

Discussion Boards, Forums and Threads

The most common form of interaction in an online course is through the discussion board using forums started by an instructor. Participation and interaction in the discussion board does not occur naturally. You must intentionally design it into your courses. To encourage engaging, quality discussion, craft discussion questions carefully and create inquiry.

If you want to encourage participation, consider allowing students to post anonymously or create new threads. This flexibility may encourage members to post their ideas and questions. You can also provide incentive by grading the discussion or adding exam questions based on discussion content.

Develop successful online discussions

Help your students feel comfortable and provide them with guidelines as they begin to use the discussion board.

Here are four general steps to developing successful online discussions to help build community and fulfill assignments.

1. Define participation requirements.
 - Share your expectations. Create a forum where students can read about etiquette and access grading information.
 - Model proper online interaction and reinforce appropriate behavior with public recognition.
2. Craft an effective question.
 - Incorporate multimedia resources into your questions to reduce the monotony of purely text-based interactions. With the popularity of services like YouTube™, you can ask students to view a clip and ask for responses.
 - Use the mashups feature to include images, videos, and slide presentations to your questions. Students can also add mashups to their replies.
3. Encourage new ideas.
 - If discussion posts contain too much agreement and not enough questioning of ideas, try assigning students with the last names A–M to support one side and N–Z to support the other.
4. Moderate.
 - Establish your presence by asking for clarification, resources, or input from silent participants.

Suggestions for forum settings

Forum settings allow you to use the discussion board in different ways. For example, to fully control a forum, you create all threads, moderate, and grade the posts. For a student-led discussion, allow students to create new threads and posts anonymously.

Here are some of the ways you can control the behavior of forums in a discussion board:

- Promote originality and a variety of ideas. You can create "post first" forums where you ask students to respond before they can read and reply to their classmates' posts.
- Create effective social forums. Allow students to post anonymously and without worrying about a grade. Allowing students to post anonymously is important at the beginning of a course when they are still becoming comfortable with discussions.
- Monitor quality and behavior. Assign a moderator to review each post before making it public.
- Allow students to control the discussion. Allow students to edit, delete, and rate posts. You can also allow students to create new threads and direct the discussion.
- Have a tightly controlled forum and use it to evaluate student performance. Select the grading and moderating options. To be sure students focus on the existing threads, don't allow the creation of new threads.
- Allow authors to edit their published posts. Consider locking the thread after grading. Users can't change locked posts.

You can't select some settings in combination. For example, if you are grading forums or threads, anonymous posts are not allowed. Also, if you enable thread grading, members can't create new threads.

The discussion board is commonly accessed from the course menu, although you can provide a link to it in another course area, such as in a content area.

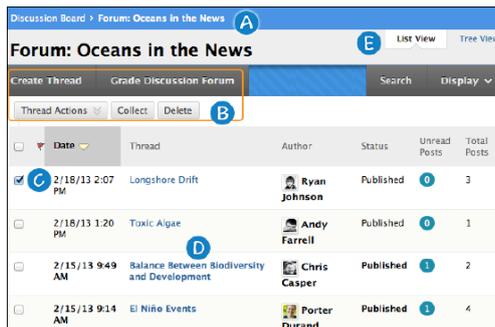
The Discussion Board page contains a list of all the forums you have created. You must first create one or more forums before users can start message threads.

On the Discussion Board page, you can create forums and search for discussion board content. By default, the search field appears collapsed to save screen space.

1. To sort the list based on a column, select the column heading.
2. To view the posts within a forum, select the forum title. Forum titles in bold contain unread posts.
3. For each forum, view the total number of posts, the number of unread posts, and the number of participants. For quick access to the forum's unread messages, select the link in the Unread Posts column.

Forum page

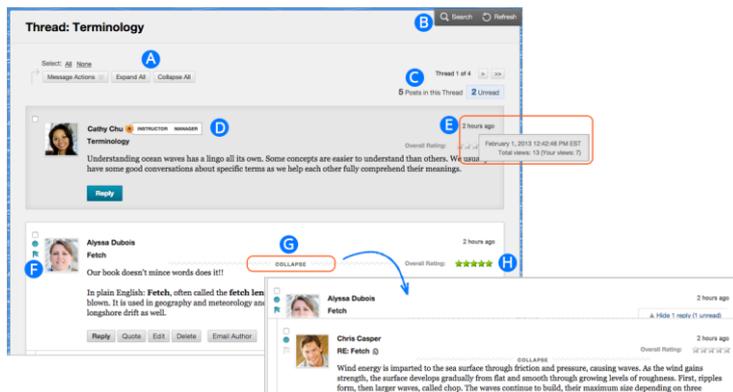
When you access a forum, a list of threads appears.



1. When possible, use the orientation bar to navigate to a previous page. If you use the back function on your browser, you may see page load errors.
2. Within a forum, you can create threads, grade forum contributions, collect threads, and search content.
3. Use the check boxes to select one or more thread and perform actions such as Collect or Delete.
4. Select a thread title to read the posts. Titles in bold contain unread posts.
5. View a forum's threads in a list view or in a tree view, with all posts listed following each thread

Thread page

When you view a thread, all posts and the thread description appear on one page. You can use thread descriptions to prompt users to participate in the discussion. Each author's profile picture accompanies their post to help you easily identify authors.



To help make replying easy, the content editor appears immediately below the message you are replying to. You can refer to any post on the page while you type your reply.

1. Use Expand All and Collapse All to manage the visibility of posts on the page.
2. Move your mouse anywhere on the page and functions appear at the top, such as Search and Refresh.
3. Select the number of unread posts to view only those posts in a thread. Use the arrow buttons to navigate to other threads in the forum.
4. When viewing threads, a badge appears next to a forum manager or moderator's name. Point to the badge to see the user's course role and forum role. Custom roles are displayed if your institution uses them.
5. View relative dates for posts, such as "7 days ago." When you point to the relative date, you can view the absolute date of creation or editing, and the number of views.
6. Mark posts as read or unread. Blue icon = unread. White icon = read. Only expanded posts that you view onscreen are marked as read. Posts are not automatically marked read by quickly scrolling down the page. Select the icon to manually change the status of a message. You can also flag posts you want to review again later or indicate as important.
7. Point to a post to see Reply, Quote, Expand/Collapse, and other available functions. Select Collapse to minimize a post. This increases the vertical screen space available for viewing posts.
8. If you enabled the rate posts feature in a forum's settings, Overall Rating displays the average rating for a post. When you point to the rating area, it changes to show Your Rating.

Access the Discussion Board

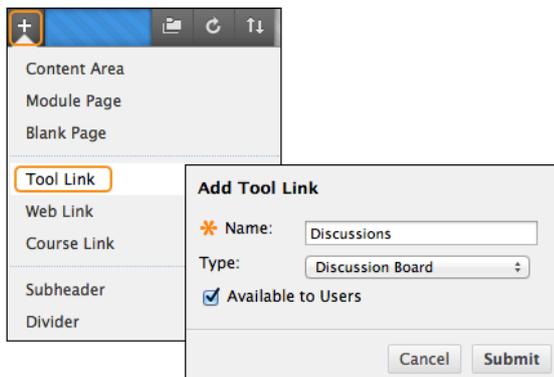
The screenshot displays the Blackboard Learn interface for a course titled "Introduction to Oceanography". The left-hand navigation menu is visible, with several items highlighted by orange boxes: "Discussions", "Tools", "Discussion Board", and "Course Messages". The main content area shows the "Week 2: History" section, which includes an assignment titled "Oceans in the News" (worth 25 points), a video assignment titled "The Vikings in America" (duration 2:28), and a post titled "Just for Fun".

You can allow users to access the discussion board in several ways. You can add a customized link to the course menu and to a course area. When you provide a link to the discussion board in a course area, students can access the tool alongside other course content.

As an instructor, on the Control Panel, expand the Course Tools section and select Discussion Board. From this link, access the course discussion board and the group discussion boards for the groups in your course.

Add a discussion link on the course menu

You can include a link on the course menu for instant access to the discussions tool. You can also customize the name of the link.



1. Point to the plus sign above the course menu. The Add Menu Item drop-down list appears.
2. Select Tool Link.
3. Type a Name for the link.
4. From the Type drop-down list, select Discussion Board.
5. Select the Available to Users check box.
6. Select Submit.

The new tool link appears last in the course menu list. Press and drag the arrows icon to move the link into a new position. In the link's menu, you can rename, delete, or hide the link from students.

Add a discussion link in a course area

You can incorporate the discussion board into course areas, allowing students to access the tool alongside content.

In a content area, add a forum link following lecture notes to gather questions on the material presented or after an assignment to gather students' perceptions on how they did. You can add adaptive release rules or date availability restrictions to limit students' access. This allows them to access content in a specified order, such as reading a PDF before adding posts to the discussion board.

1. Access the content area or folder where you want to link to the discussion board or forum.
2. Point to Tools and select Discussion Board.
3. From here, you have three options:
 - On the Create Link: Discussion Board page, select the Link to Discussion Board Page option to link to the discussion board itself.
 - Use Select a Discussion Board Forum and select a forum from the list.
 - Select Create New Forum to add a link to a forum you create at this time. You select all forum settings at the time of creation. The newly created forum appears in the list of forums to choose from when adding the link in your course.
4. Select Next.
5. On the next Create Link: Discussion Board page, type a Link Name. The Link Name cannot exceed 50 characters.
6. Optionally, type instructions or a description in the Text box.
7. For the Available option, select Yes.
8. To enable tracking, select Yes. The system will record the number of times the link is viewed, when it is viewed, and by whom.
9. Select the Display After and Display Until check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Display restrictions affect the visibility of the discussion board or forum.
10. Select Submit. The discussion link appears in the course area.

For additional support, contact the Helpdesk at 330-672-4357 (HELP) or visit support.kent.edu.