

Creating Discussion Forums and Threads

Discussion forums are spaces for informal writing, peer learning and student-led discussions. Some instructors find them useful as an alternative format for student participation and a means of insight about their thought processes. Discussion forums enable communication beyond the confines of the classroom.

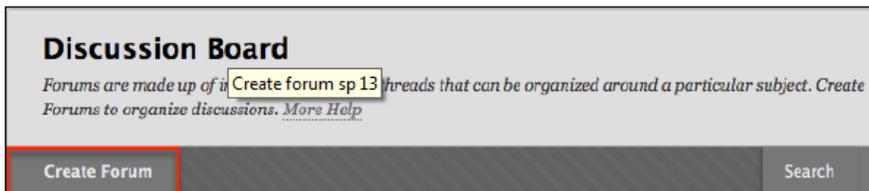
This document contains step-by-step instructions for creating forums and threads as well as recommendations for using them effectively.

Forums and Threads

Discussion boards in Blackboard Learn are composed of two items – forums and threads. Forums are areas including one or more threads related to a theme. Threads are generally used to discuss a specific topic, answer the question posed or share experiences related to a topic. Since only instructors can create forums, you will need to create them before your students can begin using the **Discussion Board**. Students may create threads if you allow them to do so by selecting the option in the forum settings.

Creating a Discussion Forum

1. Click on **Discussions** in your course menu. If it is not available, click on the "+" sign, select "Tool Link" and choose Discussion Board from the Type menu.
2. Click on the **Create Forum** button.



3. Configure the forum.

- A. **Forum Information.** Enter the name of the forum. Optionally, enter a description or instructions for when to use the forum.
- B. **Forum Availability.** Select the current availability for the forum with the buttons. Optionally, select dates and times for which you want the forum to be available.
- C. **Forum Settings.** Set the following settings according to your preference. They can be changed by clicking on the *Modify* button if you later decide to alter your choices.

Viewing Threads/Replies	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Standard View <input type="radio"/> Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum. <i>If participants are required to create threads in order to view other threads in the forum, they can be set for you automatically.</i>
Grade	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No Grading in Forum <input type="radio"/> Grade Discussion Forum: Points possible: <input type="text"/> <input type="radio"/> Grade Threads
Alignments	<input type="radio"/> Forum alignments <input checked="" type="radio"/> Thread alignments
Subscribe	<input type="radio"/> Do not allow subscriptions <input type="radio"/> Allow members to subscribe to threads <input checked="" type="radio"/> Allow members to subscribe to forum <input type="radio"/> Include body of post in the email <input checked="" type="radio"/> Include link to post
Create and Edit	<input type="checkbox"/> Allow Anonymous Posts <input type="checkbox"/> Allow Author to Delete Own Posts <input type="radio"/> All posts <input checked="" type="radio"/> Only posts with no replies <input type="checkbox"/> Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allow Members to Create New Threads <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allow File Attachments <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allow Users to Reply with Quote <input type="checkbox"/> Force Moderation of Posts
Additional Options	<input type="checkbox"/> Allow Post Tagging <input type="checkbox"/> Allow Members to Rate Posts

- Viewing Threads/Replies** Selecting *Standard View* will allow students to view other threads in the forum without creating their own thread. It will also allow you to customize more forum options. If you choose: *Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum* students will have to create a new thread in the forum to view existing threads. They will not be able to edit or delete their own posts and they cannot post anonymously.
- Grade.** If you decide to grade students on their contributions to a discussion, select *Grade Forum* and enter the maximum number of points they can receive for this assignment. A column in the *Grade Center* will be automatically created with the name of the forum. An icon will also appear under the *Grade* column when you access the *Discussion Board* allowing you to easily see the posts that individual students have submitted.
- Alignments.** Discussion boards can be aligned with goals in the Blackboard system. The options for aligning discussion board forums or threads are dependent on the grade option chosen when the forum is created. If *No Grading in Forum* is selected for the *Grade* option, you can choose to align either forums or threads. If *Grade Forum* is selected for the *Grade* option, the *Alignments* option is automatically set to *Forum alignments* and cannot be changed. The

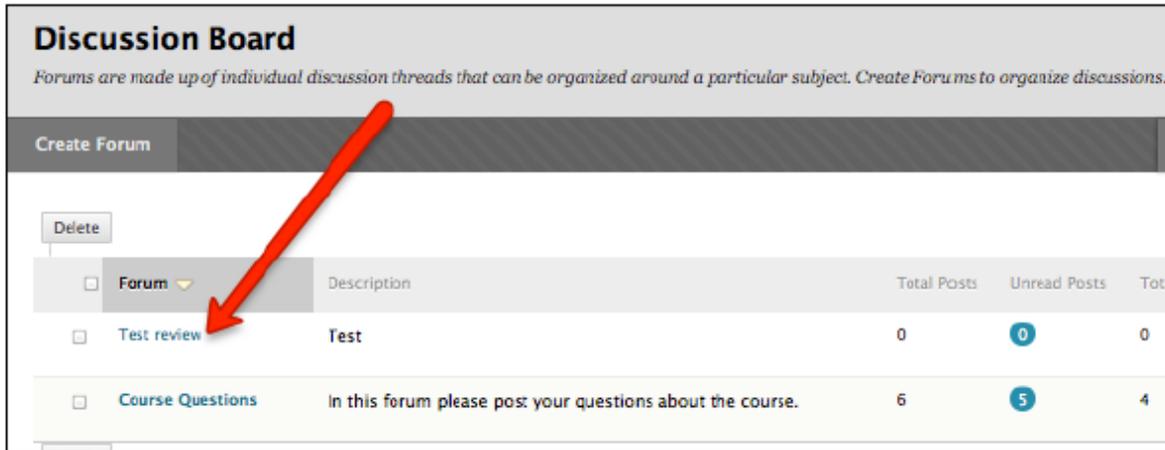
alignments options will be grayed out. If *Grade Threads* is selected for the *Grade* option the *Alignments* option is automatically set to *Thread Alignments* and cannot be changed. The alignments options will be grayed out.

- **Subscribe.** This multiple choice setting makes it possible for you to allow students to choose to “subscribe” to a forum or thread so that notifications are sent to them when a new post has been added. Notifications are sent in the form of email messages which can contain either the complete text of the new post or only a link to it. We recommend that you select *Allow members to subscribe to forum*.
- **Allow anonymous posts.** Checking this box allows your students to choose to anonymously post. The posts are only anonymous to other students but not to the instructor.
- **Allow author to Delete own posts.** Checking this box allows students to delete their posts. If you choose to allow this, we recommend selecting the *Only posts with no replies* option because it does not allow students to remove a post that another member of the class has previously replied to.
- **Allow Author to Edit Own Published Post.** Checking this box allows your students to edit their own posts.
- **Allow members to create new threads.** Checking this box allows students to create threads for new topics of discussion within this forum. If this option is not checked, students will only be able to reply to threads that you create.
- **Allow file attachments.** Checking this box enables students to upload attachments to their posts. Please, remind your students to compress or restrict the size of the files they attach.
- **Allow users to reply with quote.** Checking this box allows students to include a quote of the post to which they are replying.
- **Force moderation of posts.** Checking this box allows a moderator to review all the posts before they are visible to the class. If enabled, students or staff with a discussion board role of *Manager* or *Moderator* can click on *Moderate Forum* to view a queue of posts that are awaiting approval. After reviewing, managers or moderators can *Publish* a post or *Return* it to the writer.
- **Allow post tagging.** Checking this box allows posts to be “tagged” with keywords when viewed through the *Collect* view.
- **Allow members to rate posts.** Checking this box allows students to rate posts using a 5-star system.

4. Save the forum. Click on the *Submit* button.

Creating a Discussion Thread

1. Click on the name of the forum where you want to add a thread.



2. Click on the **Create Thread** button.



3. Enter the subject and content of the post. Click on *Attach a file* if you want to upload an attachment.
4. **Submit the post.** Click on the *Submit* button.

Recommendations

1. **Create forums with clear titles.** Create forums for themes covered in the course or for weeks of the semester. Consider also creating forums unrelated to course content such as "Student Lounge" or "Questions & Answers," so that issues peripheral to course content can be placed.
2. **Create the first thread in a forum and include the instructions.** Including instructions in the first post of a thread accomplishes the dual goal of displaying the instructions prominently and allowing students to click on the *reply* button to write their own posts.
3. **Be specific about the purpose and expected outcomes of the discussion.** Make it clear how the discussions relate to course content and how students' contributions will be evaluated. You may want to use rubrics, show examples of exemplary posts or require a deliverable.
4. **Set guidelines regarding content and approximate length of student posts.** Guide students in writing substantive posts that go beyond expressing an opinion, agreeing or disagreeing. Tell them the appropriate tone and language to use, how important grammar is and the approximate length. Encourage them to quote and reference. Teach them netiquette.

5. Specify time frames for discussions. Let students know how much time to spend on one forum, how often to check for new posts, and when the class should move to the next topic of discussion. Write a “wrap up” post or use the availability and time restriction features.

6. Design discussion activities that encourage participation. Asking students to identify, describe or summarize something is less likely to engender as much interaction as asking students to give an example, design, critique or assess. The first group of activities appears to have correct answers and is less likely to encourage divergent thinking and exchange of different points of view.

7. Encourage openly and admonish privately. Discuss exemplary posts in class or give them a high rating but talk privately or send email to students who are quiet, shy or conduct themselves inappropriately in discussion forums.