

# Creating Engagement through Discussion Forums

UAA Faculty Technology Center

*“Expert tutors often do not help very much. They hang back letting the student manage as much as possible. And when things go awry, rather than help directly they raise questions: ‘Could you explain this step again? How did you...?’”*  
~ Mark Lepper Stanford Psychologist

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Authored by: JoAnn Gonzalez-Major

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## Demonstrating Critical Thinking with Discussion Forums

*"A free exchange of ideas, opinions, and feelings is the lifeblood of collaborative learning." - J. McKinley*

Discussion forums can serve as a learning tool that fosters in-depth, academic discussion, an arena in which students work collaboratively or conduct peer analysis, or simply a place where they can virtually communicate with each other. Discussion forums used well can be an effective learning tool that encourages students to engage in higher order thinking activities.

### Considerations

Before adding online discussions to your courses you might want to consider how important discussions are and what role they should have in the learning experience. If an online discussion is integral to your course objectives, you should clearly communicate participation requirements and allocate a representative portion of the course grade to discussion participation. Provide a set of clear, explicit guidelines. Include things like:

- How frequently you will read and respond to postings.
- If you will read all postings or only a representative sample.
- What should and should-not be included in posting (e.g. Use email instead of the discussion board for private conversations, pick a central theme in this week's readings and note why it is important - support your position, etc.)
- When posting should be made (e.g. initial postings should be made y "x" day of the week, respond to at least two of your peers' postings by "x", etc.)
- Size and style of the postings (e.g. 'make your point in your posting, not in an attachment', 'proper source citations are required', use formal or conversational language in the posts, etc.)

Also keep in mind that some students that are new to online discussions in an academic setting prefer to "lurk", or be non-contributory browsers. These students may be learning, but just doing it quietly. At the beginning of a class you need to ensure that there are a variety of activities for students to do that encourage active engagement. Having low risk "ice breaker" activities (i.e., introductions topic where students add a brief bio and photo, games like "Three truths and a Lie" or the "Name Game") will help the "lurkers" find their online voice and teach the students how to use the discussion tool.

## Creating Questions

Creating good questions is one of the most important factors in designing successful discussion forums. The following are some question possibilities.

- The open-ended question: Ask for the how's and the why's instead of the what's.
- The controversial question: That the unpopular stand and get your students riled up.
- The "naiveté" question: Ask the "dumb" question to get your students talking.
- The "synthesizer" question: Draw from related reading materials, asking your students to determine what "person A" would have to say about "Person B" because of "C".
- The peer facilitator question: Have the students sign up for a facilitation week and give each student responsibility for addressing a major point/topical question, soliciting input from their peers, and posting a summary of the discussion at the end of the week.

In general, encourage students to talk to each other by creating challenging discussion topic in which the sharing of their ideas, experiences, knowledge and skills is useful.

Another important factor is keeping the discussions on topic. The following suggestions can assist in accomplishing this goal.

1. Creating well-designed questions that keep students topic focused (see question possibilities noted above.)
2. Create assignments, activities, or projects that permit students to "actively construct" knowledge when interacting with the information from the course.
3. Create discussion threads that incorporate hypothetical scenarios, case studies, or theoretical conflicts to fuel discussions.
4. Create a discussion forum that allows students to openly discuss topics of interest to them. For example encourage them to discuss things like popular music, bands, and movies online. Allow them the freedom to participate and encourage them to do so. This has two side effects: one, it necessitates that they use the course site to participate and two, it encourages them to meet one another online.
5. Provide a new discussion forum for each week or topic. If one forum is used for the entire term the threads may

### Discussion Question Sample 1

Events that occur at one point in time are likely to influence theories that are developed sometime thereafter. For example, the theory Gagne` first put forth in the 1960s was most likely influenced by his work designing military training during the 1940s. Think about present-day events and how they may shape future views of learning and instruction. On the basis of your ideas, describe an instructional theory that may appear in the next twenty years and discuss the events today that are likely to shape that theory.

### Discussion Question Sample 2

Should companies promote health economic information to USA employers?

Background & Instructions: In the USA a large portion of health insurance premiums for individuals under the age of 65 is paid for by employers. In an effort to manage premium increases, employers have formed healthcare employer coalitions and have implemented Health Enhancement, disease screening and similar programs. Should pharmaceutical companies allocate phase IV funding to support research and/or promotional activities with employers? Team A should argue that employers are an important customer segment for whom limited research and promotional spending budgets should be allocated. Team B should argue that limited research and promotional spend budgets should be allocated only to support activities directed toward patients, academic medical centers and managed markets customers. Please support your posting with examples of successful or unsuccessful collaborations between employers and pharmaceutical companies or with examples of work productivity messages.

get rather long. And provide parameters or guidelines for what constitutes an acceptable response.

6. Revise threaded discussion questions when responses are off-target. If a question is not working well and students are confused, change it immediately and send out an email to students regarding the change, and post a new thread with the revised question and associated questions.
7. Bring a thread to closure by summarizing the issues presented and resolved in the discussion; pinpoint especially interesting and informative responses by your students. This summary can be emailed to the students, posted to the end of the threaded discussion, or posted in the weekly announcements of the course site.
8. Give clear detailed directions to your students on what you want in their responses at the beginning of each thread.
9. Provide an informal threaded discussion elsewhere in the course. This can be a good place for students to post non-content related questions or to socialize online.
10. When appropriate post reminders that students stay on topic. If students begin to stray from the topic, post an item to the discussion pushing everyone back in the right direction. If the direction the students have strayed is a good one, reinforce it and allow the discussion to focus on the new topic.
11. Provide incentives for students to participate in the online discussions by attributing a discernable percentage of the grade to this activity (can be tied to the rubric noted in item 2.)
12. The answer to a question asked by one student might be relevant to many, so post answers to a student accessible FAQ course page or forum. This type of resource could quickly build into a valuable resource for current and future students.
13. Privately reprimand and give constructive feedback to students who make off-topic postings or fail to meet posting requirements.
14. Send email messages to those who are falling behind in discussions, or who are reading but not writing.
15. Encourage meta-communication about the process of online discussions and offer suggestions for improving the experience for all the participants.
16. Delete/hide threaded discussion postings by those students who refuse to play by the rules and then deny them access to the threads and lower their class participation grade.

## Sample Activities

### Student Centered

- Have students synthesize the prior week's discussion postings
- Have students generate discussion or review questions, Students can submit questions to you via email or moderated discussion forum. Select a few of the questions and post them to an open discussion forum. You could even have the students who submitted the question be the moderator for the question.
- Assign a group to be the experts on a topic or section. Have them post a question for that week's discussion and lead the discussion. Toward the end of the posting period, have the discussion leaders summarize and combine points for their peers.
- Have a student start the discussion on a topic or chapter.

- Have the student read an article that offers multiple perspectives on a course-related topic. They then write a brief synopsis of the article to explain a perspective they support and why. This summary is posted to the discussion forum. Students then read the posting of at least two other students and respond in a collegial manner, with additional evidence from the article that supports or challenges the other students' interpretations. If a student receives a challenge to a summary they should be able to defend their position, or concede their position. (Gaarrison, 2008) It is recommended that a clearly defined assessment rubric be used to grade this type of discussion.

### Promoting Interaction

- Have students take sides on an issue and defend their position. Poll students in class or online on a particular question or issue. Then have students support their positions in the discussion forum.
- Post a number of questions relating to a chapter or unit of study. Have students work in small groups on these questions. Each group will then post their final responses to the discussion forum.
- Post a sample exam and have student collaborate on answering the questions.

### Supporting Student Learning

- Post a weekly discussion question related to course readings prior to a class session. Use the comments from the online discussion to generate class discussion.
- Provide a discussion forum for readings and assignments. Encourage students to post their questions "x" number of days before the next session. Use the student postings to develop lecture materials and resources.
- Post preview or review questions or concepts in a discussion forum. Have students submit a response in their own words. This allows you to assess the students level of understanding.
- Have students create reflective discussion summaries or "discussion audits" by posing one or more of the following questions: (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)
  - What are the two most important ideas that emerged from this week's discussion?
  - What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic?
  - What do you understand better as a result of this week's discussion?
  - What key words or concept best captures our discussion this week?
  - What are some resources (e.g., websites, articles, books) that could be used to find further information/ideas about this topic?
- For individual assignments, have students review postings from the discussion forum and outline the points and themes that were discussed. Select a few good examples and post these for the class.
- Post a model answer to the discussion as a conclusion to your discussion thread.

## Creating and Managing Forums

### Accessing the Discussion Board

Forums can appear throughout a Course, in any area where an Instructor chooses. Each group may also have a private Discussion Board with Forums available only to those users that are a part of the group.

All Forums that are not a part of a group can be accessible from various points in the Course or by going to the Discussion Board links.

There are four ways to access the Discussion Board.

1. Through the **Control Panel**

- a. In your course, click the **Control Panel** link located at the bottom of the menu on the left-hand side of the course window. The Control Panel will be displayed.
- b. Click the **Discussion Board link** located in the Course Tools section on the left side of the screen.



2. Through the **Course Menu** if a Discussion link or button was established in the course menu click on the link.
3. Through the **Communications** menu link if you are using the default course shell.
4. Through **Tools** Menu (this option may vary from course to course)
  - a. Click on the Communication link in course menu.
  - b. Next click on the Discussion Board link.

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### Adding Forums

- Open your course **Control Panel**
- Click on the **Discussion Board** link in the Course Tools area of the screen. The Discussion Board listing screen will be displayed.
- Click on the Discussion Board where you would like to add the forum if more than one Discussion Board is defined.
- Click on the Add  **Forum link** located on the left-hand-side of the gray bar. An **Add Forum** page will be displayed.

1. Enter a title for the discussion forum in the **Name** text box. This title should reflect the topic of the discussion from a broad perspective.
2. Enter a description of the discussion in the **Description** text box. This could include any questions to be included in a post, or other instructions about the discussion.

3. By default Forum Availability is set to **Yes** (visible to students). If you would like to hide the forum from students click on the **No** radio button (keep in mind that you will have to manually change the setting to make the discussion visible).
4. If you would like the Discussion Forum to be automatically released on a prescribed date:
  - Click on the “*Display After*” check box then, click on either the date dropdown arrows of the calendar icon to set the release date.
  - If you would like the forum to be hidden on a specific date, click on the “*Display Until*” check box, then click on either the date dropdown arrows of the calendar icon to set the hide date.

The next series of settings will allow you to define user permissions, moderation rules, and if the forum will be graded.

**3 Forum Settings**

**Allow anonymous posts** 5

**Allow author to remove own posts** 6

All posts

Only posts with no replies

**Allow author to modify own published posts** 7

**Allow post tagging** 8

**Allow users to reply with quote** 9

**Allow file attachments** 10

**Allow members to create new threads** 11

**Subscribe**

Do not allow subscriptions

Allow members to subscribe to threads

Allow members to subscribe to forum

Include body of post in the email

Include link to post

**Allow members to rate posts** 13

**Force moderation of posts** 14

**Grade**

No grading in forum

**Grade Forum:** Points possible:

**Grade threads**

**4 Submit**

Field	Required?	Description	Recommended?
5. <b>Allow anonymous posts</b>	No	Clicking on the check box will allow anonymous posts on the Forum.	No
6. <b>Allow author to remove own posts</b>	No	Clicking on the check box will allow authors to remove their own posts.  If you decide to allow author to remove posts – clicking one of the radio buttons in the sub list will limit their abilities.	No
7. <b>Allow author to modify own published posts</b>	No	Clicking the check box will allow authors to edit their own published posts.	No
8. <b>Allow post tagging</b>	No	Clicking the check box will allow tags (Text Labels) to be added to messages on the Forum. See the Tagging Posts tutorial for more information.	No
9. <b>Allow users to reply with quotes</b>	No	Allows users to include the text of the original message in any replies to that message. This is enabled by default.	Yes
10. <b>Allow file attachments</b>	No	Allow files to be attached to messages within the Forum. This is enabled by default.	Yes, with restrictions

<b>11. Allow members to create new threads</b>	No	Allow Forum members to create new threads in the forum. This is enabled by default.	Yes, but the conversation could get out of control quickly
<b>12. Allow members to subscribe</b>	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By default the “Do not allow subscriptions” option is checked</li> <li>Checking the “Allow subscription to threads only allows members to receive an email alert when a post is updated or a user posts a reply.</li> <li>Clicking the “Allow members to subscribe to forum” allow subscription to the entire forum.</li> </ul> Refer to the Creating Subscriptions tutorial for additional information.	Yes
<b>13. Allow members to rate posts</b>	No	Clicking the check box will enable forum members to rate individual posts. Refer to the Rating Posts tutorial for more information.	Yes, if clear guidelines for peer assessment are defined
<b>14. Force moderation of posts</b>	No	Clicking this check box will require that all messages be reviewed before they are posted to the forum. See the Forcing Moderation tutorial for additional information about this function.	Depends on the class
<b>15. Grade forum</b>	No	“No grading in forum” is set by default.	
	No	Clicking on the “Grade Forum” radio button will enable grading at the Forum level. When setting this option enter the total number of points possible in the text box.	Yes, will include all threads of each student
	No	Clicking the “Grade threads” radio button will enable grading at the thread level.	No, too much work

16. Click the **[Submit]** button to post the discussion forum.

### Adding, Editing & Removing Threads

Threads are a series of posts related to a similar topic. When creating a Forum, the Instructor has the option of allowing or not allowing users to start threads.

*Note: If threads are graded, users cannot start threads.*

#### To add a thread:

1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify.

2. Then select the forum you want to add a thread to.



3. Next click on the add [Thread] button in the tools menu. The Add Thread screen will be displayed.

**Add Thread**

**1 Message**

\* Subject:  4

Message

Normal 3 Times New Roman B I U S x<sub>2</sub> x<sup>2</sup>

5

Path: [body](#)

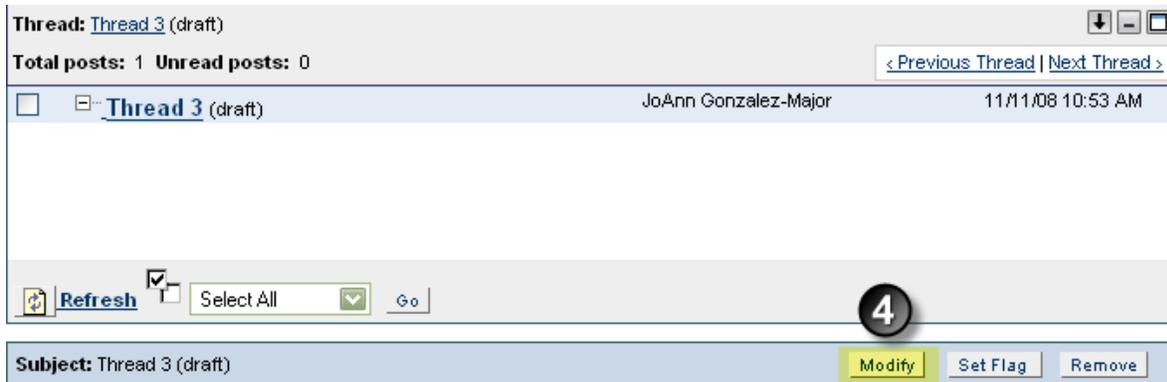
**2 Attachments**

Attachments [Attach a file](#) 6

4. Enter a title for the thread in the **Subject** text box.
5. Enter conversation text in the **Message** text box.
6. *Optional field:* Attachments can be added to the threads if the feature was activated when the forum was created.
  - o Click on the “*Attach a file*” link to add a file. A **Browse** form field will be displayed.
  - o Click on the [**Browse**] button. A File Upload screen will be displayed.
  - o Navigate to the file to be attached.
  - o Click on the [**Open**] button in the “File Upload” window to add the file to the thread
7. Click the [**Submit**] button to add and post your message to the discussion forum.

### To Modify a thread:

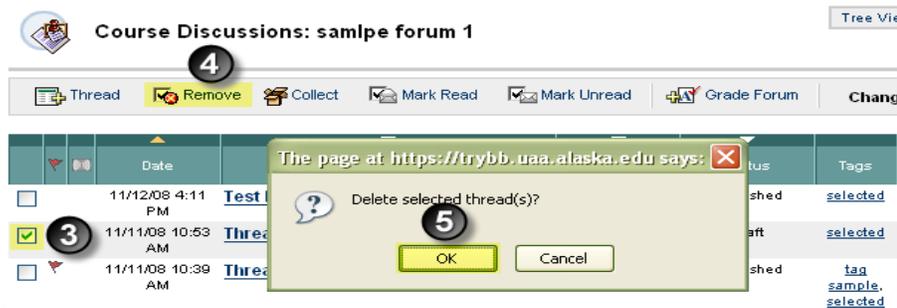
1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify by clicking on the board title.
2. Then select the forum you want to modify by clicking on the forum link.
3. Then Select the Thread you want to modify by clicking on the thread title.



4. Click on the **[Modify]** button, located in the Subject area of the post.
5. Make the changes you want to make to the thread, then click the **[Submit]** button located on the lower right-hand-side of the browser window to save the changes.

### To Remove a Thread:

1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify.
2. Then select the forum you want to modify.



3. Next click on the Check Box next to the thread you want to remove.
4. Click on the **[Remove]** button located in the tools menu toward the top of the browser window. A verification window will be displayed.
5. Click on the **[OK]** button in the verification window to complete the removal request.

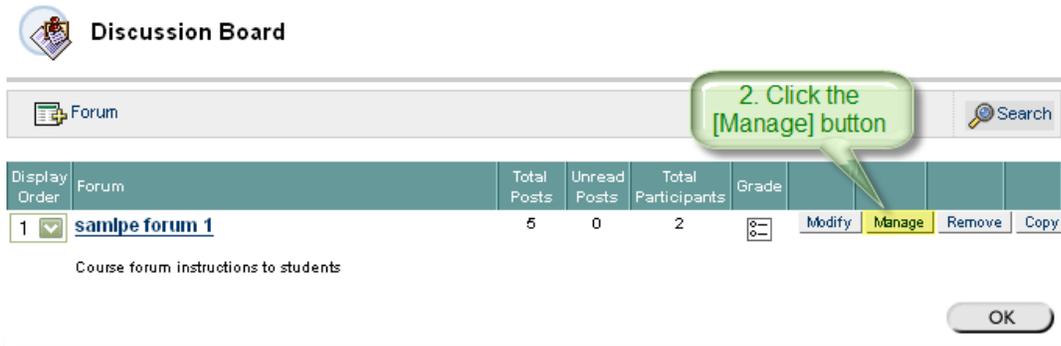
### Setting Forum Roles

Discussion Boards can serve several different purposes in a Course. In many cases, you may want to take a “guide on the side” role by passing off some or all of the administration of the Discussion Board to a peer

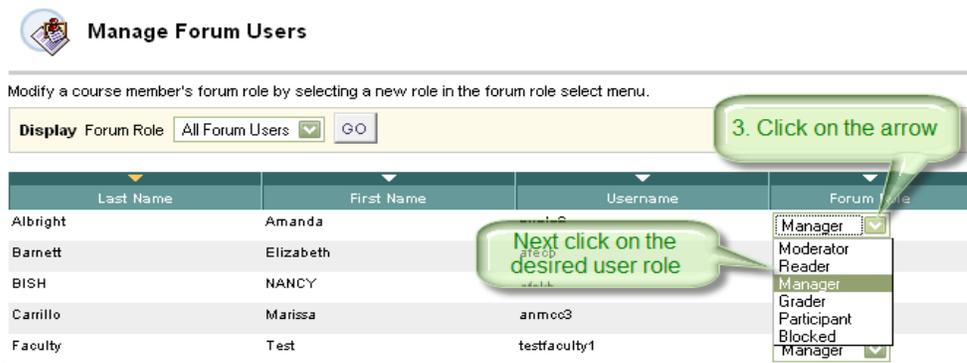
leader or another responsible user. Discussion Board Forums include roles for each user involved in the Forum. These roles define privileges within the Forum. The Forum Roles with administrative roles that can be assigned to users in a Forum are: Manager, Moderator, and Grader.

To modify forum roles:

1. Select the Discussion Forum you wish to modify.



2. Click on the **[Manage]** button for the Forum you wish to modify. The **Manage** forum page will be displayed.



3. Click on the drop down arrow across from the name of the user you wish to change, then click on their new role for the Discussion Forum.

- **Manager** – can change the forum settings, moderate posts, and assign grades.
- **Moderator** – can grant participant privileges, and modify, delete & lock posts. If Moderation Queue is used, the moderator may also approve or reject posts in the queue.
- **Grader** – has user participant privileges and grading privileges for the forum.
- **Participant** – has read and write privileges to the forum.
- **Reader** – can view forum content but cannot add or respond to posts.
- **Blocked** – user is blocked from accessing the forum.

*Note:* the screen defaults to a display 25 users at a time. To change the display option:

- Click on the “Items Per Page” drop down arrow.

- Next click on **All** in the selection list.
  - Then click the **[Go]** button. The full list of users will be displayed on one page.
4. Click the **[Submit]** button on the lower right-hand-side of the screen (you may have to scroll down to see the button.)

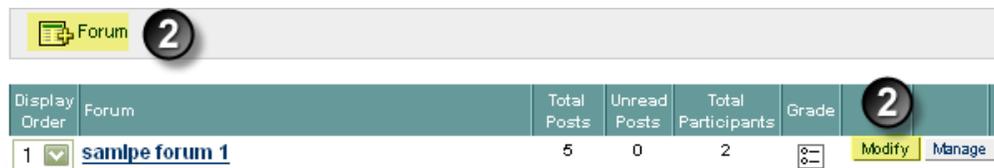
## Forcing Moderation

By default, Discussion Board users are given forum roles based on their course, organization, or system role. Instructors are given the Manager role by default. Managers control user privileges within the Discussion Board through the use of roles. For example, the Manager may delegate responsibility for reviewing posts to a Moderator.

When creating a forum or modifying a forum's settings, instructors have the option of forcing moderation. If moderation is enabled, when a user other than a Moderator or Manager submits a post, the post is saved to the Moderation Queue. New posts are displayed in the queue for review and publication. If a post is returned, a return message can be attached to the post allowing the Moderator to inform the user why the post was not accepted for posting. (University of Pennsylvania Faculty Support Center)

To Force Moderation of Forums:

1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify. The forum page will be displayed.



2. Create a new Forum by clicking on the Add Forum button in the tools menu, or click on the **[Modify]** button for an existing forum. The **Modify Forum** screen will be displayed.

**3 Forum Settings**

- Allow anonymous posts
- Allow author to remove own posts
  - All posts
  - Only posts with no replies
- Allow author to modify own published posts
- Allow post tagging
- Allow users to reply with quote
- Allow file attachments
- Allow members to create new threads
- Subscribe
  - Do not allow subscriptions
  - Allow members to subscribe to threads
  - Allow members to subscribe to forum
  - Include body of post in the email
  - Include link to post
- Allow members to rate posts
- Force moderation of posts

3. Under the Forum Setting click on the check box next to the **“Force Moderation of posts”** header.

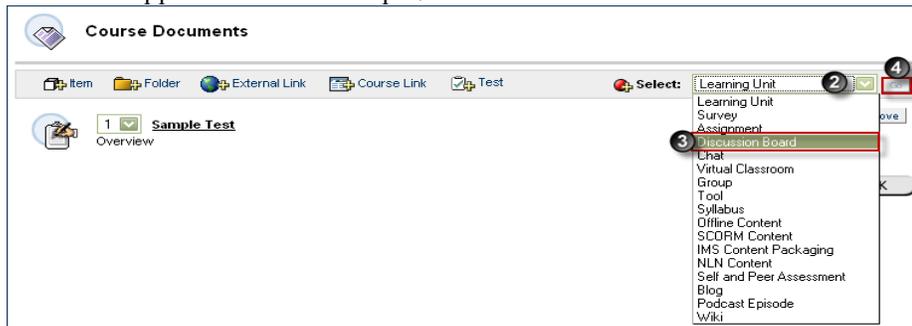
4. Click the **[Submit]** button located in the lower right-hand corner of the browser window to save the change.

## Linking to Discussions from Content Areas

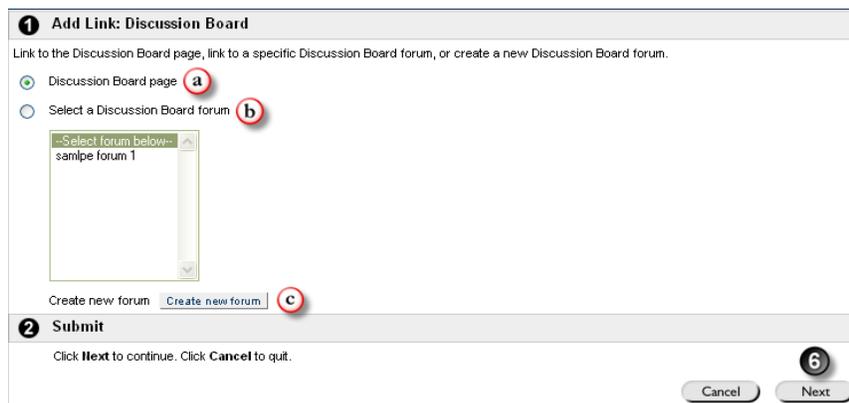
Blackboard allows the creation of discussion boards within other content areas, like Course Documents.

To create a link to the Discussion Board or to a particular Forum in a Content Area:

1. Navigate to the course Control Panel for your course, then choose the content area where the forum will appear. For this example, we will use the Course Documents content area.



2. Click on the dropdown arrow to the right of the **Select** field.
3. Click on **Discussion Board** entry.
4. Then click on the **[Go]** button. The *Add Link: Discussion Board* screen will be displayed.



5. The *Add Link...* page gives you three options for adding a link for your discussion board.
  - a. You can link to the Discussion Board page (which displays all the discussion boards in your course).
  - b. Select a specific discussion forum you have already created for your course.
  - c. Or create a new forum by clicking the **[Create New Forum]** button.
6. Select the option that is appropriate for the lesson that you are creating. (For this example we will select an existing discussion forum.) Then click on the **[Next]** button. The second *Add Link...* page will be displayed.

7. The *Add Link...* page allows you add title to the forum, provide a description that will help guide the users (this information will appear under the link in the Content section), and options for making the item available, tracking content, and choosing date restrictions if so desired.
8. Click on the **[Submit]** button located in the lower right-hand side of the browser window to save your changes.

### Copying Discussion Forums in a Course

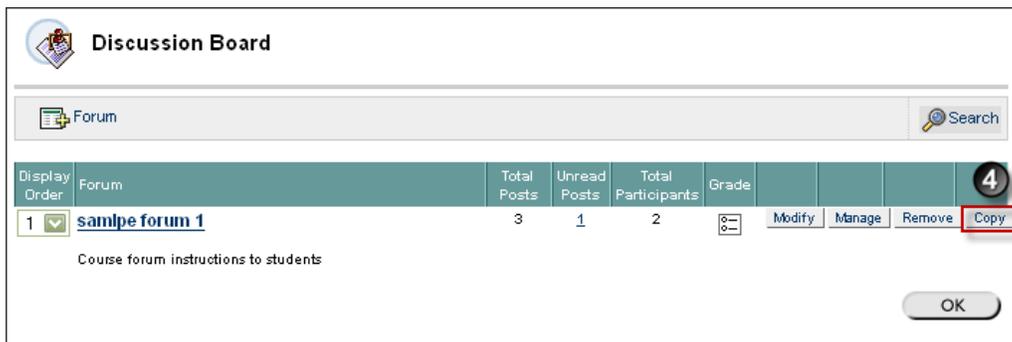
Discussion Forums can be copied from one discussion board to another within a course. This is a nice tool for setting up team based forums where each team will address the same set of questions, or creating forum templates.

To copy a Discussion Forum:

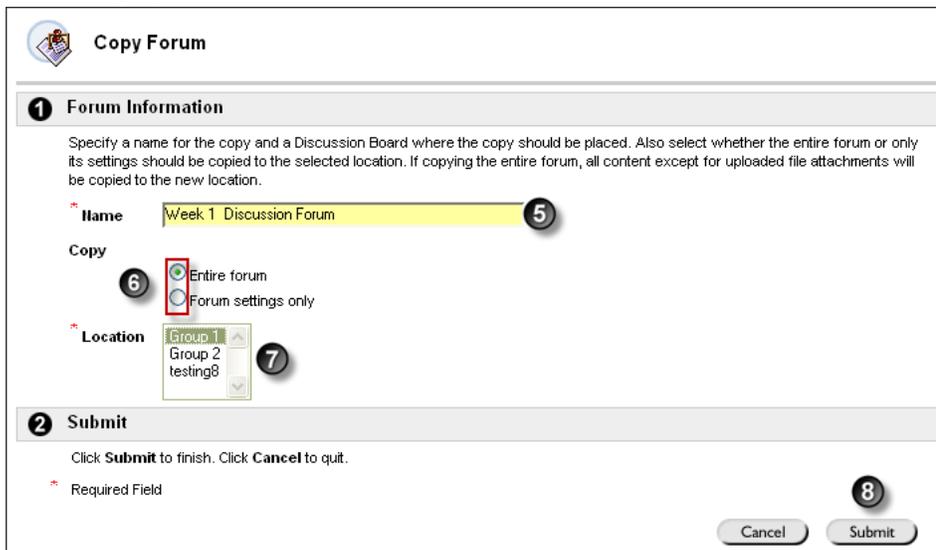
1. Navigate to the course **Control Panel**.
2. Click the **Discussion Board** link located under the ‘Course Tools’ header on the left-hand-side of the screen.

Discussion Board	Forums	Participants	Posts
testing8	1	2	2
Group 1	1	0	0
Group 2	1	0	0

- Click on the **Discussion Board** you wish to copy content from. The Forum Selection screen will be displayed.



- Click on the **[Copy]** button to the right of the forum you wish to copy. The Copy Forum screen will be displayed.



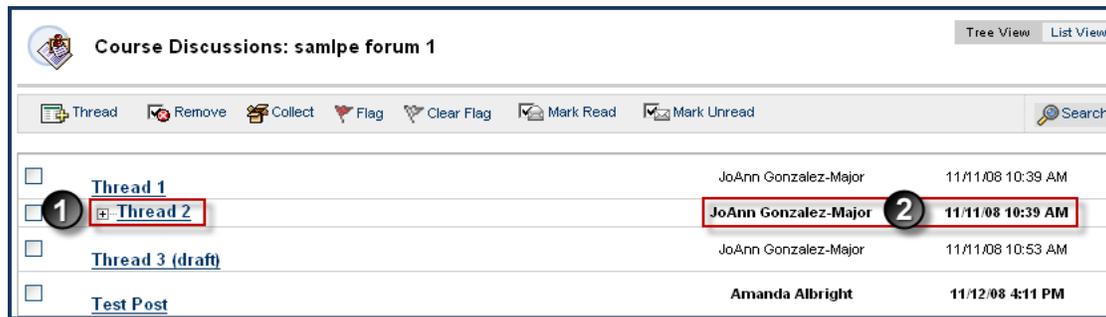
- Enter a name for forum copy in the **Name** text window.
- Click the radio button next to the type of information that you would like copied.
  - Entire Forum** – this option will copy all content in the forum except attachments. This is a nice option to use if user groups are working on different aspect of the same question, or groups discuss and refine a topic and their results are then moved to a Discussion Board that is accessible to the entire class.
  - Forum Settings Only** – No postings or attachments will be copied. This setting can be used if you would like the same setting all several forums.
- Click on the Discussion Board where the forum should be placed.
- Click the **[Submit]** button to execute your request.

## Viewing Forums

The Forum view lists the threads in the Forum and includes several options for displaying and managing threads. The Forum can be viewed in one of two contexts: Tree View or List View. This choice remains in effect until the user changes it; it can be changed at any time.

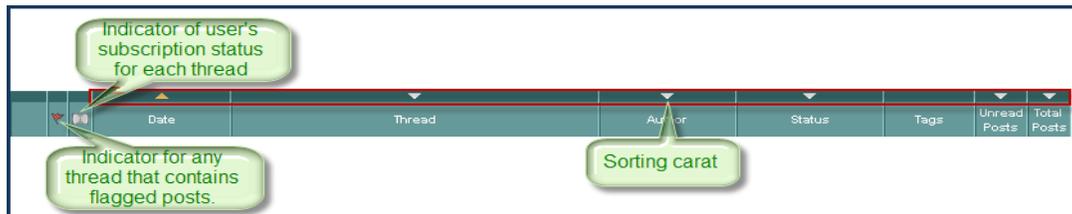


The Tree View presents the thread starter messages and their responses messages.



1. Response messages can be expanded and collapsed by using the plus/minus icon next to each starter message.
2. Unread threads and posts are displayed in bold type; if a thread starter message has unread responses, then the thread starter message is displayed in bold if the response messages are collapsed.

The List View presents the list of threads in a tabular format. The threads can be sorted by clicking the carat at the top of each column.



*Note: Different tools are available in each view window, so if you don't see the tool that you are looking for in one view switch to the other view.*

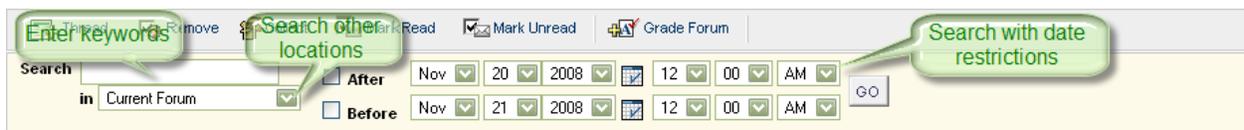
## Searching Discussion Boards

A search function appears as a magnifying glass icon at the top of the page throughout the Discussion Board. Click this icon to show or hide the search fields, thus conserving screen space in the Discussion Board.

The search fields include keyword, date and time restrictions, and options for where to search. The search function starts at the current level and options exist to work up. For example, in a thread, the default search option only searches that thread but options exist to search the entire Forum or all Forums. From the

search function, users can search all Forums in the Course, including any Forums that appear in the user's groups.

1. Select the **Discussion Board Forum** you want to search. This will take you into the discussion where you can read, post, and reply to messages.
2. Click on the name of the Discussion Forum you would like to search.
3. Click the **[Search]** button  at the top right-hand-side of the browser window to search through messages.



4. Enter keywords into the **Search** box and if appropriate enter dates into the **After** and **Before** fields to narrow the search.
5. Click on the **"in"** dropdown arrow to select another forum to search. (This drop down menu is available to search in: current forum, all forums in the discussion board, or just the current discussion board).
6. Next click the **[GO]** button to execute the search.

## Creating Collections

Collections gather posts into a printable, sort able format. Collections are a good way to organize posts for quick reading.

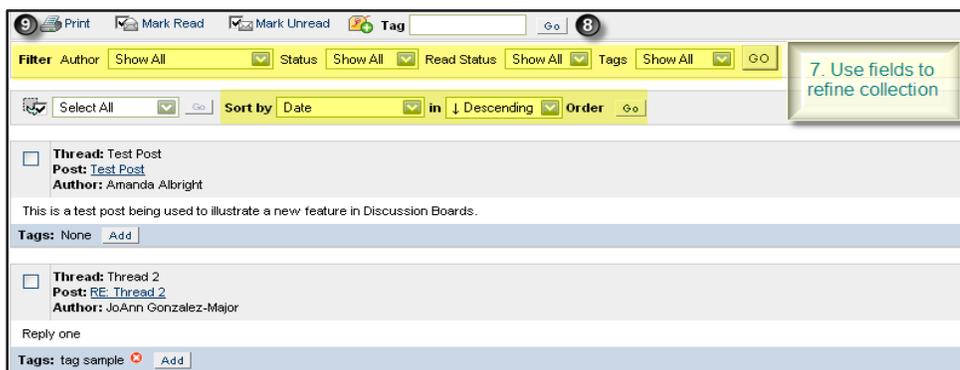
1. Open the course **Control Panel**.
2. Click on the **Discussion Board** link in the *Course Tools* area of the Control Panel.
3. Click on the name of the **Discussion Board** where you want to sort the messages. This will take you into the discussion where you can read, post, and reply to messages.



- Click on the **Forum** in which you would like to collect items. The threads will be displayed.



- Select the messages you want to view by either clicking on the check boxes next to each post, or clicking on the **Select All** link in the dropdown menu (located at the bottom of the discussion board) then the **[Go]** button to the immediate right of Select All.
- Click on the **Collect** link. The Collection page will be displayed.



- You can then use the **Filter** and **Sort by** options to narrow your selections, which are located at the top of the page.
- Forum users can create and apply text labels to their own choosing to messages in a forum by selecting the message(s) then entering a key word in the **Tag** field, then clicking the **[Go]** button to the right of the field.

*Note: These tags will allow members to read, filter, and search messages using the tags. Tags allow arbitrary message grouping independent of thread or thread status.*

- Click the  print icon to print the message collection.
- Click the **[OK]** button at the bottom of the screen to exit the **Collection** window. The Course Discussions screen will be displayed.

## Tagging Posts

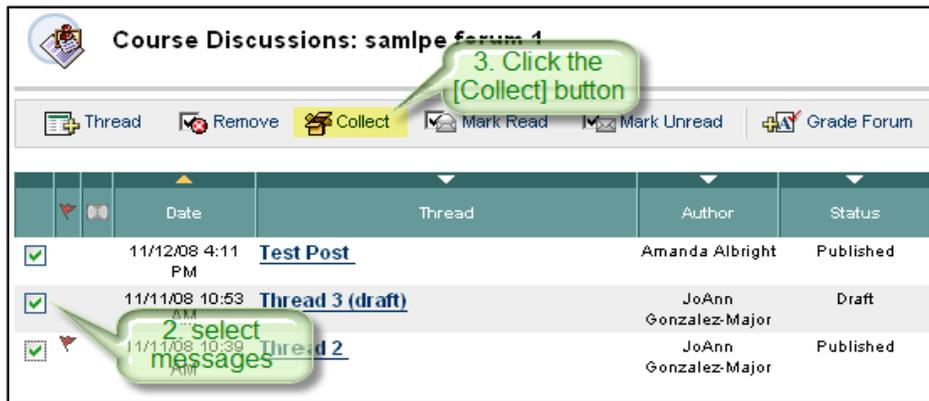
Forum managers can create and apply text labels of their own choosing to messages in a Forum; other Discussion Board users can read, filter, and search messages using the tags, but cannot create new ones. (Blackboard User Guide)

Tags allow arbitrary message grouping independent of thread or thread status.

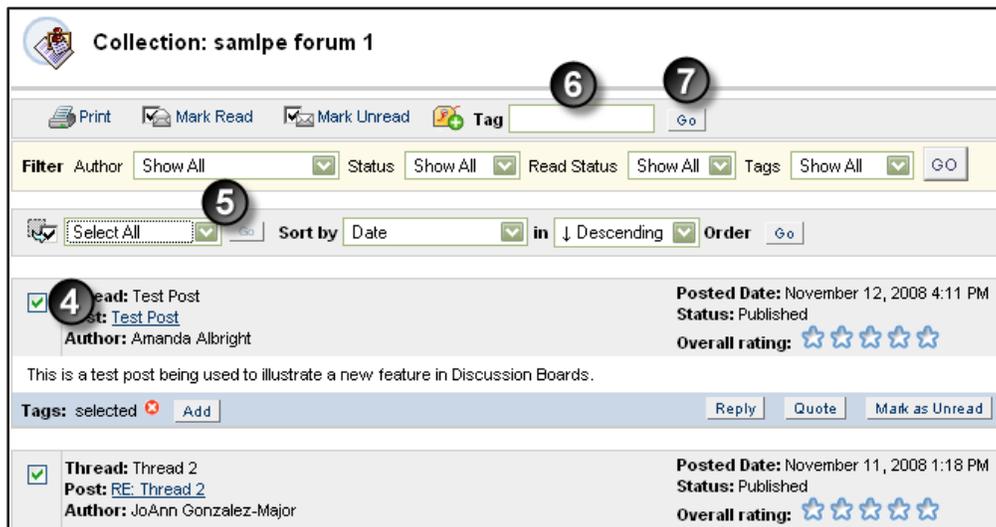
*Note: Tagging is only available if "Allow post tagging" is selected in Forum Settings.*

### Tagging Posts (List View):

1. Select the **Discussion Board Forum** where you want to add tagging.



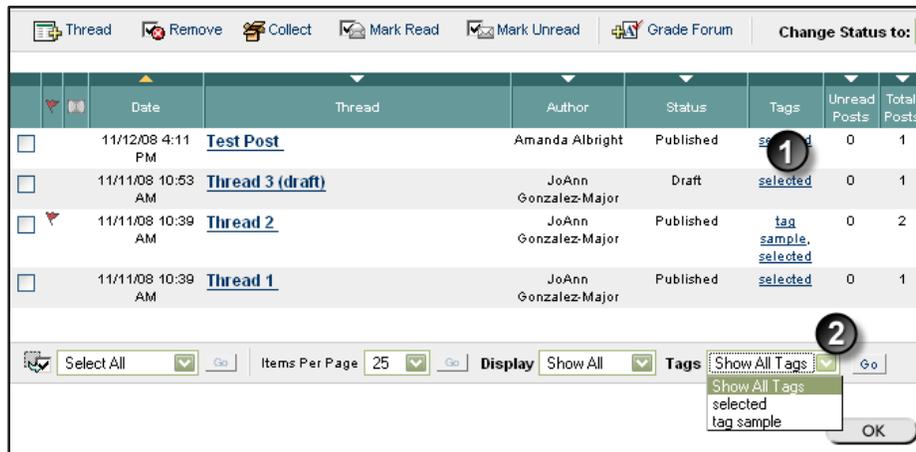
2. Next select the specific messages to be tagged by clicking on the Check Box next to the messages.
3. Click on the **[Collect]** button located in the tool bar towards the top of the screen. The **Collection** screen will be displayed.



4. Select the messages to tag from the message list using the check boxes.
5. Or select all messages by choosing **Select All** from the dropdown menu and then clicking on the **[Go]** button.

6. Next enter a tag name in the add **Tag** text box.
7. Then click the **[Go]** button to create the new tag.

## Viewing Tags (Available Only from Forum List View):



1. Click on the message keyword hyperlink in the **Tag** column
2. Or select the desired Tag category from the **Tags** dropdown list, then click on the **[Go]** button.
3. The Discussion message listing will be refreshed displaying only the messages with the selected tag.
4. Select “Show All Tags” and click the **[Go]** button to display complete list of messages again.

## Removing Tags (Available Only from Forum List View):

1. Click on the keyword hyperlink in the **Tag** column that you would like to remove. The **Collection** screen will be displayed.



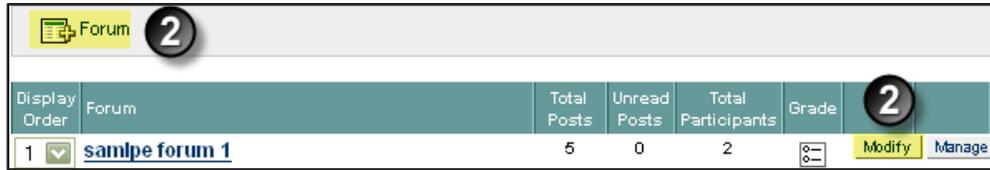
2. Click on the **Red X** icon to the right of the word you would like to remove. The verification Window will be displayed.
3. Click on the **[OK]** on the verification window to complete the action.

## Creating Subscriptions

Subscriptions to a Discussion Forum allow Blackboard to notify users by email each time a new Post is added to a Thread or Forum. If you enable this feature then users must elect to use the feature by selecting the Subscribe button which appears on the Forum page and in the Thread detail page.

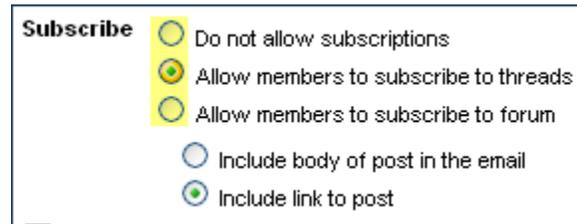
### To Enable Subscriptions:

1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify. The forum page will be displayed.



2. Create a new Forum by clicking on the Add Forum button in the tools menu, or click on the **[Modify]** button for an existing forum. The **Modify Forum** screen will be displayed.
3. Under the Forum Setting select one of the following options by clicking on the radio button to the left of the option.

- a. **Allow members to subscribe to threads** – Use this option to restrict subscription to specific threads in a Forum.
- b. **Allow members to subscribe to forum** – Use this option to allow subscriptions to all threads within a Forum. With this option also, select one of the following:



- i. **Include body of post in email** – Use this option to include the message text in the email notification and a link to reply to the message.

*Note: this option will move posting out of the secure course management system and into a public mail system. Use this option with caution.*

- ii. **Include link to post** – Use this option to include a link to the message in the email notification.

*Note: this option will keep the posting in a secure environment and drive the students back into the course.*

4. Click the **[Submit]** button located in the lower right-hand corner of the browser window to save the changes.

### Disable Subscriptions:

1. Click on the **[Modify]** button for an existing forum. The **Modify Forum** screen will be displayed.
2. Under **Forum Settings**, click on the **Do not allow subscriptions in the Subscribe** section.
3. Click the **[Submit]** button located in the lower right-hand corner of the browser window to save the changes.

## Blocking Discussion Board Users

There may be an instance where a user should not be allowed to post at all because of past history of inappropriate posts or if the user has not been participating in discussions throughout the term.

Follow the steps below to block users from accessing a particular discussion forum.

1. Click on the **[Manage]** button for an existing forum. The **Manage Forum** screen will be displayed listing the course users.

Faculty	Test	testfaculty1	Manager
Gonzalez-Major	JoAnn	anjrg1	Moderator
Hernandez	Lynda	aflrh	Reader
MANNION	HEIDI	afham	Manager
McClung	Robert	afrem1	Grader
			Participant
			Blocked

2. Click on the drop down arrow across from the name of the user you wish to block.
  - a. Note: the screen defaults to a display 25 users at a time. To change the display option:
    - i. Click on the “Items Per Page” drop down arrow.
    - ii. Next click on **All** in the selection list.
    - iii. Then click the **[Go]** button. The full list of users will be displayed on one page.
3. Click on the **“Blocked”** entry in the dropdown menu, then
4. Click the **[Submit]** button on the lower right-hand-side of the screen (you may have to scroll down to see the button.)

*Note: This will prevent all selected users from accessing this particular forum. Please keep in mind that this will prevent them from accessing it altogether not just from posting messages.*

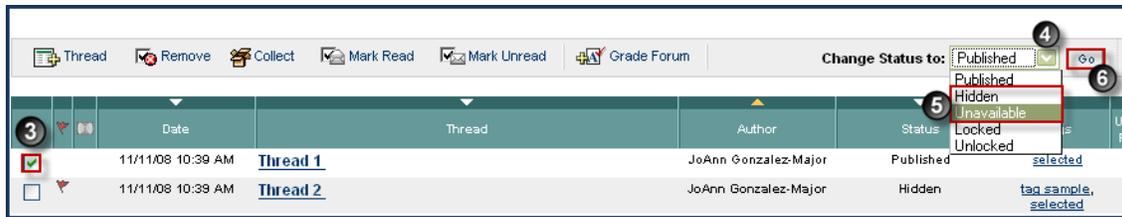
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## Hiding Threads

Threads within a forum can be hidden by the Manager or Instructor so they are no longer visible to users. This may be useful in active forums that span several themes or topics.

There are two statuses for hidden threads.

- A. **Hidden:** Hidden threads do not display unless the user chooses. Hidden threads may not be modified.
- B. **Unavailable:** Unavailable threads are only visible to forum managers & instructors. Even then, forum managers must choose to view these threads. Making threads unavailable means that users can no longer view the thread.



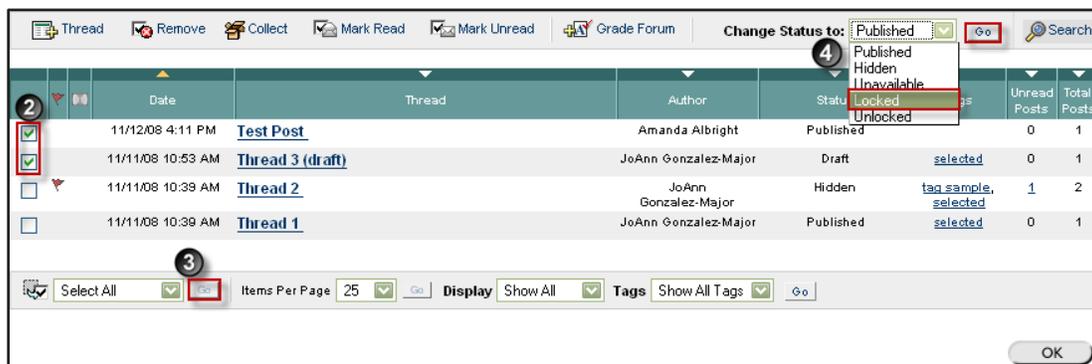
To hide a series of threads:

1. Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify. The forum page will be displayed.
2. Click on the Form in which you wish to hide the messages.
3. Click on the check box to the left of the **Thread** to be hidden.
4. Next click on the drop down arrow to the right of the *Change Status to:* field.
5. Then click on either the **Hidden** or **Unavailable** entry.
6. Then click the **[Go]** button.

## Locking Posts

It is not possible to archive a discussion board or thread, however, you can lock the discussion to preserve it from further posts. Locking enables students to read but not post to the discussions. To lock or unlock a thread:

1. Navigate to the forum where you wish to lock posts.



2. Click the boxes next to the threads (posts) you wish to lock.
3. If you want to lock all of the messages, click **Select All** then click the **[Go]** button.
4. Click on the “*Change Status to:*” menu arrow, then click on **Locked** in the dropdown menu.
5. Next click on the **[Go]** button.

	Date	Thread	Author	Status
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/12/08 4:11 PM	<a href="#">Test Post</a>	Amanda Albright	Locked
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/11/08 10:53 AM	<a href="#">Thread 3 (draft)</a>	JoAnn Gonzalez-Major	Locked
<input type="checkbox"/>	11/11/08 10:39 AM	<a href="#">Thread 2</a>	JoAnn Gonzalez-Major	Hidden
<input type="checkbox"/>	11/11/08 10:39 AM	<a href="#">Thread 1</a>	JoAnn Gonzalez-Major	Published

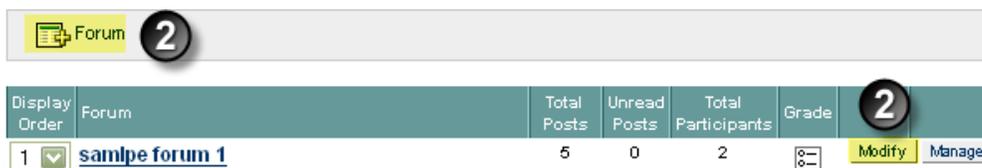
- The Thread status will be changes to “*Locked*”
- Click on the **[OK]** button to return to the Forum listing screen.

## Rating Posts

A common learning tool in classrooms are peer assessment techniques. Students prepare an essay, report, or presentation and share it with the class. Other students are asked to comment on the work and offer criticisms for improvement. This process helps the student improve their work and the reviewers improve their communication skills.

In an online learning environment the Discussion Board can also provide opportunities for peer assessment. Each student can start a thread with their work in the body of the post or attached to the initial post. Other students then review the work, assign a rating to the initial post, and include comments in a response. As users respond, the feedback expands as users reinforce and build on points made by other students.

Users can respond to a post using a 5-star rating system (we would suggest that instructors define parameters for the rating system at the beginning of the course). To enable this feature:



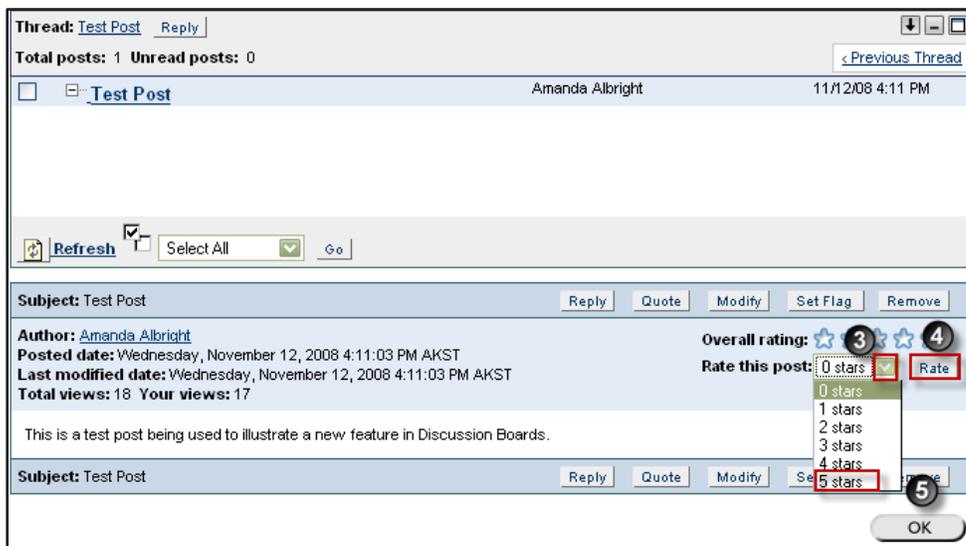
- Select the Discussion Board you wish to modify. The forum page will be displayed.
- Create a new Forum by clicking on the Add Forum button in the tools menu, or click on the **[Modify]** button for an existing forum. The **Modify Forum** screen will be displayed.
- Under the Forum Setting click on the check box next to the “*Allow members to rate posts*” header.
- Click the **[Submit]** button located in the lower right-hand corner of the browser window to save the change.

### 3 Forum Settings

- Allow anonymous posts
- Allow author to remove own posts
  - All posts
  - Only posts with no replies
- Allow author to modify own published posts
- Allow post tagging
- Allow users to reply with quote
- Allow file attachments
- Allow members to create new threads
- Subscribe
  - Do not allow subscriptions
  - Allow members to subscribe to threads
  - Allow members to subscribe to forum
  - Include body of post in the email
  - Include link to post
- Allow members to rate posts
- Force moderation of posts
  - No grading in forum
  - Grade Forum: Points possible:
  - Grade threads

### To rate a post:

1. Navigate to the forum containing the post to be rated. The Thread listing will be displayed.
2. Click on the hyperlink for the thread to be rated. The thread listing screen will be displayed.
3. Click on the “**Rate this post:**” dropdown arrow, then click on the number of stars that you wish to assign to the posting.



4. Then click on the **[Rate]** button to the right of the stars menu. *Note: a user may not rate the same post more than once, and once the [Rate] button is clicked the rating cannot be changed.*
5. Click the **[OK]** button to return to the Thread listing screen.

### Grading Discussions

The Discussion Board Grader simplifies the process of evaluating and grading a student’s participation in discussion board forums. With the Discussion Board Grader, you have access to a single page with every message that a student has posted to a particular forum, number of words per message, and number of original messages and replies.

Grading options are available when a Forum is created or by modifying a Forum. Once Grading has been enabled, a Grade Center Item is created and all the advanced management features that can be applied to the item should be managed from the Grade Center.

**Warning:** Do not change the Grade Center Name once you have added grading to the forum. Doing so will break the link between the forum and the gradebook.

## Enabling Grade Threads:

1. Open your course **Control Panel**.
2. Click on the **Discussion Board** link in the Course Tools area of the screen. The Discussion Board listing screen will be displayed.
3. Click on the Discussion Board that contains the forum that will be modified if more than one Board is defined. The forum list will be displayed.
4. Click on the **[Modify]** button to the right of the Forum you want to change.
5. Under *Forum Settings*, click on the **Grade threads** radio button.
6. Next click on the **[Submit]** button. The forum listing screen will be displayed.
7. Click on the Discussion Board **Forum** that will be graded.

<input type="checkbox"/>	11/11/08 10:39 AM	<a href="#">Thread 2</a>	JoAnn Gonzalez-Major	Hidden	<a href="#">tag sample, selected</a>	1	2	<b>8</b> <input type="button" value="Enable"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	11/11/08 10:39 AM	<a href="#">Thread 1</a>	JoAnn Gonzalez-Major	Published	<a href="#">selected</a>	0	1	<input type="button" value="Enable"/>

8. Click the **[Enable]** button for the thread to be graded.

Enable grading for this thread by setting the points possible below.

**1 Grading**

Points possible:  **9**

**2 Submit**

Click **Submit** to finish. Click **Cancel** to quit. **10**

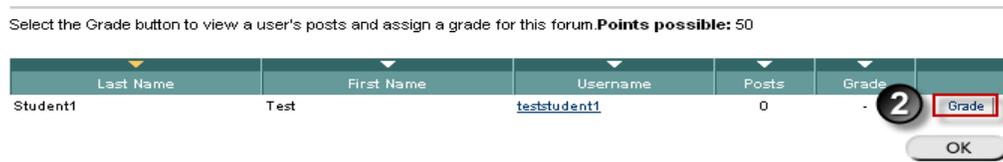
9. Enter the Possible Points for thread in the **Points possible** text box.
10. Click on the **[Submit]** button.

## Grading a Forum:

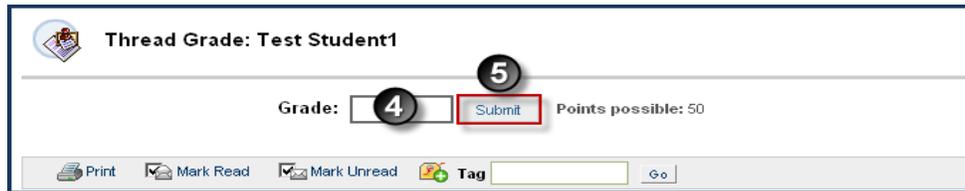
Display Order	Forum	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants	Grade
1	<a href="#">sample forum 1</a>	3	1	2	<b>1</b> <input type="button" value="Grade"/>

Course forum instructions to students

1. Click on the **Grade icon** to the right of the Forum you want to grade. The **Grade Forum Users** screen will be displayed.

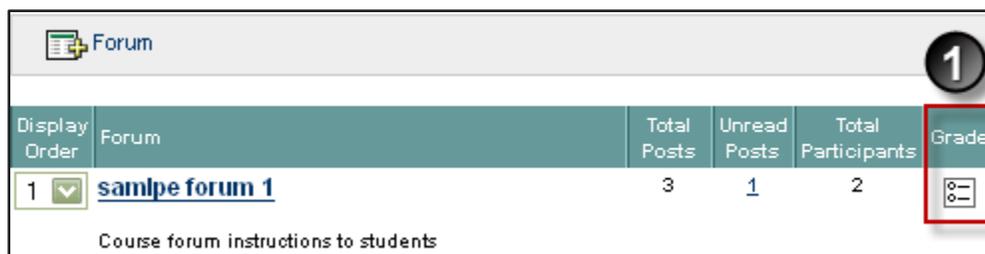


2. Click on the **[Grade]** button to the right of the student you want to grade.
3. Review student posts.

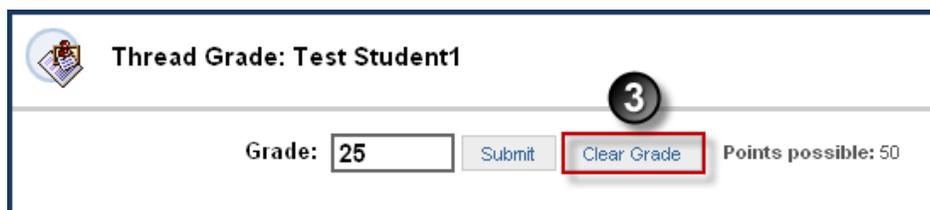


4. Then enter a grade in the **Grade** text box.
5. Next click the **[Submit]** button to the right of the Grade box. *Note:* The grade will automatically be added to the Grade Center.
6. Click the **[OK]** button at the bottom of the browser window to return to the *Grade Forum Users* page to grade the next student.
7. Click the **[OK]** button again to return to the discussion board.

### Clearing a Forum Grade:



1. Click on the **Grade icon** to the right of the Forum where you want to clear a grade. The *Grade Forum Users* screen will be displayed.
2. Click on the **[Grade]** button to the right of the student who needs the grade adjustment.



3. Click on the [**Clear Grade**] button. *Note:* The grade will automatically be removed from the Grade Center.
4. Click the [**OK**] button at the bottom of the browser window to return to the *Grade Forum Users* page.
5. Click the [**OK**] button again to return to the discussion board.

### Grading Threads:

1. Select the Discussion Board **Forum** you want to grade.
2. Click on the **Grade** icon to the right of the Thread you want to grade.
3. Click the [**Grade**] button next to the student you want to grade.
4. Review student posts.

5. When finished, enter a grade in the **Grade** text box provided.
6. Select the **Submit** button located to the right of the **Grade** box. *Note:* The grade will automatically be posted in the Grade Center.
7. Click the [**OK**] button at the bottom of the browser window to return to the *Grade Forum Users* page to grade the next student.
8. Click the [**OK**] button again to return to the discussion board.

### Viewing Forum Statistics

The Performance Dashboard keeps track of user activity throughout the course, including the Discussion Board. This information can help Instructors quickly identify Students that are outside the normal range of participation. Instructor can use this information to reward achievement and assist students that are struggling with the material.

Assessment	
<a href="#">Test Manager</a>	<a href="#">Grade Center</a>
<a href="#">Survey Manager</a>	<a href="#">Performance Dashboard</a>
<a href="#">Pool Manager</a>	<a href="#">Early Warning System</a>
<a href="#">Course Statistics</a>	

The tool can be accessed from the Control Panel and is located in the Assessment area where the Gradebook and Test Manager are also found. The Performance Dashboard provides a variety of tools for tracking student involvement in a course. For this document, we will focus on just the Discussion Board portion of the Performance Dashboard.

 **Performance Dashboard**

Use the links provided to view user progress details for each performance measurement.

 Print

Last Name	First Name	Username	Role	Last Course Access	Days Since Last Course Access	Review Status	Adaptive Release	Discussion Board	Early Warning System	View Grades
Albright	Amanda	anala2	Instructor	Nov 20, 2008 3:14:10 PM	0	<a href="#">0</a>		<a href="#">1</a>	-	
Gonzalez-Major	JoAnn	anjrg1	Instructor	Nov 21, 2008 2:54:40 PM	0	<a href="#">0</a>		<a href="#">1</a>	-	

You can click on the hyperlinked numbers in the **Discussion Board** column to see more information about posts from a specific user.

 Email User

Forum	Total Posts	Date of Last Post	Average Post Length	Minimum Post Length	Maximum Post Length	Average Post Position	Grade
<a href="#">sample forum 1</a>	<a href="#">1</a>	Wed Nov 12 16:11:03 AKST 2008	86	86	86	1	-

You can then click on a forum title link in the Forum column, or the underlined number in the Total Posts column, and see the contributions from that user in that forum. If the forums had grading options selected, the user's grade would be shown in the Grade column.

## Appendix A - Rubric Samples

## Discussion Rubric Samples

This is a rubric for a Threaded Discussion. The rubric is in two parts, the first is for understanding and the second part for evaluating. This is examining the process of replying to a post and discussing using asynchronous thread discussion tools. The rubrics working against two levels. The simplest format is construction and understanding. This is where material is posted and the students are asked a focusing or guiding question to display their understanding.

	Reply construction	Understanding
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor spelling and grammatical errors.</li> <li>Short 1 or 2 sentences.</li> <li>Lacks structure or flow.</li> <li>Written in informal language, abbreviations or text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple reply or comment which lacks insight, depth or is superficial.</li> <li>The entry is short and frequently irrelevant to the key question, original post or concept.</li> <li>Does not express opinion clearly.</li> <li>Shows little understanding.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some poor spelling and grammatical errors.</li> <li>Has some structure, but the entry does not flow.</li> <li>May contain a link or image. The reply contains several sentences.</li> <li>The text construction is mainly formal containing few abbreviations or text style language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple reply or comment showing some insight, depth and are connected with original post, question, topic or concept.</li> </ul> <p>The replies are short and may contain some irrelevant material.</p> <p>Some personal comments or opinions these may not be on task.</p> <p>Shows some understanding.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few spelling and grammatical errors.</li> <li>Has structure and the entry flows.</li> <li>Contains appropriate links, uploaded files or images.</li> <li>These are referred to within the text</li> <li>Refers to other posts.</li> <li>The reply contains sentences or paragraphs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replies show insight, depth and are connected with thread, topic or post.</li> <li>Entries may contain some irrelevant material</li> <li>Personal opinion is expressed in an appropriate style.</li> <li>Shows a good depth of understanding.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spelling and grammatical errors are rare.</li> <li>The reply has structure and is formatted to enhance readability.</li> <li>Contains an appropriate links, uploaded files or images.</li> <li>Sources are acknowledged.</li> <li>Images and links are referred to within the text.</li> <li>Refers to other posts and builds on these.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replies show insight, depth and understanding.</li> <li>They are connected with thread, topic or post.</li> <li>Entries are relevant with links to supporting material.</li> <li>Personal opinion is expressed in an appropriate style and is clearly related to the thread or post.</li> <li>The reply or post shows a high level of understanding, it shows a depth of understanding in matters relating to and surrounding the original post.</li> </ul>
Source: Educational Origami		

The Evaluation component looks at the reflection and evaluation of other posts, constructing and proposing arguments and questions that relate to the thread and shows the student is evaluating the underlying concepts of the threaded discussion.

	Reference	Clarity	Argument	Critique	Questioning
1	Student does not refer to other posts or the referred posts are irrelevant, inappropriate or unrelated to the thread.  The post may be a repeat of prior posts.	The student post shows a lack of clarity on their opinion.	Contains no relevant questions and does not formulate an argument.	Student does not provide any critique of other posts or comments.	The student does not pose any questions.
2	Student does refer to other posts.  The reply post is mainly related to the thread.	The post adds to the discussion in a limited way.  The poster expresses their opinion in a limited mode.	The student has developed a limited argument, using appropriate language.  The argument is unsupported.	The student provides a simple critique of posts in an appropriate manner.	The student states simple questions which are related to the topic.  Student answers some of the questions posted by their peers.
3	Student refers to other posts. The reply post is related to the thread.	The post adds to the discussion.  The poster expresses their opinion clearly.	The student has developed an argument using appropriate language.  The argument is supported by facts, opinions and related materials.	The student is judging other posts on their merits.  The student provides a critique of posts in an appropriate manner.	The student structures appropriate questions which are related to the topic and previous posts.  The student answers the questions posted by their peers, provides a limited defense of position or stance.
4	Student refers to other posts.  The reply post is related to the thread.	The post enhances the discussion and is expressed in clear and concise opinion.	The student has developed the argument using appropriate language.  This is clearly and appropriately supported by facts, opinions and related materials including links.	The student is judging other posts on their merits.  The student provides a detailed critique of posts in an appropriate manner.	The student structures appropriate focusing or challenging questions related to the topic and previous posts.  The student answers the questions posted by their peers with depth and shows a high degree of understanding.  Can defend his or her position of stance on a topic.
Source: Educational Origami					

## Resources

The following resources were used in the development of this document.

1. Anderson, L.W., and D. Krathwohl (Eds.) (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: a Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman, New York.
2. Blackboard Users Guide
3. Catholic Forum [http://www.catholic-forum.com/churches/cathteach/outcomes\\_rubric\\_reflection\\_journal.html](http://www.catholic-forum.com/churches/cathteach/outcomes_rubric_reflection_journal.html)
4. Chism, N. Handbook for Instructors on the Use of Electronic Class Discussion. <http://www.osu.edu/education/ftad/Publications/elecdisc/pages/home.htm>
5. Churches A, (2007). Edorigami, blooms taxonomy and digital approaches <http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/>
6. Cruz, E. (2003). Bloom's revised taxonomy. In B. Hoffman (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Technology*. <http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/bloomrev/start.htm>
7. Flat Classroom Project 2007 <http://flatclassroomproject.wikispaces.com/Rubrics>
8. Forehand, M. (2005). Bloom's taxonomy: Original and revised.. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. <http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/>
9. Instructional Design Resource Center <http://idrc.midsolutions.org>
10. Lamb, B. (2004). Wide Open Spaces: Wiki, Ready or Not. *Educause Review*, 39(5), 36-48.
11. Middendorf, J. and Kalish, A. FAQ About Discussion <http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/faqdisc.htm>
12. Muilenburg, L. and Berge, Z. A Framework for Designing Questions for Online Learning. <http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/muilenburg.html>
13. University of Leeds Staff and Departmental Development Unit [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sddu/lt/lt\\_home.php](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sddu/lt/lt_home.php)
14. University of Minnesota Digital Media Center <http://dmc.umn.edu/index.shtml>
15. University of Pennsylvania Faculty Support Center