria for appropriate posts. Users with a course role of Course Builder are granted this forum role by default.

Grader

Graders review Discussion Board posts and enter grades in the Gradebook. The Grader role has some access to the Gradebook and should only be assigned to users responsible for guiding and evaluating learning such as Instructors and Teaching Assistants. Graders do not have access to the Control Panel as part of their forum privileges. Users with a course role of Grader are granted this forum role by default.

Define a User's Role in a Forum

Follow these steps to assign a user a role in a forum.

1. Open the Discussion Board.
2. Click **Manage** for a forum.
3. The Manage Forum Users page will appear.
4. Select a role for users from the drop-down list. The default value is Participant. Participants can read and post but have no administrative privileges.
5. Click **OK**. The forum roles are now assigned.

INCORPORATING DISCUSSION BOARD FORUMS INTO THE LEARNING PROCESS

Overview

Discussion Board forums can be accessed from the Discussion Board tool that lists all the forums in the course. This centralized view is an easy access point, but there are other ways to access Discussion Board forums that immerse the user in the learning experience. For example, Discussion Board forums can be placed in any content area. Thus, a Discussion Board forum may appear following lecture notes on the same topic. Further, using adaptive release or date availability restrictions, the forum may only appear after users complete the lesson or after the Instructor has delivered the lecture in class.

Add a Discussion Board forum to a Content Area

Follow these steps to add a forum within a content area.

1. Open the Control Panel and navigate to the Content Area and folder where the forum will appear.
2. On the right side of the action bar, select **Discussion Board** from the **Select** drop-down list. Click **Go**.
3. Choose **Select a Discussion Board Forum** and select a forum from the list. Click **Next**.

Note that the **Discussion Board page** option will link to the Discussion Board Page and show all the forums in the course. Click **create new forum** to build a new forum. The forum will not appear in the desired content area after creation. Navigate back to the content area and use the **Select a Discussion Board Forum** option to place the new forum in the correct location.

4. Add information about the link on the next page. This determines how the link to the forum will appear in the content area. Click **Submit**.

Define Requirements for Viewing the Discussion Board forum

Discussion Board links are subject to date restrictions and adaptive release restrictions. When restrictions are in place users cannot access the forum from within the content area or from within the Discussion Board tool. The Instructor always has access to every forum through the Control Panel.

DISCUSSION BOARD STATISTICS

Overview

The Performance Dashboard keeps track of user activity throughout the course, including the Discussion Board. This information can help Instructors quickly identify Students that are outside the normal range of participation. Instructor can use this information to reward achievement and assist students that are struggling with the material.

View Discussion Board Statistics

Follow these steps to view Discussion Board statistics for a user.

1. Click Performance Dashboard on the Control Panel.
2. The number of forums where a user has posted appears as a link in the Discussion Board column. Click the link to view details.
3. A page appears that lists the following information:
 - Total Posts
 - Date of Last Post
 - Average Post Length (number of characters)
 - Minimum Post Length (number of characters)
 - Maximum Post Length (number of characters)
 - Average Post Position
 - Grade (if the post is not yet graded, the instructor may click a link to the Gradebook to add a grade)