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Discussions

With the Discussions tool you can encourage peer interaction and conversations in your course. Users in discussions interact with one another by posting messages to discussion topics and reading and replying to messages posted by others.

You can use the Discussions tool to:

- Encourage users to share their reflections on course material with their peers
- Set up areas for users to ask questions
- Pose a question for the class to debate
- Discuss the answers to an assignment
- Create areas for groups to work on group assignments

Accessing Discussions

1. To access the Discussions tool, click the Discussions link on the navigation bar.

Creating Forums and Topics

Forums are used to organize your discussion topics. Discussions take place inside a topic, and each topic must belong to a forum to be visible to your users. Any settings you apply to a forum are also applied to all of the forum’s topics; for example, if you have several topics in which you want to allow anonymous messages, you can put these topics in a single forum and enable anonymous messages for that forum.

Creating a New Forum

1. On the main Discussions page, click the New Forum button on the top tool menu.
2. The New Forum page displays:

3. Enter a Title for the forum. (This is a required field)

4. Enter a Description.

DIRECTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
5. Set any forum options you want:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To</th>
<th>Do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automatically create a topic</td>
<td>Select <a href="#">Create a new topic in this forum with the same title.</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable users to post messages anonymously</td>
<td>Select <a href="#">Allow anonymous messages.</a> This setting applies to all topics within the forum, regardless of topic-level settings. Note that anonymous messages cannot be evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require messages to be approved</td>
<td>Select <a href="#">Messages must be approved before being displayed.</a> This setting applies to all topics within the forum, regardless of topic-level settings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Hide the forum                   | If the options in the [Availability](#) section are not visible, click [Show forum visibility options](#), then do one of the following:  
  * To hide the forum when it is created, select [Hide this forum](#). It will remain hidden until [Forum is always visible](#) is selected again.  
  * To make the forum visible within a date range, select [Forum is visible for a specific date range](#) and specify a [Start Date](#) when the forum will become visible and/or an [End Date](#) when it will be hidden again. |
| Lock the forum                   | If the options in the [Locking options](#) section are not visible, click [Show locking options](#), then do one of the following:  
  * To lock the forum when it is created, select [Lock forum](#). It will remain locked until [Unlock forum](#) is selected again.  
  * To open the forum within a date range, select [Unlock forum for a specific date range](#) and specify a [Start Date](#) when the forum will be unlocked and/or an [End Date](#) when it will be locked again. |

6. Click [Save](#) to save the forum, or [Save & Add Topic](#) to save the forum and create a new topic within it.

### Creating a Topic

Topics are where discussions actually take place, where users post and read messages. Your course can include as many topics as you like, organized into forums. Each topic normally includes a description that defines the purpose of the topic and guides the conversation.

#### To Create a New Topic:

1. Do one of the following:

   a. On the main discussion page, click [New Topic](#) on the top tool menu.
b. On the main discussion page, click the **Add New Topic** icon for the forum in which you want to create the topic.

![Forums & Topics List](image)

You will be taken to the New Topic page:

![New Topic](image)

2. In the **Forum** drop-down list, select the forum in which you want to create the topic.
   
a. To create the topic in a new forum, click the **New Forum** link, enter information about the forum and click **Save**.

3. Enter a **Title** for the topic.
4. Enter a **Description**.

5. Set the topic options you want:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To</th>
<th>Do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enable anonymous message posting</td>
<td>Select <strong>Allow anonymous messages</strong>. Note that anonymous messages cannot be evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require messages to be approved</td>
<td>Select <strong>Messages must be approved before being displayed</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hide the topic</td>
<td>If the options in the <strong>Availability</strong> section are not visible, click <strong>Show topic visibility options</strong>, then do one of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To hide the topic when it is created, select <strong>Hide this topic</strong>. It will remain hidden until <strong>Topic is always visible</strong> is selected again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To make the topic visible within a date range, select <strong>Topic is visible for a specific date range</strong> and specify a <strong>Start Date</strong> when the topic will become visible and/or an <strong>End Date</strong> when it will be hidden again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock the topic</td>
<td>If the options in the <strong>Locking options</strong> section are not visible, click <strong>Show locking options</strong>, then do one of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To lock the topic when it is created, select <strong>Lock topic</strong>. It will remain locked until <strong>Unlock topic</strong> is selected again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To open the topic within a date range, select <strong>Unlock topic for a specific date range</strong> and specify a <strong>Start Date</strong> when the topic will be unlocked and/or an <strong>End Date</strong> when it will be locked again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Click **Save** to save the topic, or **Save and New** to save the topic and create another one.

**DIRECTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**
Editing Existing Forums and Topics

Editing a Forum or Topic

1. On the main discussions page, click the Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to edit.

2. Select the tab containing the information you want to edit.
   a. **Note:** Switching between tabs automatically saves any changes on the current tab.
3. Make your changes.
4. Click Save if applicable.

Copying a Forum

Copying a forum creates a new forum with the same properties as the original. You can choose to copy the forum’s topics as well as any pinned messages within those topics. Copying a forum does not copy any normal, unpinned messages inside the forum’s topics; however you can copy or move individual messages from existing topics once the new topics are created.

To Copy a Forum:

1. On the main discussions page, click Copy on the top tool menu.
2. Click Copy a Forum

Create a copy of a Forum and its associated properties
3. From the **Forum to Copy** list, select the forum you want to copy.

![Copy a Forum](image)

- **Forum to Copy:** -- Choose a forum --
- **New Forum Title:**
- **Copy Options:**
  - Copy topics
  - Copy pinned messages

4. In the **New Forum Title** field, type a name for the new forum.

5. Select the options you want:
   a. **Copy topics** - Select this option to copy all of the topics inside the forum; new topics are created with the same titles and properties as the existing ones.
   b. **Copy pinned messages** - If you choose to copy topics, select this option to copy any pinned messages within those topics. If you use pinned messages to post information about a topic (rules, evaluation criteria, etc.) you may want to copy these messages along with the topics.

6. Click the **Copy** button.

**Copying Topics**

Copying a topic creates a new topic with the same properties as the original. Links to grade items or competency activities are not copied. You can choose to copy pinned messages along with the topic. Copying a topic does not copy any normal, unpinned messages inside the topic, however you can copy or move messages from inside the existing topic once the new topic is created.

**If you want to move a topic from one forum to another**, edit the topic and select a new forum from the Forum drop-down list on the Properties tab.

**To Copy a Topic:**

1. On the main discussions page, click **Copy** on the top tool menu.
2. Click **Copy a Topic**

**DIRECTIONS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**
3. From the **Forum to Copy** list, select the forum containing the topic you want to copy.

4. From the **Topic to Copy** list, select the topic you want to copy.

5. In the **New Topic Title** field, type a name for the new topic.

6. From the **Copy Destination** list, select the forum you want to copy the topic to. If you select multiple forums, multiple copies of the topic are created.

7. Select **Copy pinned messages** if you want pinned messages to be copied into the new topic. If you use pinned messages to post information about the topic, you may want to copy these messages.

8. Click **Copy**.
Re-ordering Forums and Topics
You can change the order in which forums are listed on the main discussions page, and the order in which topics are listed inside each forum.

If you want to move a topic from one forum to another, edit the topic and select a new forum from the Forum drop-down list on the Properties tab.

To Re-order Forums and Topics:
1. On the main discussions page, click Re-Order on the top tool menu.
2. From the drop-down list in the Sort Order column, select the position in the list where you want each forum or topic to appear. Forums are ordered relative to each other; topics are ordered within each forum.
   a. If the topics in a forum are not visible, click the Expand icon next to the forum, or click Expand All at the top of the list.
3. Click Save.

Restricting Access to Forums and Topics
For some types of discussions, you will want everyone in your course to have access for the entire semester. For other discussions, you may want to restrict access to a shorter time period or to a specific group of users. You can restrict access to forums and topics in four ways:

- Hide the forum or topic for all users
- Lock the forum or topic for all users
- Use release conditions to display a forum or topic based on other activities within the course (for example, reading a content topic, completing a quiz)
- Restrict access to members of specific groups

Note: Any restrictions placed on a forum also apply to all topics within the forum.

Hiding a Forum or Topic
Hidden topics are not displayed on the main discussions page (except for users with permission to see hidden forums and topics or to manage discussions). By hiding topics, you can control which topics users can access at different times throughout the course. For example, you could create weekly discussion topics for users to reflect on the material covered in each week of the course and make each topic available for one week only.

You can specify start and end dates for when a forum or topic is visible so you can set up visibility ahead of time to match your course’s schedule.
Tip: Instead of scheduling a topic to disappear as soon as you want the discussion to end, consider locking the topic at that point and keeping it visible for another few days. This allows users to review the discussion after it has closed so that they don’t miss the last messages added.

To Hide a Forum or Topic:
1. On the main discussions page, click the Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to hide.
   a. You can also set visibility options when creating a new forum or topic
2. If the options in the Availability section are not visible, click Show forum visibility options or Show topic visibility options.
3. Select the options you want:
   a. To hide the forum or topic immediately, select Hide this forum or Hide this topic. The forum or topic will remain hidden until you select Forum is always visible or Topic is always visible again.
   b. To hide the forum or topic until a certain date or after a certain date, select Forum is visible for a specific date range or Topic is visible for a specific date range, then select Has Start Date and/or Has End Date and specify the dates.
4. Click Save.

Locking a Forum or Topic
Locking a topic prevents users from posting new messages or modifying existing messages, essentially making the conversation “read only.” Locking a topic can be an effective way of closing a conversation while allowing users to refer back to messages.

You can specify start and end dates for when a forum or topic is unlocked so you can set things up ahead of time to match your course’s schedule.

Tip: Consider locking a topic to end a conversation, then using a pinned message to post a summary inside topic. This way when users access the topic your summary appears at the top.

To Lock a Forum or Topic:
1. On the main discussions page, click the Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to lock.
   a. You can also set locking options when creating a new forum or topic
2. If the options in the Locking options section are not visible, click Show locking options.
3. Select the options you want:
   a. To lock the forum or topic immediately, select Lock forum or Lock topic. The forum or topic will remain locked until you select Unlock forum or Unlock topic again.
   b. To open the forum or topic within a date range, select Unlock forum for a specific date range or Unlock topic for a specific date range, then select Has Start Date or Has End Date and specify the dates.
4. Click Save.
Setting Release Conditions

Release conditions allow you to specify requirements that users must satisfy before they can access a discussion forum or topic. For example, you might require that users view a content topic or submit an assignment to a dropbox folder before accessing a discussion topic. Or you might create an extra-help discussion topic for users who fail a particular quiz.

To Add Release Conditions To a Forum or Topic:
1. On the main discussions page, click the 🆓 Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to add release conditions to.
2. Click the Restrictions tab.
3. If the controls in the Release Conditions sections are not visible, click Show Forum Release Conditions or Show Topic Release Conditions.
4. Do one of the following:
   a. If you have already created a release condition elsewhere and want to attach it to this forum or topic, click Attach Existing. Select the condition(s) you want to add, then click Attach.
   b. If you want to add a new release condition that does not already exist, click Create and Attach. Enter the details for the new release condition, then click Create.
5. Click Save.

To Remove Release Conditions From a Forum or Topic:
1. On the main discussions page, click the 🆓 Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to remove release conditions from.
2. Click the Restrictions tab.
3. If the controls in the Release Conditions sections are not visible, click Show Forum Release Conditions or Show Topic Release Conditions.
4. Do one of the following:
   a. Click the ⌿ Remove Condition icon next to each condition you want to remove.
   b. To remove all conditions, click the ⌿ Remove All Conditions icon at the top of the list of conditions.
5. Click Save.

Setting Group Restrictions

You can restrict a forum or topic so that it is only accessible to members of a specific group. This enables you to:
- Create group discussion areas where members of a group can collaborate on assignments or discuss course material in small teams.
NOTE: You must create groups before you can set group restrictions.

To Restrict a Single Forum or Topic:
1. Do one of the following:
   a. On the main discussions page, click the Edit icon for the forum or topic you want to remove add group restrictions to.
   b. If you are creating a new forum or topic, you can create group restrictions after clicking Save.
2. Click the Restrictions tab.
3. If the options in the Group Restrictions area are not visible, click Show Forum Group Restrictions or Show Topic Group Restrictions.
4. Select Restrict this forum to the following groups or Restrict this topic to the following groups and click Add Groups.
5. Select a Group Category.
6. Select the groups.
7. Click Add.
8. Click Save.

To remove a group’s access, click the Delete this item icon next to the group and then click Save.

To open the forum or topic to everyone again, clear the Restrict this forum to the following groups checkbox or Restrict this topic to the following groups checkbox and click Save.

To Restrict a Multiple Forums or Topics Simultaneously:
1. On the main discussion page, click Group Restrictions on the left tool menu.
2. Select a **Group Category**.
3. Select the **Forum** containing the topics you want to restrict, or select ‘All Forums’.
4. To restrict a forum or topic to specific groups, select the checkbox in the **Restricted** column, then select the groups you want to be able to access the forum or topic.
5. Click **Save**.

To open a forum or topic to everyone, clear the checkbox in the **Restricted** column and click **Save**.

### Group Restrictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Category:</th>
<th>Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forum:</td>
<td>Coke or Pespi?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Edit Restrictions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forums and Topics</th>
<th>Restricted?</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coke or Pespi?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Click **Save**

### Automatically Creating Group Restricted Topics

You can automatically create a discussion topic for each group in a selected category. Topics are named after the group categories and groups they are associated with.

1. On the main discussion page, click **Group Restrictions** on the left tool menu.
2. Click the **Automatically create restricted topics** link.
3. Select a **Group Category**.
4. Select the Forum in which to create the topics. If you want to create a new forum for the restricted topics, click New Forum.
5. Click Create.

Deleting a Forum or Topic

1. On the main discussions page, click Delete on the top tool menu.
2. Select the forums and topics you want to delete.
3. Click the Delete Selected button.

Changing Settings and Preferences

Discussion settings are divided into two types: Org Unit Settings allow you to change the way the Discussions tool works for everyone in your course offering, while Personal Settings let you specify how you want to view messages inside topics.

To Access the Settings page:

On the main discussions page, click Settings on the left tool menu.
Org Unit Settings

Org unit settings apply to all users and all forums and topics in your course.

**Shared Display Settings** - Controls whether shared forums and topics are displayed in the discussions list in your course offering. If you clear this option, users will not be able to access shared forums and topics from within your course offering.

**Message Ratings** - Turns the message ratings control on or off for all topics within the course offering.

**Topic Descriptions** - Controls whether topic descriptions are displayed in the message list. You may want to turn off this feature to save space for users with small screens. Consider using pinned messages to provide explanations or instructions instead.

Personal Settings

Personal settings control the way you view messages inside a topic. These settings apply to all course offerings wherever you access discussions but do not affect other users.

**Display Settings** - The following display settings are available:

- **Show the discussion topics list** - The discussion topics list appears at the left of the message list and provides quick navigation between topics.
- **Show the search bar** - The search bar allows you to search for messages. You can also show or hide the search bar by clicking **Show Search** or **Hide Search** on the action bar inside a topic.
- **Show the preview pane** - If you are using the Grid Style message list, you can choose to open messages in a preview pane at the bottom of the screen or in a pop-up window. Select this option to use the preview pane, clear it to use a pop-up window.
- **Display deleted messages** - Displays deleted messages in the message list. This option is only available if you have permission to see deleted messages.

**Default Message List View** - Controls whether messages are displayed in threaded or unthreaded view when you enter a topic. In threaded view, messages are grouped together with their replies, allowing you to follow the thread of a conversation. In unthreaded view, messages can be sorted by author, date, subject, message ID, or average rating.

**Message List Style** - The following message list styles are available:

- **Grid Style** - The Grid Style message list resembles a traditional email reader where each message’s subject, author, and date appear in a list without the full text of the message. To read a message, you click the subject; the full text is displayed in a separate area.
- **Reading Style** - The Reading Style message list shows the full text of all messages in a single view. You read messages simply by scrolling through the page, without having to select messages and read them one at a time in a dedicated reading pane or a pop-up window.

**Message Fields to Display** - You can choose to display the following fields:

- **Org Defined Id** - Select this option to see ID numbers beside author names.
- **Message Id** - Select this option to see ID numbers when viewing messages.

**Character Limits** - If you are using the Grid Style message list, you can choose to display only the first few characters of each message’s subject to save screen space. Select the checkbox and enter the maximum number of characters of each message’s subject you would like to see.

**Reply Settings** - Select this option to automatically include the text of any message you reply to when composing a reply.

**Entering a Topic**
To enter a topic, click the topic’s name on the main discussions page.

If you are using **Grid Style** message list, the Learning Environment displays a list of messages posted to the topic. Click the subject of a message to view the full text. If you have ‘Show the preview pane’ selected as a setting, you will see the message displayed on the same page. If not, it will open up in a separate window. Example of **Grid Style** shown below:
If you are using the **Reading Style** message list, the Learning Environment displays the full text of all messages. Example of **Reading Style** shown below:

You can navigate between topics using the **Discussions List** at the left if it is displayed.

For information about changing your message list view and displaying the **Discussions List**, see *Changing Settings and Preferences*, p. 16.

To return to the main discussions page, click the **Back to Forums & Topics List** link in the top right corner of the page.

To choose whether to show messages in threads (where replies are grouped with their original messages) or as a list that you can sort, use the **View** drop-down list in the top right corner. You can also choose to display only unread, flagged, or unapproved messages.

**Reading Messages**

**Opening a Message**

If you are using the **Grid Style** message list, click on the subject of any message to view that message. The message is displayed either in a preview pane at the bottom of the window or in a separate window, depending on whether you have selected the option **Show the preview pane** on the Settings page (see *Changing Settings and Preferences*, p. 16).
Finding New Messages

To help you keep up with new messages added to your course’s discussions, the Learning Environment identifies unread messages in a number of places:

- The **Updates** widget on your course homepage, the widget displays the total number of unread messages for all discussion topics in your course.

- On the main discussions page, the number of unread messages appears beneath each topic.

Unread messages are listed beneath each discussion topic.
Discussions

- On the main discussions page, you can also use the **Display** drop-down list in the top right corner to show only topics with unread messages.
- Inside a topic’s message list, the **Discussions List** at the left of the screen displays topics with unread messages in bold.

![Discussions List]

- In a topic’s message list, you can also use the **View** drop-down list in the top right corner to display only unread messages.

Searching for Messages

You can search for messages containing a specific word, written by a specific author, posted within a date range, flagged or unflagged, read or unread, and so on.

**To Search for A Message**

1. Enter the topic you want to search.
2. If the Search For field is not visible at the top of the message list, click on the top tool menu.
3. Enter the word you want to find in the **Search For** field and click **Search**.
   a. The message list displays the messages that match your search. To see all messages again, click **Clear Search** at the top of the list of messages.

**To Perform an Advanced Search**

1. Click the **Show Search Options** link to the right of the **Search** button.
2. Specify additional criteria from the options displayed beneath the **Search For** field.
3. Click the **Search** button.
Rating Messages
If you turn on message rating for your course, users can anonymously rate each message posted to any discussion topic. The resulting average is displayed above each message and you can search for messages based on their average rating, which makes it easy to locate the best or most insightful messages posted to a topic. Turning on message ratings can also serve as a participation incentive for users.

For example, you might set up a discussion topic for users to help each other with assigned problems. When a user posts a question to this topic, all users could rate each answer and the average would identify the best solutions and help to separate them from less helpful messages such as “I agree” or “Good suggestion. Thanks.”

NOTE: Message rating can only be enabled for the entire course. You cannot turn message ratings on for one topic and off for another.

Enabling Message Rating
1. On the main discussions page, click Settings on the left tool menu.
2. In the Org Unit Settings section, select Messages can be rated.
3. Click Save.

To Rate a Message
Click one of the orange stars in the message rating control located at the top right of the message.

Flagging a Message
You can use message flags to mark a message you want to review later, monitor for replies, or follow-up on. In a topic’s message list, you can search for flagged messages or use the View drop-down to view flagged messages only. Your message flags are visible only to you; other users cannot see them.

To Flag or Unflag a Message
Click the Not Flagged – Click to Flag this item or Flagged– Click to Unflag this item icon beside the message subject.
Marking a Message Read or Unread

If you are using the Grid Style message list, messages are automatically marked as read when you open them (depending on your site’s configuration), but if you are using the Reading Style message list or you print messages to read them you will need to manually mark messages as read to indicate to the Learning Environment that the message is no longer new.

In some cases you may also want to manually mark a message as unread—for example, if you open the message from the Grid Style message list but do not finish reading it.

To Mark a Message Read or Unread:
Do one of the following:

- In the Grid Style message list, select one or more messages from the list and click the Mark Read or Mark Unread icon at the top of the list.
- In the Reading Style message list, click the Mark Read or Mark Unread link below the message header.
- In either view, to mark all messages in the topic read click Mark Read on the action bar.

Printing Messages

If you prefer reading from paper, you can print messages from the Grid Style message list. You cannot print messages from the Reading Style message list. See Changing Settings and Preferences, p. 16, for information about changing your message list style.

To Print Messages:

1. In the Grid Style, message list, select the messages you want to print.
2. Click the View Selected Messages as Printable icon at the top or bottom of the list.
3. Click the Print button in the bottom right corner.

Posting Messages

Posting a New Message

1. Join the topic where you want to post a message.
2. Click Compose on the action bar. (top left)
3. Enter a Subject.
4. Enter the **Message**.
5. Set any options you want:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To</th>
<th>Do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pin your message to the top of the topic</td>
<td>Select the <strong>Pin message</strong> checkbox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make your message anonymous (conceal your name)</td>
<td>Select the <strong>Author anonymously</strong> checkbox. This checkbox is only available if the topic or the topic’s forum allows anonymous messages (see <em>Creating a topic</em>, p. 5, or <em>Creating a forum</em>, p. 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attach a file</td>
<td>Click the <strong>Add a File</strong> button and select the files you want to attach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Post your message to multiple topics | 1. If the **Add Topics** button is not visible in the **Message Posting Options** section, click **Show the message posting options**.  
  2. Click the **Add Topics** button.  
  3. Select the topics you want to post the message to.  
  4. Click **Insert**.                                                                 |

6. Click **Post** to post the message now, or **Save Draft** to save the message without posting.

---

**Draft Messages**

When composing a new message, you can save the message as a draft to continue working on it later. This is useful if you are composing a long or complex message and want time to review it before you post it for others to read.

**Note:** You can only save new messages as drafts. You cannot save a draft when replying to another message.

**To Save a Draft:**

- When composing a message, click the **Save Draft** button.

**To Open a Draft Message:**

1. Join the topic where you created the message.
2. In the **View** drop-down at the top right of the page, select “Drafts.”
3. Do one of the following:
   1. If you are using the **Grid Style** message list, click the message’s subject to open the message and then click the **Edit Message** on the top tool menu.
   2. If you are using the **Reading Style** message list, click the **Edit** link beneath the message header.
Pinned Messages

Pinned messages always appear at the top of the message list, regardless of how the list is sorted or displayed. In threaded view, the thread following a pinned message appears as the first thread in the list.

You can use pinned messages to post announcements, rules of conduct, discussion summaries, or any other important information you want to display at the top of a message list.

Pinned messages can also be copied along with the topic they belong to; normal messages cannot.

**Note:** You cannot pin a message if it is a reply to another message.

**To Pin a Message:**

When composing or editing a message, select the **Pin message** checkbox.
Replying to a Message

1. Do one of the following:
   1. If you are using the **Grid Style** message list, click the subject of the message you want to reply to, then click the **Reply** on the top tool menu.
   2. If you are using the **Reading Style** message list, click the **Reply** link below the message header.
2. Type your reply in the **Message** area.
3. If you want to include the original message text in your reply, click the **Add Original Message Text** link.

   **Tip:** You can specify whether you want to automatically include original message text in your replies. See *Changing Settings and Preferences*, p.16.

4. Set any options you want:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To</th>
<th>Do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make your message anonymous (conceal your name)</td>
<td>Select the <strong>Author anonymously</strong> checkbox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This checkbox is only available if the topic or the topic’s forum allows anonymous messages (see <em>Creating a topic</em>, p. 5, or <em>Creating a forum</em>, p. 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attach a file</td>
<td>Click the <strong>Add a File</strong> button and select the files you want to attach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Click **Post**.

Moderating Discussions

Message Approval

If a topic requires message approval, when messages are posted they are only visible to the Instructor. To make these messages visible to all users, you must manually approve them. (Messages posted by Instructors are automatically approved.)

You can turn message approval on or off from the Properties tab when creating or editing a Forum or Topic.
If a message is not appropriate for the topic and you do not want to approve it, you can do any of the following:

- Leave the message unapproved
- Edit the message before approving it
- Delete the message

Finding Messages That Require Approval

You can find unapproved messages in the following ways:

- On the main discussions page, the number of unapproved messages is displayed beneath the topic’s name. To see only topics that contain unapproved messages, select “Topics with Unapproved” from the Display drop-down list at the top of the page.
- Inside a topic, if you have the Discussions List turned on, the number of unapproved messages is the second number displayed in parentheses beside each topic. For example, a topic that read “Favorite donut (3) (1)” would have one unapproved message.
- In the message list inside a topic, unapproved messages are indicated by the Message Requires Approval icon. To see only messages that require approval, select “Unapproved Only” from the View drop-down list at the top left of the page.

Approving Messages

To Approve a Message:

If you are using the Grid Style message list, do one of the following:

- Open the message and click Approve on the action bar.
- Select one or more messages from the message list and click the Approve icon at the top or bottom of the list.

If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the Approve link below the message header.
To Unapprove a Previously Approved Message:

Do one of the following:

- In the Grid Style message list, open the message and click Unapprove on the action bar.
- In the Reading Style message list, click the More actions link below the message header, then click Unapprove on the action bar above the message.

Editing a Message

Editing a message allows you to change the subject or message text, add or remove attachments, or change whether the message is pinned. You cannot make a message anonymous or change the name of the message author—the original author’s name will remain even after a message has been edited. Users who have edited a message are listed in the message’s history.

Edited messages are indicated by the Last Edited icon in the message header.

To Edit a Message:

1. Do one of the following:
   a. If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click Edit Message on the top tool menu.
   b. If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the More Actions link below the message header, then click Edit on the action bar at the top of the message.
2. Make the changes you want.
3. Click Save.

Viewing a Message’s History

If a message has been edited, the message history records all previous versions of the message, who edited it, and when it was approved. Edited messages are indicated by the Last Edited icon in the message header.
To View a Message’s History:

Do one of the following:

a. If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click History on the top tool menu.
b. If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the More actions link below the message header, then click History on the action bar at the top of the message.

Copying or Moving a Message

Messages don’t have to stay in the topics they are initially posted to. If you think a message belongs in a different topic, you can move it by copying it and choosing the option to delete the original message. If a message is applicable to more than one topic, you can copy it into as many other topics as you want.

To Copy or Move a Message:

a. Do one of the following:
   a. If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click Copy on the top tool menu.
   b. If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the More actions link below the message header, then click Copy on the action bar above the message.

b. Select the forum and topic you want to copy the message into.
c. Select any additional options you want:
   a. To copy any replies made to the message, select Copy message replies.
   b. To move the message from the current topic into the selected one, select Delete original message after copy completes.

   CAUTION: If you choose to delete the original message and DO NOT choose to copy replies, any replies made to the message are deleted.

d. Click Copy.
Deleting a Message
You can delete a message to remove it from a topic.

**CAUTION:** Deleting a message also deletes any replies to that message.

**To Delete a Message:**

If you are using the Grid Style message list, do one of the following:

a. Select the messages you want to delete in the message list and then click the **Delete Selected Messages** icon at the top or bottom of the list.

b. Open the message you want to delete and click **Delete** on the top tool menu.

If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the More actions link below the message header and then click the **Delete** on the action bar above the message.

Restoring a Deleted Message
To restore a deleted message, you must have permission to view deleted messages and you **MUST HAVE** the Display deleted messages option enabled on the Settings page. See Changing Settings and Preferences, p. 16.

**To Restore a Deleted Message:**

Do one of the following:

a. In the Grid Style message list, open the message can click the **Undelete** on the top tool menu.

b. In the Reading Style message list, click the More actions link below the message header, then click the **Undelete** on the action bar above the message.

**NOTE:** If the message restored was a reply to another message, and the message has also been deleted, both messages are restored.
Evaluating Messages

Setting Up Assessment
You can choose to evaluate user’s individual messages and have the Learning Environment automatically calculate a topic score for each user, or you can assign a topic scores directly to each user. If you choose to assess individual messages, you can specify how you want the system to calculate each user’s overall topic score.

To Configure a Topic for Assessment:

1. On the main discussions page, click the Edit icon for the topic you want to configure.
2. Click the Assessment tab.

   ![Assessment Tab](image)

   - **Grade Item**: -- Choose a grade item -- [New Grade Item]
   - **Score Out of**: [Enter a number]
   - **Messages**: [Select Assess each message and automatically calculate the topic score]
   - **Calculation**: -- Select a calculation method --
   - [Include unassessed messages in the calculated score as zero]

3. If you want the score to be linked to a grade item, select the item from the Grade Item drop-down list. See Linking a Topic to a Grade Item, p.34, for more information.
4. Specify the number you want to Score Out of. You will evaluate user using a scale ranging from zero to the number entered here. For example, if you enter 15, you will assess users on a scale from zero to fifteen.
5. If you want to assess individual messages (rather than assigning an overall topic score directly for each user):
   - a. Select the Assess each message and automatically calculate the topic score checkbox.
   - b. Select the Calculation method you want to use to determine users’ overall topic scores based on message scores.
c. If you want the calculation to treat unassessed messages as if those messages had received a score of zero, select the **Include unassessed messages in the calculated score as zero**. By default, unassessed messages are ignored when calculating the topic score.

6. Click **Save**.

**Assessing Users**

Once a topic is configured for assessment, you can assess users from two places: inside the topic while reading messages or on the **Assess Topic** page. Assessing users from within the topic lets you read users' messages in context and evaluate as you perform other reading-related tasks (approving messages, marking messages read, replying, etc.). Assessing users from the Assess Topic page enables you to see topics scores for all users and view all of a user’s messages together on one screen.

**Note:** If a topic uses message approval, you must approve a message before you can assess it.

**To Assess Users From Within a Topic:**

1. Enter the topic.
2. Do one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To assess</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>Do this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual messages</td>
<td>The Grid Style message list</td>
<td>Open the message you want to assess, then click <strong>Assess</strong> at the top of the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual messages</td>
<td>The Reading Style message list</td>
<td>Click the <strong>Assess</strong> link below the header of the message you want to assess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic as a whole</td>
<td>The Grid Style message list</td>
<td>Open any message by a user you want to assess, then click <strong>Assess</strong> at the top of the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic as a whole</td>
<td>The Reading Style message list</td>
<td>Click the <strong>Assess</strong> link below the header of any message by a user you want to assess.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Enter the **Message Score** or **Topic Score**.
4. Click **Save**.

**To Assess Users From Within a Topic:**

1. From the main discussions page, click the **Assess Topic** icon for the topic you want to assess.

   a. **Tip:** If the Score column is empty on the Assess Topic page, click **Display Options** on the action bar, select **Score Value** or **Percentage**, and click **Save**.
2. Do one of the following:
   a. On the **Users** tab, click the **Topic Score** link beneath the name of the user you want to assess.

   ![Users Tab](image)

   b. Click the **Assessments** tab, then click the name of the user you want to assess.

   **TIP**: On either tab, you can search for specific users by typing all or part of a user’s name or user ID in the **Search For** field and clicking **Search**. You can also filter the view to display members of a specific group or section using the **View By** drop-down list.

3. In the pop-up window, do one of the following, depending on the type of assessment:
   a. If you are evaluating the entire topic holistically, enter the score for this user in the **Topic Score** field.
   b. If you are evaluating individual messages, enter a score for one or more messages in the **Score** column at the bottom of the page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name, Last Name</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Graded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demo04 Student04</td>
<td>- / 10 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo03 Student03</td>
<td>- / 10 (0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo02 Student02</td>
<td>10 / 10 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[✓]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demo01 Student01</td>
<td>5 / 10 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[✓]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: If the user’s messages are displayed across multiple pages, be sure to save the page before navigating to another page of messages. Any new message scores entered will be lost if you change pages without saving.

4. Click **Save**.
5. Click **Close**.

**Linking a Topic to a Grade Item**
You can link a topic’s score to a grade item in your course’s grade book so that users’ scores are automatically transferred to the grade book. This enables you to factor the topic score into users’ final grades for the course. It also enables you to display the result to users; users cannot view their topic score directly through the Discussions tool, but they can view their grades in the grade book.

**To Associate a Topic With a Grade Item:**

On the **Assessment** tab where you configure a topic for assessment, select the grade item from the **Grade Item** drop-down list, or click the **New Grade Item** link to create a new grade item for the topic. See **Setting up assessment**, p. 36, for more information about configuring a topic for assessment; see **Grades User Guide** for more information about creating grade items.

**Note:** Only numeric grade items can be linked to discussion topics.

**Releasing Topic Scores to the Grade Book**
You assess topics linked to grade items in the same way you assess stand-alone topics, by assigning a score to each message or to each user for the topic overall. (See **Assessing Users**, p. 32, for more information.) However, the Learning Environment will not update the grade item until you release the score to the grade book. This prevents inaccurate grades from being displayed before you are finished assessing users.

When you release the topic score, the Learning Environment updates the grade item in the grade book. Any additional changes you make to a user’s score are automatically sent to the grade book.

**To Associate a Topic With a Grade Item:**

1. On the main discussions page, click the **Assess Topic** icon for the topic.
2. On the Assess Topic page, do one of the following:
   a. Select the checkbox in the Graded column beside each user whose score you want to release to the grade book, then click **Save**.
   b. To release scores for all users, click **Mark All Graded** on the action bar.

**Tip:** You can also release a user’s score in the same place that you enter it by selecting the Graded checkbox.