

Discussion Board

The **Discussion Board** is a communication medium for posting and responding to messages. Conversations are grouped as threads that contain a main posting and all related replies. An advantage of the Discussion Board is that threads are logged and organized.



A Discussion Board allows users to interact at different times. They do not have to be in the same place at the same time, as in a Virtual Classroom or Chat Room. Also, a Discussion Board is not email because messages are typically viewable by everyone in the class (unless instructors limit who can participate either by "blocking" users or creating different Forums for different Groups of users).

Forums are used to organize threads. Think of a Forum in terms of a unique online discussion, which mimics a traditional classroom discussion activity. For example, when teaching in a live classroom, you may have a weekly discussion assignment in which you expect everyone to participate. The same can happen in your online classroom.

Threads are top-level message posts within a Forum. If you allow it, users can add new threads, which is analogous to asking a question or taking the initiative to spark a topic of discussion in the traditional classroom. The list of threads is displayed when entering a forum. To view all connected postings (replies) to a thread, users must select the thread's hyperlink. In the list of threads, users can see at a glance the number of Unread Posts and Total Posts for each thread.

For example:

Course Discussions: Activity 1: Getting Acquainted

Thread Remove Collect Lock Unlock Grade Forum Change Status to: Published Go

Display Show All GO Search in Current Forum After Jul 09 2006 GO Before Jul 09 2006 GO

	Date	Thread	Author	Status	Unread Posts	Total Posts
<input type="checkbox"/>	6/14/06 1:56 AM	Hello from your instructor	Instructor 2, psupport	Hidden	0	2
<input type="checkbox"/>	6/14/06 1:56 AM	About Me	Student 3, psupport	Hidden	0	2
<input type="checkbox"/>	6/14/06 1:56 AM	Hello	Instructor 2, psupport	Published	1	15

Select All GO

Beyond its primary use as a communication medium, the Discussion Board is an interactive teaching tool that fosters academic exchange and debate. The following features are available at the discretion of the forum creator:

- **Rate Posting:** 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.

- **User Management:** users are given forum roles based on their course, organization, or system role. Instructors and Leaders are given the **Manager** role by default. Managers control user privileges within the Discussion Board through the use of roles. For example, the Manager may delegate responsibility for reviewing posts to a **Moderator**. Managers create new forums, and they can enable other users to Manage, Moderate, and Grade (**Grader**) a forum once it is created. The role of **Participant** is the default role for students, but you if you do not want someone to participate (post messages) in a forum, you can assign that person the role of **Reader** (can see posts and follow discussions but cannot post) or **Blocked** (cannot post or view messages). You may want to Block a user who has a past history of inappropriate posts or if the user has not been participating in discussions throughout the term.
- **Forum Moderation:** 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 have the option of forcing moderation. If moderation is enabled, when a user other than a Moderator or Manager submits a post, the post is saved to the **Moderation Queue**. New posts are displayed in the queue for review and publication. If a post is rejected, a return message can be attached to the post informing the user why the post was not accepted for publication.

- **Grading:** 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.

Instructors, Teaching Assistants, and users with the Grader or Manager forum roles will be able to grade a forum (based on a total number of points) or grade individual threads within the forum. If **thread grading** is enabled for the forum, Instructors have the option to turn grading on or off for each new thread. When choosing the **Grade forum** option, an item with the name of the forum is automatically created in the Gradebook and can be used in the grading scale along with other gradable items.

- **Thread Subscriptions:** participants may be allowed to **Subscribe** to threads within a forum in order to receive notifications by email of new or updated postings in that thread. The notification is sent to the email address stored in the user's Personal Information. Users will not be able to enter a different email address to which notifications will be sent, so as to prevent spam from being generated from the Discussion Board.
- **Linking to a Forum:** 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.

Other notable features of the Discussion Board include:

- **Saving:** users can save posts as drafts, allowing them to work on a long post without the threat of losing what they have composed. A draft can be published at the appropriate time.
- **Searching:** searches can be limited or expanded to include current forum, current thread, or all forums in the course. Date range-only searches are even allowed – no search text is required.
- **Collections:** users can group posts into Collections. Collections can be filtered and sorted by Author, Date, Subject, Thread, or Status to customize the Collection for easy viewing and printing. For example, 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.
- **Forum Copy:** instructors can copy messages and/or settings from one forum to another forum in the same course.
- **Forum Availability & Thread Availability/Hiding:** instructors can make an entire forum unavailable or just make certain threads within the forum unavailable so the forum or thread cannot be viewed by students. Alternately, instructors can change status of threads to Hidden; hidden threads do not display unless the user chooses. Hiding threads removes outdated threads and makes relevant content easier to find, which is particularly useful for discussion forums that have accumulated an overwhelming number of messages.
- **Forum Locking:** instructors can “lock” a forum to prevent additional posts, but allow users to read existing threads.
- **Statistics:** Discussion Board statistics are a part of the **Performance Dashboard**. The total number of forums in which the user has participated is displayed for each user. Clicking on the number directs the instructor to a user detail page that displays links to all forums in which the user has participated and usage statistics for the user in each forum. Statistics displayed include:
 - Total Posts
 - Date of Last Post
 - Average Post Length
 - Minimum and Maximum Post Lengths
 - Average Post Position
 - Grade (if grading is enabled and the post is not yet graded, the instructor may click a link to the **Gradebook** to add a grade)

This information can help Instructors quickly identify students that are outside the normal range of participation. Instructors can use this information to reward achievement and assist students that are struggling with the material