Blackboard learning *System*™

Maximizing Discussions
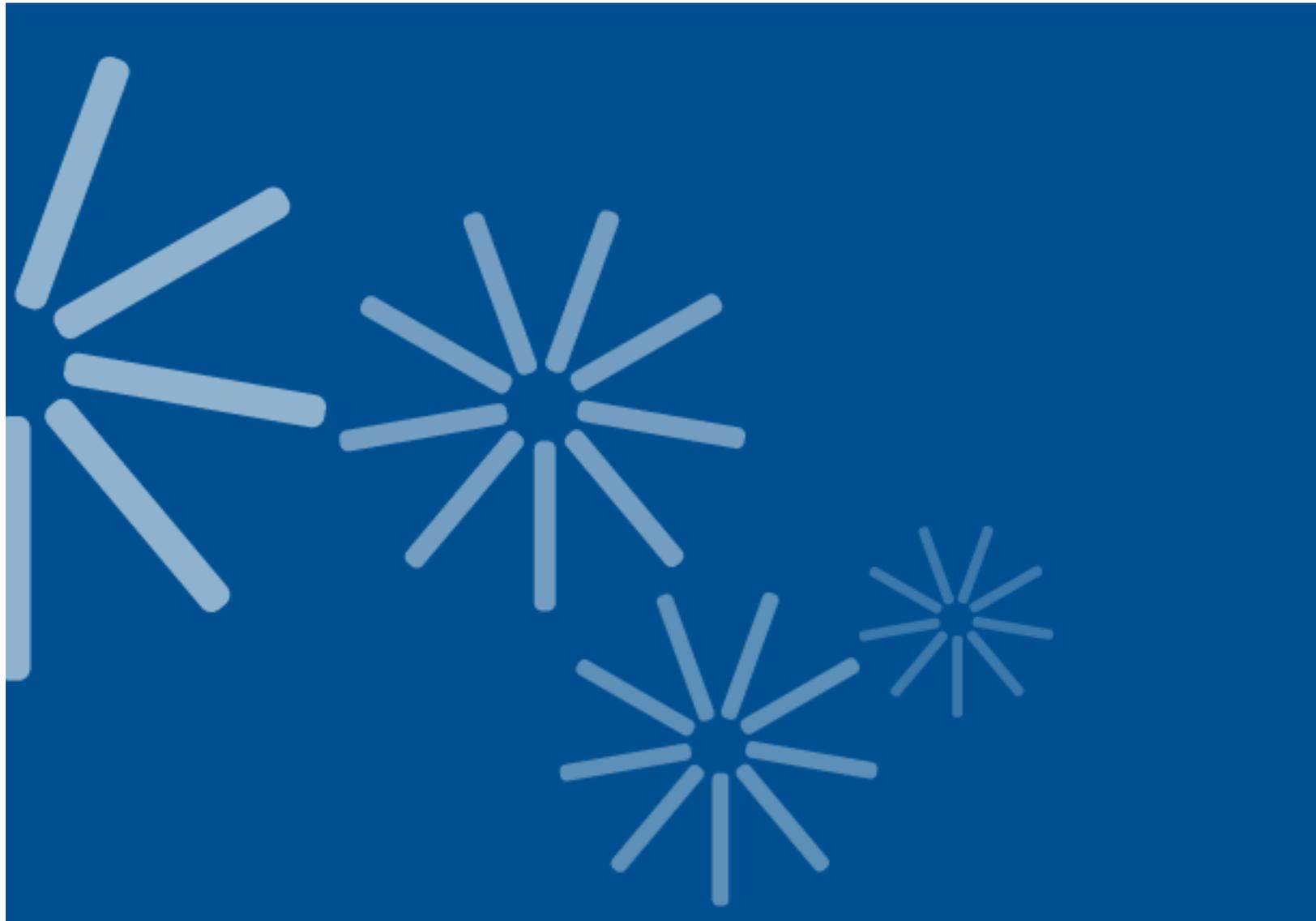
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ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP

In this workshop, you'll become comfortable with the Discussions tool, and gain new ideas on how to effectively use this valuable tool to enhance teaching and learning.

You will learn how to view and post messages, and create new topics. You'll also discover the three types of discussion topics. You will also develop skills in managing discussions, including how to grade your students' postings.

Topics

- Getting Started

- Creating Discussions

- Moderating Discussions

- Managing Discussions

- Grading Discussions

- Grading Forms

Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- set up discussion categories and topics.
- view and post discussions.
- grade discussions.
- create a grading form to use when evaluating discussion postings.

GETTING STARTED WITH DISCUSSIONS

The Discussions tool provides an ideal forum for interpersonal interaction between students and with the instructor. Instructors, teaching assistants, and students can post messages about a topic in a public forum, at their own leisure, benefiting from each other's opinions and input.

You can use the Discussions tool to post important messages to the entire class, generate class discussions, facilitate peer review, and evaluate students based on their responses to open-ended questions.

❖ TERMS TO KNOW	
Categories	Categories can be used to group discussion topics. Categories are optional.
Topics	Topics are used to group messages. A topic may be a question or the introduction of a new concept.
Messages	The individual posts to a topic.
Thread	A series of replies to the same message. A message *thread* consists of the original message and any replies to either the original message or to a posted reply. Messages can be viewed as threaded or unthreaded.

The Discussions Tool by Tab	
Build	From the Build tab, you can add Discussion links to folders, the Home Page, and learning modules.
Build **Teach**	From both the Build and Teach tabs, you can create and manage discussion categories, topics, and messages.
Teach	From the Teach tab, you can grade discussions.

Planning the Discussion

The primary goal of online discussion is to promote the skill of **thinking** - "to use the mind to arrive at a conclusion, make a decision, draw inferences, to reflect, to reason, to solve problems."[1] These goals are more easily attained when students are provided with a comfortable online space, clear expectations, and creative questioning.

Planning is key to having an effective online discussion. Identify your learning outcomes and outline your plan for each discussion ahead of time, also know how you will determine when these learning outcomes have been achieved. Identify the key concepts and content material to be covered in each discussion, and formulate questions appropriate to your learning outcomes. Lastly, provide learners with guidelines for online behavior (often referred to as "netiquette"). Consider the following when planning the discussion:

- How many posts per week are required for participation?
- How long should a post be?
- When are the posts due?
- What percentage of the grade will be determined by participation in the discussion?
- How would you like learners to respond to each other's posts?
- How will you evaluate the quality of the posts?
- How will you enforce the rules for student behavior on-line?

[1]"A Framework for Designing Questions for Online Learning." *Welcome to eModerators*®. Online. 9 September 2006. <http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/muilenburg.html>

The Discussions Screen

⇒ To access the Discussions screen to view all discussion categories and topics, under Course Tools, click **Discussions**.

Categories allow you to group related topics

Topics allow you to group related messages

View all the messages posted to a topic or only the new ones

Discussion Types

The Discussions tool allows asynchronous conversation, which means the writer and reader do not need to be online at the same time to communicate. It allows users to take the time to reflect, research, or survey opinions before they post a message. In addition, users can include attachments with their messages, to provide further details or resources.

Discussion messages are organized into categories and topics. Categories can be created to group topics. Topics contain the messages. There are three topic types:

- **Threaded**: Use this topic type for a structured discussion, or when the discussion might take different directions. In threaded topics only message subjects are displayed on the main screen. All replies to the same message are grouped together, creating message threads.

Expand All	Collapse All		Display:	⇨Threaded	⇩Unthreaded		🔍All	📧Unread
☐ **Subject**		📎	**Messages**	**Author**		**Date** ⇩		
☐ ⊟ street presence ⋎ ⊕			3 (**1 Unread**)	Noah Lincoln ⋎		May 10, 2006 1:13 PM		
☐ Re:street presence ⋎				Robert Smith ⋎		May 10, 2006 4:27 PM		
☐ **Re:street presence** ⋎ **(New)**				Lilly Hawthorne ⋎		May 10, 2006 4:32 PM		
☐ ⊞ industrial revolution ⋎ ⊕			2	Ella Wilson ⋎		May 10, 2006 1:09 PM		

EXAMPLE	Threaded discussions could be used when you want students to debate a topic. For example, in a Political Science course, students could debate the use of smear campaigns.

- **Blog.** Use this topic type for a more casual discussion, or when you want students to be able to quickly see all messages. In blog (web log), topics messages are displayed on the main screen as a chronological series of entries. Participants can comment on messages; comments appear on a separate screen.

| EXAMPLE | Use a blog for group projects. For example, in an Anthropology course, a group of students could research and present on an indigenous group from the East Indies. |

- **Journal.** Create a journal topic to give each student a place for their writing samples or to record their thoughts on course topics or lectures. Journals can be private (for student and instructor only) or public (accessible by the class). You can access students' journals via a list on the left of the screen.

Name	Number of Entries (New)
My Journal	3
Ella Wilson	5
Noah Lincoln	3
Lilly Hawthorne	2 (1)

My Journal

[Create New Entry]   [View Drafts]

[Select All] [Deselect All]   Sort by: [Date]

☐ **Subject:** Group Meeting 1   **Date:** May 11, 2006 1:18 PM

Group met on 3 January to plan our responsibilities for first group project. Nadia: to do initial research into current reviews; Ella: to do research into reviews of contemporaries; Noah: to do document set up; I will manage updates from group members, and schedule next meeting.

[Comments] [Edit Message] [Forward] [Lock Message]
(0 Comments)

☐ **Subject:** Notes from Lecture 1   **Date:** May 11, 2006 1:14 PM

Enjoyed this first lecture. We covered all topics outlined in syllabus, and finished with discussion in small groups.

[Comments] [Edit Message] [Forward] [Lock Message]
(0 Comments)

EXAMPLE   Journals are ideal for individual projects. For example, in a Creative Writing course, you could see the draft progression and thought process of a written piece.

Posting Messages

You can post a message to an existing threaded or blog topic. Entering a unique subject title creates a new thread. Every message is associated with a topic.

⇒ To create a new message:

1. Click **Create Message**. The Create Message pop-up screen appears.

2. Enter a unique subject title.

3. Enter a Message and click **Post**. The message is posted and the new thread is started.

   Note: Journals are a personal space, therefore, only the owner of each journal may create an entry. As such, you as an instructor may only add comments to a student's journal. Click **Comments**.

⇒ To reply to a message, click the linked message subject and click **Reply**.

⇒ To edit a message, click the linked message subject to display the message and click **Edit Message**. Only instructors have this capability unless it is specifically granted to students.

   Note: For students to be able to edit discussion messages, the topic must first be set to allow editable posts. From a topic's ActionLinks menu, choose *Edit Properties* and select **Editable Posts**.

Set the Tone

Your efforts to establish rapport with students early in the course will benefit them during online discussions. Just as it is important to set the tone at the beginning of the course as a whole, online discussions also need to get started on the "right foot."

- **Use discussions consistently** as part of the course design. List it as a requirement in the syllabus and post reminders about ongoing discussions to keep students cognizant of the need to regularly check for new messages and to participate.

- **State the goals** or purpose for every formal discussion.

- **Reinforce the behavior you want to see** with public recognition.

- **Make expectations known** by stating them directly and modeling the desired behavior.

    o You - how involved will you be in discussions? Will you lead discussions, only occasionally provide insights?

    o Students - will they take turns leading small group discussions, be required to post summaries?

Get their feet wet with an **ungraded** discussion that allows students to gain confidence conversing online. You may even want to evaluate their postings, but not record the results in the Grade Book.

Viewing Messages
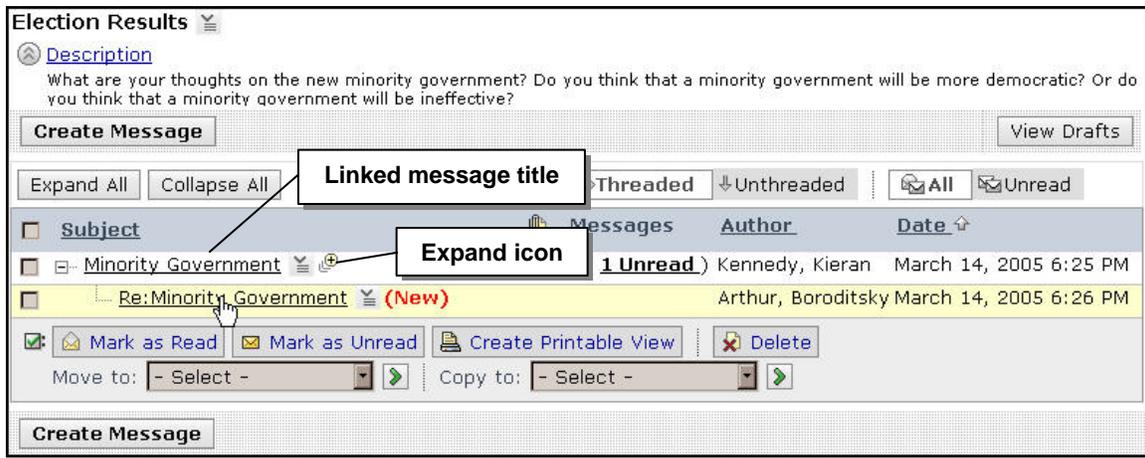
The Threaded Messages Screen

$\Rightarrow$ To view all messages in a threaded topic, click **Expand All**. All of the threads are expanded.

$\Rightarrow$ To view all message titles in a single thread, click the **Expand** icon.

$\Rightarrow$ To read a message, click the linked message title. The message appears in a pop-up screen.

$\Rightarrow$ To view all messages in a thread:

1. Click the subject for the first message in the thread. The Message pop-up screen appears.

2. Click **Display Complete Thread**. All messages appear in the Compiled Messages pop-up screen.

$\Rightarrow$ To print or save all messages in a thread for viewing:

1. Select the messages you want to compile and click **Create Printable View**. The Compiled Messages pop-up screen appears.

2. Click **Print**.

The Blog Messages Screen

⇒ To view all comments in a blog or journal message, click **Comments**.

✎ Hands-On Practice: Viewing and Posting Messages

- View an existing message and post a reply.

- Post a new message.

- Edit the message you just posted.

CREATING DISCUSSION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

After you have the type of discussion decided upon, create the discussion topics.

Creating Topics

⇒ To create topics:

1. From the Discussions screen, click **Create Topic**. The Create Topic screen appears.

2. Select the type of discussion topic you would like to create.

   - **Note:** The following steps to create a topic are the same no matter the type of topic.

3. Enter a Title, Description, and select if you want to Show or Hide the topic.

4. To add a topic to a category, choose one or create one from the drop-down menu.

5. Select the desired grading option (not gradable, numeric, alphanumeric, or by Grading Form).

Note: Grading creates a column in the Grade Book, allowing you to mark students' contributions to the topic. You can choose to release the grade to students. If you make a topic gradable, you cannot revert back to non-gradable.

6. Select the options desired:

   a. **Peer Review** – allow students to review and evaluate messages posted by their peers using a simple rating scale or grading form.

   b. **Student Posting Rules** – define the limits of students' participation in a topic.

   c. **Author Identification** – indicate whether posts to this topic will exclude the author's name.

   d. **Journal Privacy** – determine if the journal entries will be shared with the entire class.

7. Click **Save**. The Discussions screen appears and the topic is created.

Hands-On Practice: Creating Discussion Topics

- Create several discussion topics (at least one of each type) appropriate for your discipline. Make one or more discussions gradable.

- Add one of these topics to a new category.

Crafting Questions

A carefully worded question will be more likely to produce the learning you have identified in your objectives. The quality of your first post in a thread influences the thought level of subsequent posting.[2]

Bloom's Taxonomy can be useful in determining what type of question to develop as well as how to word it.

Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, established a hierarchy within the cognitive domain as a way of evaluating intellectual responses. The hierarchy consists of six levels of complexity for different "layers" of learning.

Level of Bloom's Taxonomy	Key Bloom's Verbs
Knowledge and Comprehension	define, recall, name, state, identify, discuss, describe, explain
Application	demonstrate, interpret, illustrate, show, perform, relate
Analysis and Synthesis	analyze, distinguish, compare, contrast, discriminate, criticize, test, compose, design, formulate, construct, develop, integrate, modify
Evaluation	judge, appraise, evaluate, revise, select, measure, weigh, conclude

[2] Meyer, K. A. The Ebb and Flow of Online Discussions: What Bloom Can Tell Us About Our Students' Conversations. *JALN, 9* (1). March 2005. <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v9n1/v9n1_meyer_member.asp>

❧ Activity/Discussion: Extreme Makeover -- Question Edition

Crafting effective questions can be challenging. Try your hand at reworking a question that resides at the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy to measure higher levels in the taxonomy.

Example of Completed Activity

Original Question:

Describe the characteristics of one generational cohort.

Revised Question:

Interview someone who is not a member of your generational cohort. Afterward, construct a table comparing your attitude on certain issues with the attitudes of the interviewee. How do these differences manifest themselves in social and work interactions?

Bloom's Level – Evaluation

Original Question: _____

_____

_____

Revised Question: _____

_____

_____

Bloom's Level: _____

As a group, share your before and after questions. Are there any questions in your course that test knowledge or comprehension? If so, these need to be re-written, or evaluated using another tool, such as assessments or assignments.

Essential and Guiding Questions

Another technique for ensuring that your discussions go beyond basic knowledge and comprehension is to use essential and guiding questions.

– **Essential questions** are those that require higher level thinking skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating. Answers to essential questions cannot be readily found on the Internet and then copied and pasted into a paper. The focus of an essential question is the personal meaning and insight that is constructed by the student.[3]

– **Guiding questions** are related questions that help students answer the essential question. These questions are subcategories of the main topic and may tap into lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Ideas for Guiding Questions

Guiding questions can be developed and used in a number of ways:

– Students can work in small groups to develop their own guiding questions to help them answer the essential question.

– You can start with guiding questions and lead up to the essential question through the course of the discussion.

– You can include them with the initial post to help students get started.

– You can interject guiding questions into the conversation when a lull occurs.

▶ **Example**

Essential Question: How would you design the perfect online instructor?

Guiding Questions	– What assumptions do you hold about teaching effectiveness?
	– How would you assess an instructor's performance?
	– Identify a list of traits that contribute to the qualification of "perfect." Think about your own experiences as a student.
	– List traits you would avoid in designing the perfect instructor.
	– What is the relationship between an instructor's abilities and a student's level of learning?

[3]McKenzie, J. (1996). "Framing Essential Questions." *Technology Connection, 6* (1). Retrieved January 19, 2006. <http://www.fno.org/sept96/questions.html>

MODERATING DISCUSSIONS

After working to develop questioning strategies, the resulting discussion activity needs to be maintained throughout the term. Even discussions that start out with ample excitement can dwindle before your objective has been met without some vigilance on your part. You must maintain your online presence and keep students motivated.

☐ Keep it relevant and interesting

☐ Require student participation

☐ Guide the conversation

Facilitation of online discussions also requires an awareness of the nature of computer-mediated communication, a detectable presence in the discussion, and a willingness to use technology to gather information and provide feedback.

Online discussions lack the nonverbal cues we rely on to interpret face-to-face communication. Therefore, online discussions are open to multiple interpretations. Be aware of tone and word choice when giving feedback. Emoticons and acronyms can help show emotion and can help add personality such as ;-) or ☺, LOL (laughing out loud), and TTYL (talk to you later).**Note:** In today's world of text and instant messaging, students may be all too inclined to abandon proper grammar and syntax in favor of all lower-case text, abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons. Encourage students to aspire to proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation, by modeling such and by clearly stating these expectations.

Facilitating an online class means you can expect to be online at least 1-2 hours per day per class. You can expect to be online more even more if your class is large, if the coursework is heavy, and at the beginning of the course when you are establishing the online learning community. However, merely reading the postings is not enough. You must leave a footprint; let your students know you were there by providing at least the occasional reply.

Ask for feedback periodically. Use the Assessments tool to create an anonymous survey. You might ask:

- What is going well for you?
- What would improve this experience for you?
- Do you feel your classmates have listened to you in the discussions?
- Did you feel the level of interaction from the instructor is appropriate?

Once you have collected your students' opinions, use the information to think of ways you might improve your online course and facilitation. Consider posting the results of the survey and what you have learned from the online experience. Remember: You are a part of the learning community, too!

The Art of Moderation

As the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage," you will need to find the right balance between guiding the conversation and standing back to allow students to discover new ideas.

Some suggestions to help you find the balance:

- Ask probing questions that lead to other perspectives on the subject or ask for clarification. Avoid asking yes or no questions.

- Do not respond to every student post or rush to fill silences. If you are patient, you may see students contribute rather than depend on you. You may need to re-engage students when long lulls occur, however.

- Redirect "tangents" to the appropriate topic.

- Provide reinforcement for posts that meet your expectations.

- Acknowledge efforts by those who are taking a brave step outside of their comfort zone.

- Reply privately when necessary, such as when dealing with individual issues or online behavior.

- Pace the conversation

    o Determine a schedule for posing questions in discussions that allows enough time for responses and also prevents "overload."

    o Provide time frames in which discussions are expected to occur. This will limit "lag" time between posts and responses.

    o If discussion contains too much agreement and not enough questioning of ideas, try assigning students with last names A-M to support one side and N-Z to support the other.

- State your expectation for message length. Note: the longer the post, the less likely it will be read.

- Move messages posted to the wrong topic.

- Set "closing" dates and wrap up discussions so they have a definitive end.

- Provide a weekly listing of what is due to maintain focus.

❧ Discussion: CSI – Why Did This Discussion Die?

Your friend, Professor Web, relies on discussions to encourage students to connect current events to course topics.

For the first month, students posted frequently, but now they post once a week and rarely reply to each other.

With all of these "lone posts," students are not really conversing, lessening the learning opportunities in discussions.

What are some possible explanations for this problem? What could Professor Web do to improve the quality and quantity of the posting?

MANAGING DISCUSSIONS

As the term progresses, you will want to manage postings to keep discussions current and organized. Employing sound management techniques will help to prevent you and your students from being overwhelmed by discussion activity.

You can:

- reorder categories

- move and copy topics

- move and copy threads

- lock discussions

Reordering Categories

You may want to reorder categories so the most current and relevant categories appear at the top of the Discussions screen.

⇒ To reorder categories:

1. Click **Reorder Categories**. The Reorder Discussion Categories screen appears.

2. Select the category you want to move.

3. In the row just below where you want the category to appear, click the **Insert Selected Items Above** icon and click **OK**. The selected category is moved.
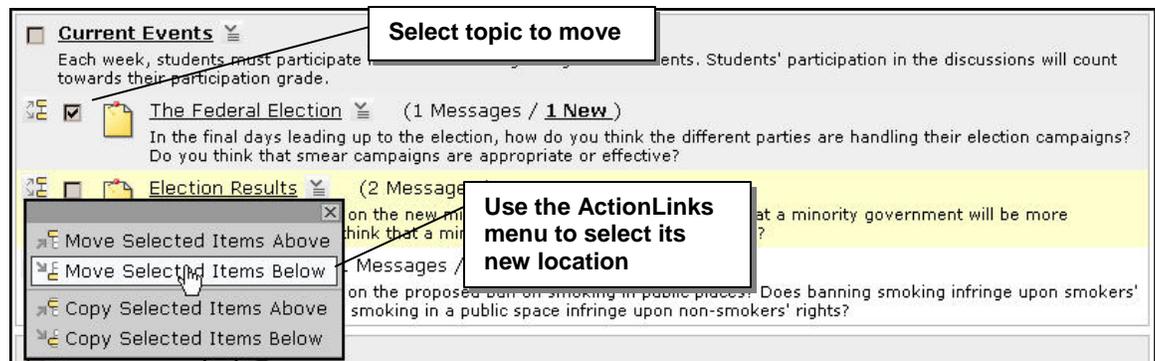
Copying and Moving Topics

You can copy or move topics within or between categories. For example, you might want to move the most current topic so it's at the top of the list, or you might decide to move a topic to a different category.

⇒ To copy or move a topic:

1. Select the check box next to the discussion topic you want to copy or move.

2. Click the ActionLinks icon of the category or topic adjacent to where you want to move or copy the topic. A list of options appears.

   Note: You can move or copy the selected topic within the same category or to a different category. You can also select multiple topics to move or copy simultaneously.

3. Select whether you want to move or copy the topic above or below.

Copying and Moving Posts to Other Topics

Throughout the semester, students may inadvertently post messages to the wrong topic. You can copy or move one or multiple messages from one discussion topic to another.

IMPORTANT   Moving a message also moves all replies to that message.

⇒ To move or copy or a message:

1. From the Messages screen, select the check box next to each message you want to move or copy.

2. From the Move to or Copy to drop-down list, select the topic that you want to move the message to, and click the **Go** icon. A confirmation message appears.

3. Click **OK**. If the new topic is empty, the Messages screen appears and the messages are moved or copied.

4. If the topic contains existing messages, select the thread you want to add the message to and click **OK**. If you want the message to be moved or copied as a new thread, do not select a thread.

Locking Discussions

Discussions topics and threads can be locked to prevent students from posting new messages. For example, if a thread is getting too far off topic, lock it and encourage students to start a new thread. Or, if discussions for a certain topic were to be completed by a certain date, lock the topic after the due date.

⇒ To lock a topic:

1. From the Discussions screen, locate the topic you want to lock and, from its ActionLinks menu, click **Edit Properties**. The Edit Topic Properties screen appears.

2. Under **Topic Behavior Options**, go to the *Student Posting Rule* heading, select *Lock this topic for Students* and click **Save**. The Discussions screen appears. Students can still read postings in this topic, but can no longer post new messages to it.

⇒ To lock a thread, from the Messages screen, click the name of the thread you want to lock. The Message pop-up screen appears. Click **Lock Thread** and close the pop-up screen. The Messages screen appears and the thread can be viewed but not added to.

Reuse and Recycle

The online instructor's best kept secret!

Reusing text you have already put a lot effort into is an incredible time saver. Students won't know you "pulled from your archive."

- You can maintain documents that allow you to copy and paste choice snippets into discussions. Include initial posts, replies, and even generic summaries you "personalize" each term by including quotes from students' posts.

- You can create discussion topics and initial messages in advance and hide them from students until they are needed.

- Save messages that could be used later as examples of exemplary posts.

- Take notes on discussions so you can make changes later.

🦅 Hands-On Practice: Managing Discussions

- Reorder the categories.

- Move and copy several topics and messages.

- Experiment with locking topics and threads. What happens to the messages screen when you lock a topic or message thread?

GRADING DISCUSSIONS

If you have gradable discussion topics, you can grade them directly from the Discussions tool and:

- view class averages for number of messages read, posted, and replies.

- view an activity overview for each student.

- access a student's messages and save or print the messages.

- view a student's peer reviews (if this feature is enabled). If a simple rating scale is used, the grading screen displays the average ratings, both given and received. If a grading form is used, the total number of reviews displays.

- use the PeopleLinks feature to send mail to a student.

The Grading Process

Here is an overview of the grading process for Discussions:

1. Create	When you create a gradable topic, a column is automatically created in the Grade Book.
2. Participate	You and your students participate in the discussion. As the discussion progresses, you provide feedback and guidance.
3. Grade	Review student posts and enter grades. You may wish to lock the threads once you have graded them.
4. View Grades	The grades you enter are saved in the Discussions tool and added to the Grade Book. Students can view their grades in My Grades.

⇒ To grade a discussion topic:

1. From the Discussions screen, locate the topic you want to grade. From its ActionLinks menu, click **Grade Topic**.
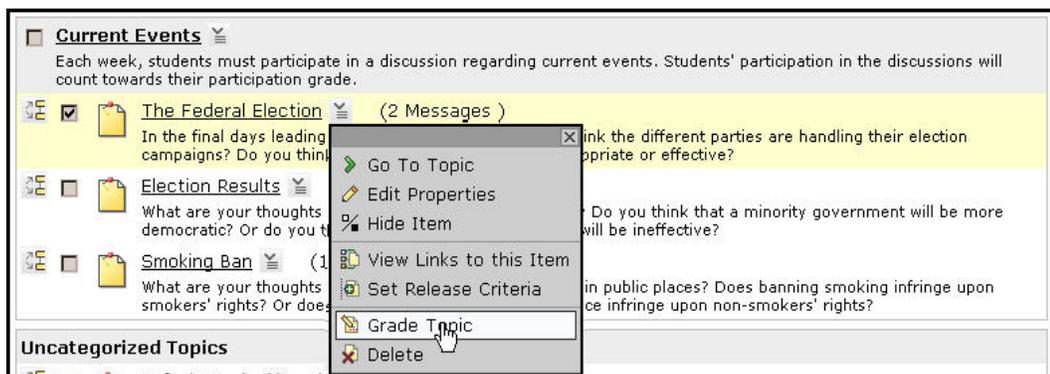
2. The Grade Discussions screen appears and each student who has posted a message to the topic is displayed along with a Discussion Activity Overview and a Student Overview.

Grade Discussions Screen

3. To view a student's posts, click the student's name and, from the PeopleLinks menu, click **View Student Posts**.

4. The Student Discussion Posts screen appears, displaying the student's postings for the topic, along with the number of:

   - new messages
   - replies posted
   - messages read

5. For each student, complete the grade according to the grading method you selected.

Grade Discussions for: **Election Results**
Grading Criteria: Numeric out of 5

Indicates the maximum number of points

Save Grades

Name	Grade
Boroditsky Arthur ⩗	5
Kieran Kennedy ⩗	3
Demo Student 804910001 ⩗	1

6. Click **Save Grades**.

Tip

By assigning points to discussions, you send a clear message to students that thoughtful participation in the course is a valued part of the learning experience.

Evaluating Discussions

It is important to have reasonable expectations about what will be accomplished in an online discussion. It may take more time for well-articulated points to emerge than in a face-to-face classroom due to its asynchronous nature.

In addition to providing a practical number of course discussion opportunities, students need timely and constructive responses regarding the quality of their contributions. Evaluation not only lets them know how they performed, but shapes the improvement of future interactions.

Feedback

Feedback that applies to the whole group can be posted in discussions. For instance, recognizing exceptional responses that can be used as a standard for quality or correcting misconceptions benefits all students. Carefully consider which type of feedback to include in public discussions and which should be given through private mail.

Use your feedback to reinforce key concepts, add an opinion the students may have missed, and bring the discussion to a close.

⚡ Hands-On Practice: Grading Discussions

• Grade some of the messages in the discussion topics in your Practice Course. If there are no posts available, switch to the Student View tab and create some.

Grading Forms

If you do grade discussions, you may want to create a grading form that clearly outlines to students what they should focus on when posting messages; the same form will also help you grade the messages as fairly and efficiently as possible.

Grading forms allow you to evaluate the quality of the postings in a multi-dimensional way. You can provide very clear performance expectations to students, as well as outline objective guidelines to use when grading students' performance.

❖ TERMS TO KNOW	
Objective/Criteria	In order to provide students with clear performance expectations, you use a list of objectives or criteria each student will meet in the course.
Performance Indicators	Each criteria or objective is rounded out by performance indicators. As the name indicates, performance indicators identify what students must accomplish in order to obtain the corresponding grade.

Grading Forms by Tab	
Build	From both the Build and Teach tabs, you can:
	• create grading forms.
Teach	• edit grading forms.

EXAMPLE

Objective/Criteria	Performance Indicators		
	Needs improvement	**Meets expectations**	**Exceptional**
Spelling and grammar	Many mistakes and lack of proofreading (10 points)	Few obvious mistakes (20 points)	No obvious mistakes (30 points)
Critical thinking	Arguments not supported (10 points)	Some arguments supported (20 points)	Solid arguments with excellent support for all of them (30 points)
Original ideas	Nothing original (15 points)	Some originality (25 points)	Several original ideas (40 points)

Creating Grading Forms

Create a grading form to grade students' work based on specific criteria. It also provides clear performance indicators for students and consistent grading guidelines for instructors and teaching assistants.

After you create the grading form, it will be available as a grading option for assignments and discussion topics.

EXAMPLE   You could create a grading form to evaluate a writing assignment. The evaluation criteria could be *Spelling & grammar*, *Critical thinking*, and *Original ideas*, and the performance indicators could be *Needs improvement*, *Meets expectations*, and *Exceptional*.

⇒ To create a grading form:

1. From the *Grading Forms* screen, click **Create Grading Form**.

2. Enter a title and description.

3. Three criteria appear by default. To add to or edit these, do the following:

    a. Under *Objective/Criteria*, click its **Edit** icon.

    b. Edit the label. Click outside the text box to save your edit.

    c. If you need to add a criterion, click **Add Criterion**.

    d. If you need to delete a criterion, click its **Remove this criterion** icon.

4. Three performance indicators appear by default. To add to or edit these, do the following:

   a. Under *Performance Indicators*, click its **Edit** icon.

   b. Edit the label, and click outside the text box to save your entry.

   c. If you need to add a performance indicator, click **Add Performance Indicator**.

   d. If you need to delete a performance indicator, click its **Remove this performance indicator** icon. You must have at least two performance indicators.

5. For each criterion, define your performance indicators by entering an explanation in the text box.

6. In the *points* text box for each criterion's performance ranking, enter a numeric value.

7. Click **Save**.

Time-Saving Tips

- Provide a mix of graded and ungraded discussions. You can reveal whether the discussion is graded or ungraded after it is complete.

- Use the built-in rubric for grading discussions.

- Have students compile their best posts in the portfolio tool and grade only those posts.

- Use peer grading.

  o Have students grade members of a different group, so they won't feel uncomfortable assigning grades to those they have worked with closely.

  o Have each group member name one student who was the most helpful. The person with the most nominations receives bonus points.

Grading Discussion Postings Using Grading Forms

Before completing the grading form for each student, you can view topic statistics on the average number of messages read, posted, and replied to, as well as the average peer review rating. You can then access information specific to each student.

⇒ To grade discussion postings using grading forms:

1. From the Discussions screen, locate the topic you want to grade and from its ActionLinks menu, click **Grade Topic**.

2. To view the student's posts, click the student's name and from the PeopleLinks menu, click **View Student Posts**.

3. After viewing the messages and summary information for each student, click **Discussion Activity Overview** to return to the grading screen.

4. Click **Complete Grading Form**, make your selections for each criterion and click **Save**.

Complete Grading Form of Demo Student for The Federal Election			
Objective/Criteria	**Performance Indicators**		
	Need Improvement	**Meet Expectations**	**Exceptional**
Spelling and Grammar	○ (10 points) Many mistakes and lack of proofreading	○ (20 points) Few obvious mistakes	○ (30 points) No obvious mistakes
Critical Thinking	○ (10 points) Arguments not supported	○ (20 points) Some arguments supported	○ (30 points) Solid arguments with excellent support for all of them
Participation	○ (15 points) Not many thoughtful messages posted	○ (25 points) Few thoughtful messages posted	○ (40 points) Frequent thoughtful messages posted
			Total: 0 out of 100

Comments:

[Save] [Cancel]

Editing Grading Forms

⇒ To edit a grading form:

1. From the *Grading Forms* screen, click its ActionLinks icon and click **Edit Grading Form**.

2. Edit the grading form. When editing grading forms that are already used by a learning object, you cannot add or delete criteria or performance indicators. You can, however, edit the numeric values assigned to the performance indicators.

   If grades have been assigned, they are automatically re-graded in **Grade Book**. There is one exception: overridden grades are not automatically re-graded.

3. Click **Save**.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Course Discussions

In addition to evaluating your students' participation, you should step back and gauge how effective the discussions were.

A few carefully crafted and selected questions that can be fully explored by students will be more effective than putting out more questions than can reasonably be discussed. It will also be easier for you to evaluate a finite number of discussions.

On a topic by topic basis, ask yourself...

- Did students come up with most of the important points, or did you need to provide them?

- Was enough time allowed for the topic to be fully explored?

- Did students seem interested?

- Did they construct new ideas?

- Were students achieving the learning objectives you set?

Better yet, **ask your students** what worked best for them by using a survey or discussion.

Hands-On Practice: Using Grading Forms

- Create a grading form appropriate for a discussion topic.

- Create a new discussion topic; under Grading Options, select the new grading form.

- From the Student View tab, post a brief message to the topic.

- From the Teach tab, grade your posting using the grading form.