Discussion Boards

**Discussion boards** allow groups or individuals to communicate and discuss topics of interest asynchronously. Discussions may take place for a few days, weeks, or the entire semester. A discussion board contains a series of **forums** or folders covering a central topic to which readers respond. Responses to topics related to the forum are **threads**. Threads contain individual responses called **posts**.

Discussions can serve a range of purposes, such as:

- An online meeting place for social interaction among peers.
- An additional medium for collaboration and the exchange of ideas.
- A medium to pose questions about homework assignments, readings, and course content.
- A way to demonstrate the understanding or application of course material.
- A record of discussion that members can review at a later point.
- A graded activity that demonstrates understanding or application of course material.

(BBBethW, 2013)

Features and Benefits

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<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote</strong></td>
<td>Users can quote another user’s post when answering a thread. This is very useful if the post relates to an older thread.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>View by Tree</strong></td>
<td>Forums can be viewed by “tree” that is, see all of the replies (posts) to a specific thread.</td>
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<td><strong>Grading</strong></td>
<td>Forums and threads can be graded</td>
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<td><strong>Search</strong></td>
<td>Searches can be conducted by keyword, date, and location. Location options include current thread, current forum, discussion board, and all forums.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collect Posts</strong></td>
<td>Allows members to group selected forums threads together and sort them by author or status. This is an excellent tool for grading and moderating posts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Create Gradebook items for Discussion Board contributions.</strong></td>
<td>When a discussion board is created, a Gradebook item can be created at the same time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thread Rating System</strong></td>
<td>Members can use 1 to 5 star rating system to rate each other’s posts. This peer review tool encourages members to strive to post scholarly content.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subscribe to posts</strong></td>
<td>Members (and managers) can receive an email alert when a post is updated or a member posts a reply.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flag</strong></td>
<td>User can place flag on a thread to call attention to the post.</td>
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Roles

There are six role types:

- **Blocked** - No privileges in the forum. This role can be used as a deterrent to postings that are offensive or inappropriate.
- **Reader** - Can read but not post in forums.
- **Participant** – Can read, post, and edit threads (if the edit function is available).
Roles in the new discussion board have been revised and expanded. Role assignment is easier as well. Roles are assigned to members by the forum manager, who can modify a member’s role at any time. Each member has only one role. The default role is participant.

### Multiple thread status choices

Instead of posting a thread and have readers see it as soon as it is posted, Managers have several options for the status of threads to ensure quality content:

- **Published**: A thread that is available to members.
- **Locked**: The thread may be read but not edited. Locking threads keeps members accountable for their content.
- **Unlocked**: The thread can be edited.
- **Hidden**: Thread is not displayed until member chooses. A hidden thread may not be edited. Hiding a thread allows members to remove outdated content.
- **Unavailable**: Thread is only visible to the forum manager. Only the manager can make the thread visible.

### WYSIWYG editor

This feature allows members to type and edit text, as it will appear when published in the discussion board.

### Insert Photos, Documents, Audio or Video clips

Photos, documents (presentations, spreadsheets or text), images and audio files add depth and clarity to the Discussion Board by adding interactive content.

### Best Practices for Discussion Boards

Success with a discussion board requires planning and preparation. The discussion board is not just a handy online tool that substitutes for a classroom, but as your classroom *online*. What you expect from your members in the classroom carries over to the discussion board. In the syllabus, explain your expectations for participation in the discussion process.

#### Determine the style of discussion:

- **Student-to-class** Students respond directly to thread.
- **Student-to-student discussion** Students reply directly to one another’s posts, rather than responding to the thread. Students should quote the initial post as part of their response.
- **Group discussion** Students are directed by their instructor to have an exclusive conversation within a group setting

#### Have the members take a test drive:

Create a forum that lets them introduce themselves and answer open-ended questions about themselves. Ask them to post an image, audio or video, and use the WYSIWYG editor with their response.
Moderate the discussion: Be sure to check in on the discussion frequently to evaluate responses, elicit greater feedback between users, and generate input from users who have not yet responded to the discussion.

Accommodate different learning styles: Use images, embedded video demonstrations or recorded audio into forum threads, or require these tools in student’s posts.

Structure forum topics to elicit open-ended responses: Instead of asking for a list of issues associated with an historic event, ask members to explain how these events affected history by addressing issues relevant to the event.

Create a rubric: that sets a grading standard for all groups or individuals and share it with the members.

Peer Review: Require group members to peer-review posts and provide feedback on member’s contributions.

Express dismay: When the quality of a member’s posting is not up to the standard that you have set, let the member know it. This can be as simple as a friendly note urging members to explain a point more thoroughly, or as drastic as blocking a member for posting inappropriate content.

Convey expectations for Discussion Board content:

- **Minimum participation:** Set a minimum requirement for the number of threads generated and responses to classmate’s threads
- **Quantity of information:** Expect students to write responses that will generate further discussion.
- **Quality of grammar, spelling, and prose:** The expectation for documents turned in the classroom should be the same standard for posting in a forum.
- **Timely response:** Forums or threads should require a minimum and maximum response time.
- **Corrections:** If the forum allows members to revise posts, set a standard for how quickly a member reacts to errors such as broken links, spelling errors or other mistakes discovered by instructors and group members

Understanding Discussion Forums and Threads

Just as it is critical to plan and structure your course content, you need to provide structure for online discussions. Forums allow you to group related discussions and help your students stay on task. Before anyone can start message threads, you need to create one or more forums.
The main discussion board page displays a list of forums. A forum is an area where participants discuss a topic or a group of related topics. Within each forum, participants can create multiple threads. A thread includes the initial post and all replies to it. (BBBethW, 2013)

Blackboard Video Tutorials: Discussion Boards

- A Tour of the Discussion Board
- Create a Discussion Forum
- Manage a Discussion
- Search and Collect Discussion Posts
- Grade a Discussion Forum

Additional Online Discussion Board Resources

- http://technologysource.org/article/web_discussion_forums_in_teaching_and_learning/
- http://www.hawkeye.cc.ia.us/faculty/cpost/using_discussion_boards_paper.htm
- http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdl/summer42/markel42.html
Forums

Create Forum from the Discussions Link
If you want the discussion board to appear in a content area, please review the instructions for creating a forum in a content area.

1. With the Edit Mode ON, click the discussion board Link on the Course Menu.
2. The discussion board page opens, click Create Forum. In order to activate the discussion board, the initial forum is created by the instructor.

3. The Create Forum page opens. Enter the name of the forum in the Name field.
4. Write the topic and a description of the forum in the **Description field**.
5. Click **Yes** to make the forum available. (You can create forums ahead of time and set the availability to **No** until the discussion is ready to start.)
6. Click the **Display After/Until** checkboxes, and then choose dates and times by clicking the **calendar** and **clock** icons.

7. Scroll down to the **Forum Settings**. There are several settings to consider: Note that choosing certain forum options may disable other forum options.

- **Viewing: Threads/Replies**
  - **Standard View**: This is the default option, allowing the instructor to create threads, or choose to allow students to create threads and edit posts.
  - **Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum**: This option eliminates the Standard View options. If this option is chosen, the instructor must provide posting instructions for students in the forum description field.

- **Grading**:
  - **No Grading in Forum**
  - **Grade Discussion Forum**: If chosen, the instructors must add a point value.
  - **Grade Thread**: This will open a grading option when the thread is created.

- **Subscribe**: Check this box to allow members to receive an email each time a forum member posts to or replies to a subscribed forum or thread.
  - Members can subscribe to the forum, thread or posts within the forum.

- **Create and Edit**:
  - **Allow Anonymous Posts**: Leave un-checked to encourage appropriate behavior in the forum.
  - **Allow Author to Delete Own Posts**: Leave un-checked to encourage appropriate spelling, grammar and language.
  - **Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts**: Leave un-checked to encourage appropriate spelling, grammar and language.
  - **Allow Members To Create New Threads**: Leave un-checked. The instructor should always create the first thread. Instructors should generated threads to keep the forum focused.
- **Allow File Attachments** - Check this box to add documents, images, or other types of file attachments to a post.
- **Allow Users To Reply With Quote** – Check this box to allow members to quote the post of another member in their reply.
- **Force Moderation of Posts** - Leave un-checked, as it will require instructor or designated manager to review and approve EVERY post.

  - **Additional Options**
    - **Allow Post Tagging** - Leave un-checked. Tagging will result in slower page loading.
    - **Allow Members To Rate Posts** - Check this box to activate 1 to 5 star rating system, which may be used to elicit peer feedback.

  - **Click Submit.**

Create a Forum in a Content Area

1. In any content area, click **Tools**
2. Click **discussion board**
3. The **Create Link: discussion board page** opens, click **Create New Forum** to create a new forum.
4. If a forum has already been created, click **Select a discussion board Forum**
5. **Choose a forum** from the list
6. Click **Next**
7. The **Create Forum** page opens. Enter the name of the forum in the **Name field**.
8. Write the topic and a description of the forum in the **Description field**.
9. Click **Yes** to make the forum available. (You can create forums ahead of time and set the availability to **No** until the discussion is ready to start.)

10. Click the **Display After/Until** checkboxes, and then choose dates and times by clicking the **calendar** and **clock** icons.

11. Scroll down to the **Forum Settings**. There are several settings to consider: Note that choosing certain forum options may disable other forum options.

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**Additional Options**
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- **Allow Members To Rate Posts** - Check this box to activate 1 to 5 star rating system, which may be used to elicit peer feedback.

**Click Submit.**

**Link Information**
Next, we will create a link to the discussion board. The discussion board resides in the discussion tool, so you will linking the board to the content area.

12. The **Link Information** page opens. Add a **link name** (by default, it will be the name of the forum)
13. Use the **Text field** to add the topic, description and forum instructions. *If you do not type anything here, the forum will appear blank to students in the content area.*
14. If you created date and time restrictions for the forum, **DO NOT** repeat them here. Leave this area blank.
15. Click **Submit** and the forum will appear in the content area.
Forum Options
Forum options are access from the discussion Tool. If a forum is created in a content area, you must click the discussion tool in the course menu to access the forum options.

Click the **Action Button** under the **forum link** to view the forum options:
- **Open** – Opens the Forum.
- **Edit** – Opens the **Edit Forum page** to allow changes to the forum.
- **Grade** – Opens the **Grade Forum page**. This option is **only** available if the grading option is chosen when the forum is created or edited.
- **Manage** – Review and change member roles.
- **Copy** – Make a copy of forum.
- **Delete** – Permanently deletes forum. Note that if you delete the forum from a content area, you are only deleting the forum link, and you must still delete the forum from the discussion board area.

Open Forum
Once students have posted to your forum, you will want to review the posts. Note that Blackboard allows you to see the **Total Posts, Unread Posts, & Total Participants** within the forum, at a glance. Just look at the right side of the page.

1. Click the **Forum Name**. This is a link to open the forum. You may also click the **Action Button** under the **forum link**.
2. Click **Open**.

Edit Forum
1. Click the **Action Button** under the **forum link** to make changes to a forum or setting.
2. Click **Edit**.
3. The **Edit Forum page** opens. Make necessary changes to the **Name Field, Description Field, Forum Availability, Date and Time, Grading** or other **Forum Settings**.
4. Click **Submit**.
Search Forums
Forums may be searched to locate posts by user, topic or keyword.

1. Open the discussion board. On the forum page click Search
2. In the Search window enter a search term
3. In the In window, choose a forum from the drop-down list
4. Choose date and time search criteria by clicking the Display After/Until checkboxes, and then choose dates and times by clicking the calendar and clock icons.
5. Click Go

Grade Forum
The Grade Forum option must be checked when creating the forum in order to use the Grade Option.

1. Click the Action Button under the forum link
2. Click Grade.
3. The Grade Center Inline Grading tool opens. Review the text and type in a grade
4. You can also add a reply to the user’s post by clicking reply
5. You may also add user feedback and private comments.
6. Click Submit to post the grade and begin grading the next student’s discussion

Note that all of the student’s threads and posts, will appear in Inline Grading tool.
Manage Forum

1. Click the **Action Button** under the **forum link**
2. Click **Manage**.
3. The **Manage Forum Users page** opens.
4. Check the box(es) next to the **username**. One or more users may have their roles changed at any time, over the life of a forum.
5. Click the **Edit Role button**.
6. Click the **role name** to choose role. The default role for the instructor is **Manager**. The default role for a student is **Participant**. Roles include:

   - **Manager** – Has full control over the forum. Managers can delete forums, moderate and grade threads. The instructor should be the sole manager, but this role may be assigned to a student or Teaching Assistant.
   - **Builder** – Participant privileges plus the ability to copy, edit and delete forums.
   - **Moderator** – Participant privileges plus the ability to delete or modify posts. If the **Force Moderation** setting is applied when the forum is created, the moderator must approve ALL posts prior to publishing.
   - **Grader** – Participant privileges, they also grade posts.
• **Participant** – Can read, post, and edit threads (if the edit function is available).
• **Reader** – Can read threads and posts, but cannot participate in the discussion.
• **Blocked** – Cannot access the forum.

7. After choosing a role, click **OK.**

**Copy Forum**

Copying a forum allows you to make a copy of a forum to distribute to other **Groups** within the course, or to another course that you are teaching. If copying the entire forum, all content **except file attachments** will be copied.

1. Click the **Action Button** under the **forum link**
2. Click **Copy.**
3. The **Copy Forum page** opens.

4. Type a **Name** for the forum.
5. Choose what to copy, either the **entire forum** or the **forum settings.**
6. Choose a copy **location** (group or course).
7. Click **Submit.**

**Delete Forum**

1. Click the **Action Button** under the **forum link**
2. Click **Delete.**
3. **READ THE WARNING.** Once content is removed, the action is permanent.
4. Click **OK** on the Warning Menu.

**Threads and Posts**

Threads are the initial post and the entire series of replies, or posts to that thread within a discussion board forum. In order for members to participate in a forum, an initial thread must be established by the instructor or their designated manager. Members may also create their own threads if the instructor allows this option.

**Create Thread**

1. Click **Create Thread** to open the **Add Thread page.**
2. Enter the **Subject** of the new thread in the **Subject** field.
3. Enter the text that you would like to be displayed in the **Message** field.
4. Click a **Browse option** to add an attachment such as a document, image or multimedia file.
5. Click **Save Draft** to save, but not publish the thread.
6. Click **Submit** to publish the thread.

### Create Post

1. Click the thread link to open the thread
2. Click the **Reply** button.
3. Enter the **Subject** of the new thread in the **Subject** field. By default, the subject will be RE: and the title of the thread. **Be sure to change the subject line.**
4. Enter the text that you would like to be displayed in the **Message** field.
5. Click a **Browse option** to add an attachment such as a document, image or multimedia file.
6. Click **Save Draft** to save, but not publish the thread.
7. Click **Submit** to publish the thread.
Quote
Quoting allows users to reply to post, quoting the original message in the reply

1. Open the forum that you want to quote and click Quote.

2. Enter the text that you would like to be displayed in the Message field.
3. Click a Browse option to add an attachment such as a document, image or multimedia file.
4. Click Save Draft to save, but not publish the thread.
5. Click Submit to publish the thread.

Delete Thread

1. Open the forum that you want to quote and click Delete.
2. READ THE WARNING. Once content is removed, the action is permanent.
3. Click OK on the Warning Menu.