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For help in developing, using, or troubleshooting the Discussion Board, contact
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Basic Structure and Use

Blackboard’s Discussion Board provides the backbone for fully online courses and gives students in hybrid and face-to-face courses the opportunity to share ideas beyond the classroom. In this guide, we’ll first look at the structure and main elements of the Discussion Board, and then cover how to set it up.

To enter the Discussion Board
Click Discussion Board in the left navigation menu OR
Click Communication in the Toolbox, then click Discussion Board OR
In the Control Panel under Course Tools, click Discussion Board
This view displays both the regular discussion board area and the Group Discussion Boards that you added

The instructor first sets up a **Forum** to serve as the container for one or more topics, or **Threads**. You and your students type messages (**Posts**) that everyone else in the class can read. Anyone can respond (**Reply**). Each Reply is attached to its parent message. Together, the Posts and Replies form the **Thread**. As more students read an original Post, the number of responses can grow. Your students and you can have a dialogue on a number of topics, reading and responding at your convenience.

The following screen shot illustrates the instructor’s view of the Discussion Board layout after some Fora have been added.

1 – Link for adding a Forum
2 – Search function
3 – Column for Display Order
4 – Column for Forum Titles, which are boldfaced if they contain Unread Posts
5 – Columns for Forum details, including whether a Forum is set up to be graded
6 – Links for Instructor Controls (Modify, Manage, Remove, Copy)
To enter a Forum
Click its underlined title.

Viewing a Forum
Clicking a Forum produces a screen showing the discussion Threads. All users, including your students, can choose how to view this page.

- **List View** displays all Threads in a list that is completely flush left on the screen.
- **Tree View** displays Threads in a collapsible/expandable tree structure that indents replies.

Features common to both views include
- Each Thread displays the date/time it was entered (based on the server clock), its title, and the name of the person who entered it.
- Any Threads with unread Posts appear in boldface.
- **Instructor** link options include Thread, Remove, Collect, Mark Read, Mark Unread and, if enabled, Subscribe and Forum Grading.

Here’s a closer look at what is unique to each view; details about these functions follow.

**Forum List View**

1 – The **Change Status to** dropdown menu lets you update the status of any checked Thread(s): Published, Hidden, Unavailable, Locked or Unlocked.

2 – The **Flag** column displays a Flag icon if any Posts within that Thread have been flagged by the user (such as to remind the user to follow up).

3a & b – Click Thread **Check Boxes**, then click the **Collect** icon to see selected Posts on a single page.

   You can place a checkmark by an individual Post in the collection and select **Mark Read**.

4 – Only the **List View** shows the Status of a Thread (see No. 1 above).
5 – The **Display** function at the bottom lets you select the Status of Thread(s) you want displayed in the instructor view: *Show All, Published, Locked, Hidden, Unavailable,* and **Drafts**. Students see only *Published* items. An item may be both *Published* and *Locked*.

**Forum Tree View**

1 – In the *Tree View*, the **Flag** options appear in the top action bar.

2 – The **Search** function is at top right.

3 – A button to **Refresh** the screen is at bottom left.

4 – The *Tree View* can show all the Posts of a Forum on one page (**Expand All**) or close each Thread so only its first Post appears (**Collapse All**). To expand a single Thread, use the + (plus) sign to the left of the first Post; to collapse the Thread, use the – (minus) sign.


Viewing a Thread and Its Posts

To enter a Thread
Click the underlined title OR,
in the List View, click the underlined number in the Unread Posts column.

The Thread Detail page includes
1 – The Action Bar with options for various actions
2 – Search function
3 – The Thread tree listing all the Posts of the Thread
4 – A link to Refresh the screen and a dropdown for selecting Threads for the options above (to be used in conjunction with the Go button)
5 – The body of whatever Post is highlighted in blue in the Thread tree

Note: The options lining the top and bottom of a Post (in this case, Reply, Quote, Modify, Set Flag and Remove) are largely dependent on the instructor’s settings.

If you want to move the Post area above the Thread tree, click the small black arrow in the top right corner of the tree (Search in the image). Click it again and the Post will once again appear under the tree. The minus sign hides the tree altogether.
Reading and Replying in the Discussion Board

To read a Post, click the underlined message title, or click Previous Post/Next Post in the right corner of a Post. To make a response, click Reply or click Quote. The latter will place the Parent Post into the body of your response. Type your reply, then click Submit.

The Reply feature will bring up a textbox and automatic title, as in the screen shot below. (You may want to instruct students to write more specific subject lines that reflect their contribution to the discussion). Notice that you can choose to see the parent Post while replying.

If you wish, you may Save a draft of a Post and come back to it later. It will only appear in your view of the Thread until you click Modify to finish it, then Submit.

Crystal Nielsen 3/24/08 12:25 PM
Setting Up the Discussion Board

To create a Forum
Click **Discussion Board** in the Control Panel > Click your course ID link > click +**Forum** in the tool bar.

**Note:** The Control Panel view is a bit different from the course menu view. It lists
1 - The main course discussion board (which shows the course ID)
2 - The discussion boards for groups

On the **Add Forum** page, enter or select the three main elements of a Forum: 1) the basic **Information** (Name required, Description is optional), 2) Availability, and 3) **Settings**, then click **Submit**.

You can either enter specific details in the Description or start a discussion with the first Thread and give your instructions there. If you do not check the boxes for **Display After** and **Display Until**, the Forum will remain available (or unavailable) for the duration of the course.
Forum Settings

Allow Anonymous Posts
If you plan to grade participation in the Discussion Board, it's best to avoid this!

Allow Author to Remove Own Posts
If you allow users to remove their own Posts without also checking Posts with no replies, they could potentially wipe out the Posts of their classmates.

Allow Author to Modify Own Published Posts
Check this one if you want users to correct their typos, etc.
Allow Post Tagging
Tags allow instructors (or Forum managers) to tag a Post with the key topics one might find in it, (e.g., the topic child-rearing). This is different from the Search function because Search looks for keywords, and Tagging will grab Posts that may discuss a topic but not use the actual label (in other words, a user may talk about child-rearing without ever using that particular phrase). Tagging works independent of Thread or Thread Status. Tagging can slow loading and using the Discussion Board, so you may want to use it sparingly for a course. More about how Tagging works later.

Allow Users to Reply with Quote
This includes the Parent Post in the body of their Reply.

Allow File Attachments
This setting is automatically checked and is recommended if students will be uploading papers for peer review or otherwise attaching documents for others to see. You can remove it if you wish.

Allow Members to Create New Threads
This setting is automatically checked. If you choose to Grade by Thread, Blackboard automatically disables this so that you can create the only Thread to which students respond.

Subscribe
This setting lets users to click a button that tells Blackboard to notify them by e-mail each time a new Post is added to a Thread or Forum. The button appears in the action bar on the Forum page or in the Thread Detail. If you want students to create new threads, select Allowing Subscriptions by Forum. If you choose Subscribe to Thread, Blackboard will disable the setting for allowing students to create new Threads.

Allow Members to Rate Posts
Users can rate Posts in the Forum on a scale of one to five stars as a form of peer review. Peer rating can be used to pedagogical advantage, perhaps as part of the grade you give.
**Force Moderation of Posts**
A feature often seen in cyberspace, moderation refers to the screening of Posts before they are viewable by the rest of the users. Forums on the World Wide Web are often moderated to prevent cranky users from Posting inappropriate messages (e.g., with foul language, etc.)

This feature has some great pedagogical uses. For instance, you can use the Moderation feature to have students write Posts (or even submit files) that only you can see at first, then after you determine a grade, you Publish the Post for the rest of the class to make comments. Or, you may choose to delegate responsibility for reviewing Posts to a student Moderator, who would review submitted Posts and decide whether to Publish them. More about Moderation later.

**Forum and Thread Grading**
Instructors may choose to grade by Forum or by Thread. The grade icon appears in the Grade column for Forums or for Threads as appropriate. The main difference is whether you will allow students to create new Threads, or if you will be writing the initial Thread yourself to which students Reply. If you choose *Grade by Thread*, Blackboard will warn you that users will not be able to create new Threads, although a bug may still allow them. If students do create new Threads, Blackboard will let you enable grading for those Threads. More about grading later.
Managing the Discussion Board
Some ways to work more efficiently in the Discussion Board.

Changing the Thread Status and Display
In the List View only, a dropdown field allows users to display desired Threads within the permissions of their role (for instance, students cannot select Unavailable Threads).

To change the Status of a Thread
In List View, place a check next to the desired Thread > Highlight the desired Status in the Change Status To: dropdown list on the right side of the action bar > Click Go.

Types of Thread Status

• **Published Threads** - By default, Threads are considered Published, meaning they are available to users.

• **Hidden Threads** - On occasion, you may wish to Hide outdated Threads to make relevant content easier for students to find. Students may still choose to display Hidden Threads. Hidden Threads may not be modified.

• **Unavailable Threads** - Unavailable Threads are only visible to Forum Managers (a default role for Instructors). Even then, Forum Managers must choose to view these Threads. Making Threads unavailable means users can no longer view the Thread.

• **Locked Threads** - This is a way for you to archive a Forum but keep it available for students to read Posts. The Reply button no longer appears if a Thread has a status of Locked. **Unlocked** reverses this Status.
Note that one’s own Drafts may be chosen for Display, but only when they are an original Post. A Reply Post that has been saved as a Draft must be located within the Thread.

**Using Search**

A search link is at the top right of the page throughout the Discussion Board.

To create a Search

Click the **Search** button > Enter a **keyword or phrase** > Choose the desired option for **where to search** > Choose **date restrictions** (optional) > Click **Go**.

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, including any Forums that appear in the user’s groups.

**Collecting Posts**

You can group Posts into **Collections**, which is handy for reading multiple Posts on one screen or printing collected posts.

To Collect Threads

Click the **checkbox** next to the desired Post(s) > Click **Collect** on the action bar. If you want all the Posts on the page, use the **Select All dropdown** at the bottom of the page, click **Go**, and then click **Collect**.
Blackboard will Collect the checked Posts onto a single page for easier reading, as shown. The default view shows the Posts in the order they were written, from the bottom up.

1 – Action bar for printing or marking Posts as Read or Unread
2 – Filter to show Posts based on Author, Status or Read Status (Read or Unread)
3 – Selection dropdown and Sort feature
4 – Bottom action bar for acting on a single Post.

Note: A Print option appears at the top of the Collect page. You can print to your regular printer, or save the page as a PDF file and save it on your computer.

To save a page of Collected Posts as a PDF

**Mac**
Click File > Click Print > Click PDF > Select Save as PDF > Select the location to save > Rename the file if desired > Click Save

**Windows**
Use the MS Office tool (download from MicroSoft) to save a file as PDF or install a freeware PDF printer driver.
Flagging Threads or Posts
Flagging is useful for finding Threads or Posts at a later time, perhaps to help you remember where someone wrote of a useful resource, or to remind you to Reply later.

To flag the initial Post of a Thread
In the Forum Tree View, place a check next to the desired Thread title > Click Flag on the action bar.

To flag any Post
On the Thread Detail page, place a check next to the desired Post title > Click Flag on the action bar. Or, using the action bar at the top or bottom of a Post, click Set Flag. (This will only appear if a Post is not yet Flagged.)
To unflag any Post
On the Thread Detail page, place a check next to the desired **Post title** > Click **Clear Flag** on the action bar. Or, using the action bar at the top and bottom of a Post, click **Clear Flag**. (This will only appear if a Post is Flagged.)

**Using Forum Moderation**
Moderation refers to the screening Posts before they are viewable by the rest of the users. Instructors are the moderators by default, but you may delegate responsibility for reviewing Posts to a student Moderator.

**Moderating Posts**
When moderation is checked in the Forum Settings, the tool titled *Moderate Forum* appears at the top of the Thread Detail.

![Thread Detail]

When students write a Post in a Moderated Forum, their Post goes into a queue, or holding area, until you or your designated moderator releases the Post for viewing by all. This is what student Jane would see while she is waiting for her Post to be moderated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayer Request for Cousins</td>
<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>2/13/08 11:16 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts of God</td>
<td>Crystal Nielsen</td>
<td>2/13/08 11:42 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Suffering and Sparrows</td>
<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>2/13/08 5:43 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the instructor, only you can read the Post until you take action.

**To moderate Posts**
Click **Moderate Forum** on the action bar seen on the Thread Detail page > In the Moderation Queue, click **Moderate** next to the student's Post > On the Moderate Post page, choose whether to **Publish** the Post or **Return** it to the user; if you return it, meaning it will not be Posted to the Discussion Forum, explain why > Click **Submit**.

![Moderation Queue]
Delegating Moderation Duties
Discussion Board Forums include roles for each user involved in the Forum; the default role is Participant. These roles define privileges within the Forum. The Forum roles with administrative privileges that can be assigned to users in a Forum are

- **Managers** have full control over the Forum. Managers can change the Forum settings, moderate Posts, and assign grades. Instructors and TAs have this role by default.

- **Moderators** review Posts before they are made available to all users in the course. NOTE: *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. Unless the instructor delegates the Moderator role to a student, the instructor has Moderator permissions.

- **Graders** review Discussion Board Posts and enter grades in the Gradebook. The Grader role has some access to the Gradebook but not to the Control Panel as part of its Forum privileges.

To change a user's role in a Forum
Click **Manage** next to the Forum > Select a **role** from the dropdown list.

![Manage Forum Users](image)

Tagging Posts
Forum managers can create and apply text labels of their own choosing to messages in a Forum; other Discussion Board users can read, filter, and search messages using the Tags but cannot create new ones. Tags allow arbitrary message grouping independent of Thread or Thread status.
To create Tags
In the Forum List View, select specific Posts and click **Collect** > Select the Posts to Tag using the checkboxes (or use the Select All dropdown and click Go) > Enter a new Tag name in the Add Tag field in the action bar > Click **Go**.

Or, **Collect** desired Posts > Click **Add** in the action bar beneath a Post > Enter a Tag name > Click **OK**.

For you or your students to view Tags
In the Forum List View, click the underlined links in the Tag column.
Or, highlight the desired Tag category in the dropdown and click **Go**.
Note: Tagging can lengthen the time needed for Discussion Board page loads. You may want to enable Tagging on a temporary basis at certain times in the course, Tag selected messages at that time, and then disable it during times of anticipated heavy Forum usage. Re-enabling Tagging at the end of the course would restore all of the previously entered Tag data to view in the pages.

To remove a Tag:
Click the red “X” icon next to a Tag.

Grading Discussions
In a classroom setting, students are often expected to participate in class discussions where that participation is part of the equation when assessing performance. For online courses, student interactions in the Discussion Board most typically provide a specific record of participation. Instructors can assign students a grade for either the quality or quantity of their discussion Posts, or for both.

Grading Via the Discussion Board
Grade students in the Discussion Board itself at the Forum level or at the Thread level. In the section on setting up the Discussion Board (page 8), we saw that the instructor chooses at that time whether and how to grade. This can later be changed by Modifying the Forum settings.

Accessing the Grade Feature
Blackboard will show a Grade icon in different areas, depending on whether you have chosen the Grade by Forum or Grade by Thread setting.

If you’ve chosen to Grade by Forum, an icon will appear in a Forum's Grade column.
With **Grade by Thread**, the Grade icon appears to the right of the Thread list when in Forum List View.

In the Forum Tree View, click the Thread link to see **Grade Thread** in the action bar. Grade Thread is visible on the Thread Detail page regardless of your Forum view.

**Assigning Grades**  
The grade feature creates a list of all users and their number of Posts. Clicking **Grade** next to a student’s name will produce a page of his/her Collected Posts and a place to enter a grade.
To assign a grade via the Discussion Board
As a user with a role of Manager or Grader, click the Grade icon in Forum List View or Grade Thread in Tree View > Click Grade for any given student > If necessary, review the Collected Posts for that student > Enter the points earned > Click Submit (next to the grade box) > Click OK at the bottom of the page.

When you grade via the Discussion Board, Blackboard automatically creates a column in the Gradebook. After you enter grades, they will appear in the appropriate Gradebook column.
**Grading Via Item Grade in the Gradebook**

Alternately, you can grade discussion Posts via the Gradebook itself. The disadvantage here is that the actual Posts don't appear on the page where you enter the grades. The advantage is that you can assign grades to all students at once and readily see information about the nature of the scoring, such as whether the grade is viewable by users or included in score calculations.

To assign grades via the Gradebook

In the Gradebook, click the **underlined link to the desired Forum or Thread** in its column > Click **Item Grade List** > Enter grades in the Manual Grade column > Click **Submit**.

---

**Giving Feedback**

You can use the Comments feature to write a note of encouragement or give feedback separate from the Discussion Board, just for the student to see. You must submit a grade before you can enter a Comment.

To write a Comment:

In the Gradebook, click the **underlined link to the desired Forum or Thread** > Click **Item Grade List** > Click **Modify Comments** next to any given student > Enter text > Check the box next to **Is Public** if you wish the student to see your comments (otherwise, these are notes for yourself) > Click **Submit**.

Or, click the underlined link to a student’s grade and click **Modify Comments**.
When the student next goes into My Grades, s/he will be able to view the Comment.

**Viewing Discussion Board Statistics**

Discussion Board statistics are a part of the Performance Dashboard, accessed via the Control Panel. The dashboard displays the total number of Forums in which the user has participated.
The number in the Discussion Board column is also a link to more detailed statistics about the student’s activity in each Forum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Total Posts</th>
<th>Date of Last Post</th>
<th>Average Post Length</th>
<th>Minimum Post Length</th>
<th>Maximum Post Length</th>
<th>Average Post Length</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving to Online</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thu Mar 20 15:32:35 MDT 2008</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Good Discussion Prompts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fri Mar 21 08:42:45 MDT 2008</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clicking a linked number in the Total Posts column will lead to a Collection of the student's Posts in that Forum.
# Glossary of Discussion Board Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blocked</td>
<td>The user is not allowed to access the Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect Posts</td>
<td>The process of selecting one or more Posts or Threads 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy Forum</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft</td>
<td>A Post that has been saved for future editing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flag</td>
<td>A mark used to call attention to the Post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum Role</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Forum</td>
<td>The process of assigning a grade to a user for their performance in a Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Thread</td>
<td>The process of assigning a grade to a user for their performance in a Thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grader</td>
<td>A Forum role that grants the user Participant privileges as well as the Grading privileges for the Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidden Thread</td>
<td>A Thread that is locked and not visible by default. Users may view hidden Threads by enabling the Display Hidden Threads feature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locked Thread</td>
<td>A Thread that is visible for reading but cannot be modified. Users may not Post to a locked Thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>A Forum role that grants all privileges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation Queue</td>
<td>A list of Posts that must be approved before they will appear in the Discussion Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>A Forum role that grants the user read and write privileges in the Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Position</td>
<td>The position of a Post in a Thread relative to the other Posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Published Post</strong></td>
<td>A Post that has been submitted and, if necessary, approved by a moderator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rate Post</strong></td>
<td>The process of evaluating a Post based on a fixed, 5 point scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reader</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Save Posts</strong></td>
<td>The act of saving a Post as a draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thread</strong></td>
<td>The initial Post and the entire series of replies to that Post within a Discussion Board Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thread Detail</strong></td>
<td>The page that displays the Threaded view of all Posts in a Thread along with the selected Post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unavailable Thread</strong></td>
<td>A Thread that is hidden and inaccessible to all users except Forum Managers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>