



Discussion tool fact sheet

The **Discussion Tool** allows lecturers, teaching assistants and students to post messages about a topic in a public forum, in their own time. Students can share information and benefit from each other's opinions and input.



Ideas!!

The **Discussion Tool** can be used to:

- facilitate debate, collaboration and dialogue
- encourage students to share ideas and knowledge
- create interest in events, ideas or products
- stimulate motivation to read
- attach interesting articles and other relevant items or documents
- facilitate peer review
- assess student contributions by using gradable discussions

Elements of Discussions

- **Categories** can be created to group similar discussion topics together.
- **Topics** are used to group messages in a logical way.
- **Messages:** An individual posts a message to a particular topic.
- A **Thread** consists of the original message and all replies to it, displayed visually in an indented, connected 'thread'.
- The example below shows a category and topic.



Three types of Discussion topics can be created:

- **Threaded topic** (most common): a threaded topic for a traditional online discussion. Students post and reply to messages. Messages that are associated with the same posting are grouped together, creating message threads that can be expanded and collapsed.
- **Blog topic:** a collaborative blog space is created to allow students to post a chronological series of entries on a particular topic. Participants can add comments to any blog entry.
- **Journal topic:** a journal topic to give students a place for their own writing. The journals can be kept private between the student and lecturer or shared with the class.

Step-by-step instructions to create a threaded topic:



1. Click on **Discussions** from either the **Build** or **Teach** tab.
2. Click on **Create Topic**.
3. Select the discussion topic you would like to create. Select **Threaded topic** for a traditional online discussion.
4. Enter a **Title** and **Description** (info on topic, not thread itself) for the topic.



REMEMBER

- Use either the **Build** or **Teach** tab to create and manage discussion categories, topics and messages.
- Use the **Teach** tab to grade discussions.


Threaded discussion

View related messages on a specific subject (the original message and replies to it)

Unthreaded discussion

View messages in the order they were sent. document first before you add them to the Learning Module.

- The following grading options exist to select whether the topic is gradable:



Integration:
The score for Discussion appears in the **Grade Book** if you made the topic gradable.

- Select appropriate peer review options. The following peer review options exist:

Grading

Topic is not gradable

Allow the topic to be graded

Numeric grade: Out of

Alphanumeric grade

Grade by Grading Form:

A column is automatically created for this topic in Grade Book

Grade Book column title:

Release grade to Students in My Grades

Select Grading Form for peers to grade each others' contributions via a grading form / rubric.

Peer Review (Expand this area to see more options.)

Do not enable peer review in this topic

Allow Students to review messages using a simple rating scale

Allow Students to review messages using a grading form

- Remember to expand the Topic Behavior Options to view more options. Take note that you can Lock the topic if you don't want students to continue with the discussion.

Topic Behavior Options (Expand this area to see more options.)

Student Posting Rules

Students can post messages and reply to messages

Students can post messages but cannot reply to messages

Students can reply to messages but cannot post messages

Students can edit their messages after posting them

Lock this topic for Students (Section Instructors can post in a locked topic)

Author Identification

Authors are identified by user names

Authors are anonymous to Students

- Click on **Save**

Now you can create your message:

- Click on **Create Message**
- Enter a title for your message and type in the subject.
- Click on **Add Attachments** to attach a file.
- Click on **My Computer**. Browse for and select the file you would like to attach and select **Open** to attach it. The file you have attached should now be displayed beneath the **Add Attachments** button.
- Click on **Post** to send the message.


When to create a new message / reply to a message:

Messages are like files (on Windows Explorer) within a sub-folder (Topic). When you Create a message, you are actually starting a new Subject to be discussed.

All new subjects are indicated with the +/- sign in front. When you reply to a message, it is like you are adding your thoughts to this file. Therefore, it is easier to follow the conversation when everyone replies to a specific subject.

When you want to start a new conversation on a different subject, but still on the same Topic, then rather Create a new message.

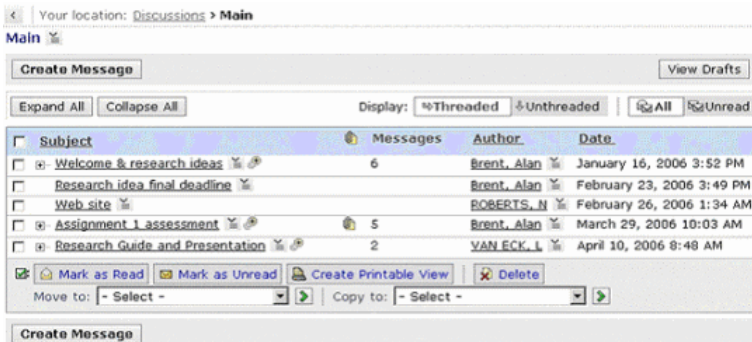
Remember you can change the **message title** when you reply. You (instructor) can also **move messages** around with the move icons.



Example

Dr Kitty Uys and Alecia Samuels from CAAC, use online discussions for onsite weeks where key issues are identified and debated by students.

Please take note of the following buttons available in the image below to view discussion messages (the options are explained beneath):



Expand All: Opens up all messages in a thread.

Collapse All: Collapses all messages in a thread.

Threaded: Messages grouped according to a subject and all replies to the original message.

Unthreaded: Messages are displayed in the chronological order in they were sent.

All: View ALL messages

Unread: View only messages not yet read.

Mark as Read / Mark as Unread (self explanatory)

Create Printable View 

- Similar to **Compile** in the old version.
- Select the messages you would like to be available in the **Printable View**. If there are threads of discussion, ensure that all the threads are **expanded** before you continue with a printable view.
- NB: **Threads not expanded** will be **excluded** from the view.
- Checking the checkbox, next to the heading **Subject** will select ALL the messages if they have been expanded.
- Click on the **Create Printable View** button.
- Select the **Save as File** option, and save to your HDD to read offline.

Delete: Deletes selected messages.

Move to: / Copy to: messages can be moved and copied to other topics/categories.

Create Message: Creates a new message within the current topic.

Lock and Unlock Messages

You can lock **messages** and **threads** so that Student can read messages, but they cannot reply or comment, edit, forward, or submit peer review. Instructors and Teaching Assistants can post to locked messages. You can have a mix of locked and unlocked messages in the same topic.

In threaded topics:

- Locate the thread and click the subject of the first message in the thread.
- Do one of the following:
 - To only allow users to read messages, click **Lock Thread**.
 - To allow users to use all functionality available in the topic, click **Unlock Thread**.



REMEMBER

- Students can edit their messages after posting them. This option can be turned off.
- A topic can be **locked**, e.g. after being locked, contributions will not be permitted.
- Authors can be **anonymous**, if this option is selected.



Blogs / Journals

- In blog topics, locate the message to lock/unlock.
- In journal topics, locate the entry to lock/unlock.