

Competencies

After reading this document, you will be able to:

- ▶ Create, edit, delete, respond, and attach files (when appropriate) to asynchronous communication tools

Discussions Overview

Discussions allow you, your students, and your teaching assistants to send, read, and search for messages. You can also create *topics*, which center discussion on particular subjects. Topics can be public or private. Everyone in your course can access public topics, while private topics are available only to selected students and teaching assistants. By default, *Discussions* contains three public topics:

- ▶ *All*: contains all messages from all public topics
- ▶ *Main*: the main discussion area, and the default topic
- ▶ *Notes*: messages related to a page of content in a Content Module

Although you cannot delete these topics, you can rename *Main* and *Notes*. You can also make *Main* and *Notes* private so learners cannot see them and post to them.

| Discussions | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|----------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="button" value="Compose message"/> ... <input type="button" value="Search"/> <input type="button" value="Topic settings"/> | | | | | | |
| Click on a topic name to see its messages. | | | | | | |
| Success: The status of each topic has been updated. | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Topic | Unread | Total | Private | Anonymous | Locked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Main | 0 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Notes | 1 | 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | All | 1 | 1 | <input type="button" value="Update"/> | | |

Figure 1: Discussions (Designer View)

Reading and Posting Messages

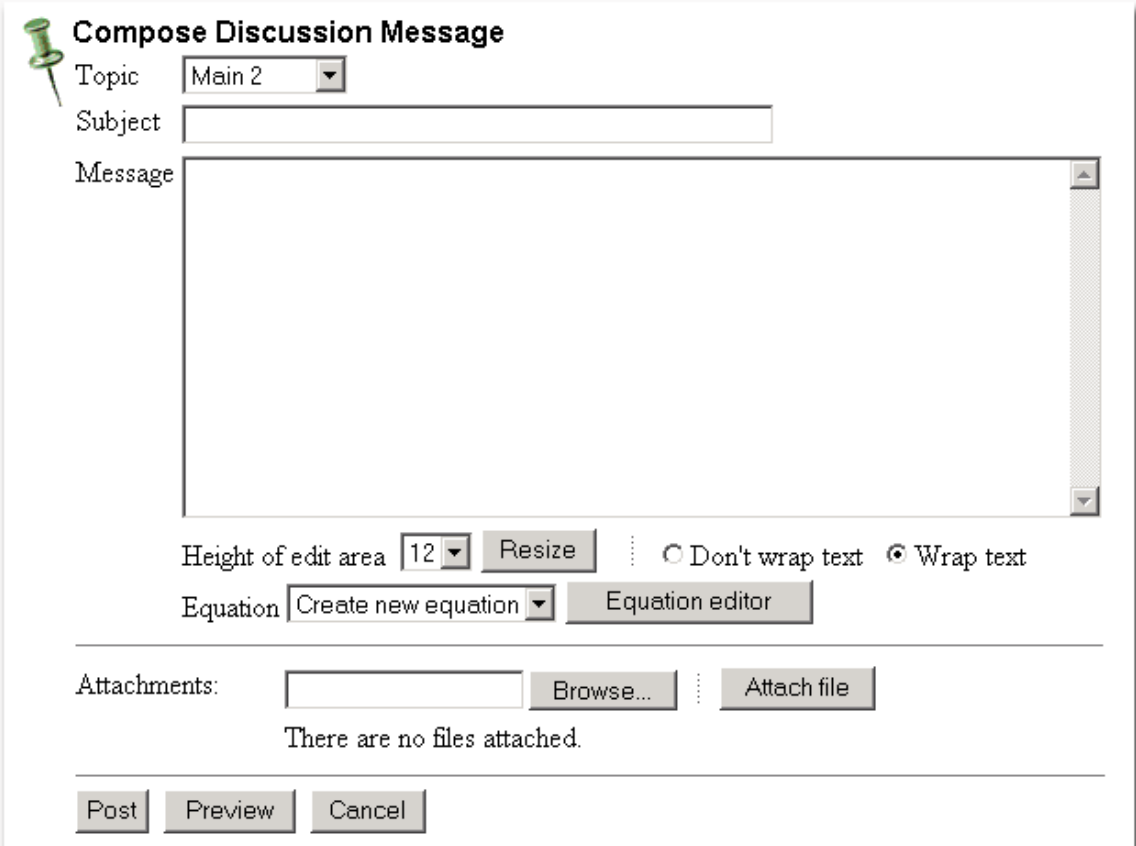
You can use the *Discussions* tool to compose and post messages to a course discussion. You also may read messages posted by other discussion participants and post replies to them if you so desire.

Composing and Posting a Message

This feature of the *Discussions* tool enables users to weigh in on a topic of discussion. Users may take as much time as needed to compose and review a message before posting it. In addition, users can choose to attach files to their postings.

To compose and post a message

- 1 In the *Discussions* table, click **Compose message**. The *Compose Discussion Message* window opens.
- 2 From the *Topic* drop-down list, select the topic to post the message to.
- 3 Complete the *Subject* field, and then type your message in the designated text box. Blank subjects or messages are not allowed.



Compose Discussion Message

Topic: Main 2

Subject: [Text Box]

Message: [Large Text Area]

Height of edit area: 12 | Resize | Don't wrap text | Wrap text

Equation: Create new equation | Equation editor

Attachments: [Text Box] | Browse... | Attach file

There are no files attached.

Post | Preview | Cancel

Figure 2: Compose Discussion Message window

- 4 If you want to attach a file:
 - a Click **Browse** to locate the file on your computer or disk and click **Open**. The file name displays in the *Attachments* text box.
 - b Click **Attach File**. The filename appears beneath the Attachments text box. If you wish to remove the file, you can do so by clicking the box next to the file name and selecting remove.



Note While in the *Compose Message* window, you can click **Preview** to view your message as it will appear in the discussion. To return to the *Compose Message* screen, click **Edit**. To post your message from the Preview window, click **Post**.

- 5 Click **Post**.



Tip While in the *Compose Message* window, you may cancel your entry at any time by clicking **Cancel**. The window closes, and your work is lost.

Reading, Replying to, and Quoting Posted Messages

After reading a posted message, discussion participants have the option of posting a message in direct reply. The reply may include a quote from the existing message as well.

To read a message

- 1 From the *Discussions* table, click the topic that contains the messages that you want to read. The *Messages* screen appears.
- 2 To display any messages that were just sent, click **Update Listing**.
- 3 Click the hyperlinked subject of the message that you want to read. A window opens, displaying the message.
- 4 If the message includes a file attachment, you'll see a paper clip icon. For security reasons, it is recommended that you download the attachment to your own computer before you view it.
- 5 To download the file attachment:
 - a Click the paper clip icon. The *Attachments* window opens.
 - b Select the file you want to download, and click **Download**.
 - c Follow the instructions for downloading from your browser.
 - d When the download is complete, click **Close** to return to the message window.
- 6 When you have finished reading the message, click **Close** to close the popup window.

To reply to a message

- 1 Open the message to which you want to respond.
- 2 Click **Reply** in the header of the message window.



Tip If you want to include the text of the message you're responding to, click **Quote** instead. You also have the option of clicking **Reply Privately** to send a message to the author's WebCT *Mail* account (assuming that this tool has been added to the course).

- 3 Enter your message in the designated text box. Blank subjects are not allowed.

- 4 If you want to attach a file:
 - a Click **Browse** to locate the file on your computer or disk and click **Open**. The file name displays in the *Attachments* text box.
 - b Click **Attach File**. The filename appears beneath the Attachments text box. If you wish to remove the file, you can do so by clicking the box next to the file name and selecting **remove**.



Note While in the *Reply to Message* window, you can click **Preview** to view your message as it will appear in the discussion. To return to the *Reply to Message* screen, click **Edit**. To post your message from the Preview window, click **Post**.

- 5 Click **Send**.

Navigating the Discussions Tool

The *Discussions* table includes headings listing the following information:

- ▶ the current discussion topics
- ▶ the number of unread messages in each topic
- ▶ the total number of messages in each topic
- ▶ the status of the topic (*public* or *private*, *unlocked* or *locked*, or *anonymous*)

| Discussions | | | |
|--|----------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Compose message | ... | Search | Topic settings |
| Click on a topic name to see its messages. | | | |
| Topic | Unread | Total | Status |
| Main | 0 | 0 | public, unlocked |
| Notes | 1 | 1 | public, unlocked |
| All | 1 | 1 | --- |

Figure 3: The Discussions table (Student View)

From the *Main* view, you can perform a variety of functions related to navigating and managing *Discussions*. These include:

- ▶ displaying threaded and unthreaded messages
- ▶ selecting messages and marking them as read or unread
- ▶ using *Manage Messages* to move or delete messages

Displaying Threaded and Unthreaded Messages

You can choose to view *Discussion* messages either in order of their appearance in a discussion thread (*Threaded*) or in the order they were posted to the *Discussions* tool (*Unthreaded*).

A *Thread* is created when someone replies to a message. The subject of the first message automatically becomes the heading and a twisty [▶] displays to the left. When you click the twisty so it points downward [▼], both the original message and the reply are shown underneath and are indented under the heading.)

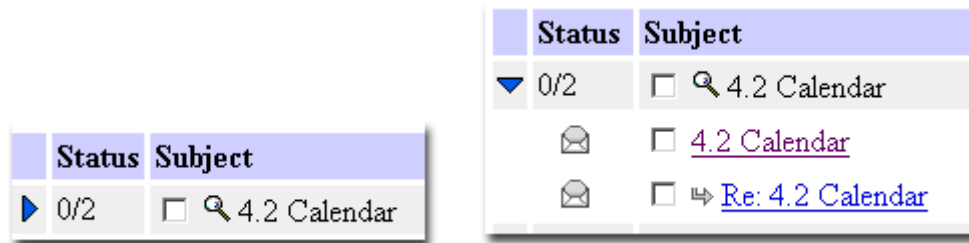


Figure 5: Threaded messages with the twisty locked (left) and unlocked (right)

Status: displays the number of unread messages in the thread over the total number of messages in the thread. In the case of the example above, there are two messages, both of which have been read.

Subject: displays the subject of the first message in the thread and the magnifying glass icon. You can view the entire message thread by clicking the magnifying glass icon.

The box to the right of the magnifying glass icon and the thread heading can be used to apply a function to all of the messages in the thread. For instance, you can mark all of the messages in the thread as read or unread by clicking the box, selecting the appropriate function in the *Apply to selected message(s) below drop down menu* and clicking **Go**.

To view messages as Threaded or Unthreaded

- 1 From the *Discussions* table, click **Main**. The *Main* view displays.
- 2 Choose the topic you wish to view from the *Select topic* drop-down list.
- 3 On the right side of the screen there is a **Threaded / Unthreaded** pairing, with one word a link and the other normal text. The word in plain text describes the current view of postings.
- 4 If you want to change the view, click **Threaded** or **Unthreaded** as appropriate. The postings redisplay as specified.

Selecting Messages for Marking as Read or Unread

From the *Main* view, you can select specific messages and mark them as either read or unread.

To select and mark messages as read or unread

- 1 From the *Discussions* table, click the topic that contains the messages that you want to mark. The *Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Display the messages that you would like to mark.
 - ▶ to choose from all messages, click **Show All**.
 - ▶ to choose from all unread messages, click **Show Unread**.
- 3 Check the check boxes next to the appropriate messages.

- 4 From the *Apply to selected message(s) below drop-down list*, select **Mark as read** or **Mark as unread**.
- 5 Click **Go**. The messages redisplay, reflecting any changes you made.

Moving and Deleting Messages

You can move a message from one topic to another. In addition, you can delete any messages that you wish to remove from the discussion entirely. You also have the option of deleting all the messages in a given topic.

To move a message

- 1 Click **Designer Options**.
- 2 From the *Discussions* table, click the topic that contains the message(s) that you want to move. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 3 Select the checkbox next to the message that you wish to move and scroll down to the bottom of the *Discussion Messages* screen.
- 4 Click the *Move to* checkbox and chose the appropriate topic from the drop-down box.
- 5 Click **Go**.

To delete specific messages

- 1 Click **Designer Options**.
- 2 From the *Discussions* table, click the topic that contains the message(s) that you want to delete. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 3 Select the message(s) to delete. Scroll down to the bottom of the *Discussion Messages* screen.
- 4 Click **Delete**.

To delete all messages from a topic

- 1 Click **Designer Options**.
- 2 Select the checkbox next to the topic from which you would like to delete all of the messages.
- 3 Under the Actions Menu on the right hand side of the screen, click **Delete Messages**.