

*Desire2Learn*   
**Learning Environment**

## Discussions v8.3.0

User Guide  
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**eLearning** *your way*

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# Discussions

With the Discussions tool you can encourage peer interaction and conversations in your course. Users in discussions interact with one another by posting messages to discussion topics and reading and replying to messages posted by others.

You can use the Discussions tool to:

- Encourage users to share their reflections on course material with their peers
- Set up areas for users to ask questions
- Pose a question for the class to debate
- Discuss the answers to an assignment
- Create areas for groups to work on group assignments

## Accessing Discussions

To access the Discussions tool, click the **Discussions** link on the navigation bar.

The screenshot shows the 'Forums & Topics List' page. On the left, there is a sidebar with 'Discussion Areas' and 'Instructions'. The main content area lists several discussion topics. Callouts point to various elements:

- Forum**: Points to the 'Discussion Areas' sidebar.
- Topics**: Points to the 'Instructions' sidebar.
- Add topic**: Points to the 'New Topic' button in the top toolbar.
- View stats**: Points to the 'Statistics' icon in the 'Actions' column.
- Edit**: Points to the 'Edit' icon in the 'Actions' column.
- Assess topic**: Points to the 'Assess' icon in the 'Actions' column.

The main content area displays a list of topics with details such as title, message count, unread status, and approval status. For example, 'Contemporary Issues' has 16 messages, 16 unread, and 0 unapproved. 'Organic Foods' has 16 messages, 16 unread, and 0 unapproved. 'Farming and Horticulture' has 0 messages, 0 unread, and 1 unapproved. 'Explosives and earthquakes' has 7 messages, 7 unread, and 0 unapproved. 'Bi-Weekly Discussions' has 3 messages, 3 unread, and 3 unapproved. 'Discussion 1: Oil Rigs' has 3 messages, 3 unread, and 3 unapproved.


The Forums & Topics List page is the main page for the Discussions tool

# Creating forums and topics

## Creating a forum

Forums are used to organize your discussion topics. Discussions take place inside a topic, and each topic must belong to a forum to be visible to your users. Any settings you apply to a forum are also applied to all of the forum's topics; for example, if you have several topics in which you want to allow anonymous messages, you can put these topics in a single forum and enable anonymous messages for that forum.

### ► To create a new forum

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **New Forum** on the top tool menu.
- 2 Enter a **Title** for the forum.
- 3 Enter a **Description**.
- 4 Set any forum options you want:

To	Do this
Automatically create a topic	Select <b>Create a new topic in this forum with the same title</b> .
Enable users to post messages anonymously	Select <b>Allow anonymous messages</b> . This setting applies to all topics within the forum, regardless of topic-level settings. Note that anonymous messages cannot be evaluated.
Require messages to be approved	Select <b>Messages must be approved before being displayed</b> . This setting applies to all topics within the forum, regardless of topic-level settings.
Hide the forum	If the options in the <b>Availability</b> section are not visible, click <b>Show forum visibility options</b> , then do one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To hide the forum when it is created, select <b>Hide this forum</b>. It will remain hidden until <b>Forum is always visible</b> is selected again.</li> <li>• To make the forum visible within a date range, select <b>Forum is visible for a specific date range</b> and specify a <b>Start Date</b> when the forum will become visible and/or an <b>End Date</b> when it will be hidden again.</li> </ul>



To	Do this
Lock the forum	<p>If the options in the <b>Locking options</b> section are not visible, click <b>Show locking options</b>, then do one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To lock the forum when it is created, select <b>Lock forum</b>. It will remain locked until <b>Unlock forum</b> is selected again.</li> <li>To open the forum within a date range, select <b>Unlock forum for a specific date range</b> and specify a <b>Start Date</b> when the forum will be unlocked and/or an <b>End Date</b> when it will be locked again.</li> </ul>

- Click **Save** to save the forum, or **Save & Add Topic** to save the forum and create a new topic within it.

## Creating a topic

Topics are where discussions actually take place, where users post and read messages. Your course can include as many topics as you like, organized into forums. Each topic normally includes a description that defines the purpose of the topic and guides the conversation.

### ► To create a new topic

- Do one of the following:
  - On the main discussion page, click  **New Topic** on the top tool menu.
  - On the main discussions page, click the  **Add New Topic** icon for the forum in which you want to create the topic.
  - If you have just created a forum, on the New Forum page click the **Save and Add Topic** button.

- In the **Forum** drop-down list, select the forum in which you want to create the topic.

To create the topic in a new forum, click the **New Forum** link, enter information about the forum, and click **Save**.

- Enter a **Title** for the topic.
- Enter a **Description**.

Depending on your course settings, topic descriptions may be displayed in the message list where users read and post messages (see *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20). If this setting is enabled, you may want to keep descriptions short and avoid using large images.


## 5 Set the topic options you want:

To	Do this
Enable anonymous message posting	Select <b>Allow anonymous messages</b> . Note that anonymous messages cannot be evaluated.
Require messages to be approved	Select <b>Messages must be approved before being displayed</b> .
Hide the topic	<p>If the options in the <b>Availability</b> section are not visible, click <b>Show topic visibility options</b>, then do one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To hide the topic when it is created, select <b>Hide this topic</b>. It will remain hidden until <b>Topic is always visible</b> is selected again.</li> <li>To make the topic visible within a date range, select <b>Topic is visible for a specific date range</b> and specify a <b>Start Date</b> when the topic will become visible and/or an <b>End Date</b> when it will be hidden again.</li> </ul>
Lock the topic	<p>If the options in the <b>Locking options</b> section are not visible, click <b>Show locking options</b>, then do one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To lock the topic when it is created, select <b>Lock topic</b>. It will remain locked until <b>Unlock topic</b> is selected again.</li> <li>To open the topic within a date range, select <b>Unlock topic for a specific date range</b> and specify a <b>Start Date</b> when the topic will be unlocked and/or an <b>End Date</b> when it will be locked again.</li> </ul>

6 Click **Save** to save the topic, or **Save and New** to save the topic and create another one.

## Editing existing forums and topics

### Editing a forum or topic



- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to edit.
- 2 Select the tab containing the information you want to edit.  
**Note** Switching between tabs automatically saves any changes made on the current tab.
- 3 Make your changes.
- 4 Click **Save** if applicable.

### Copying a forum

Copying a forum creates a new forum with the same properties as the original. You can choose to copy the forum's topics as well as any pinned messages within those topics. Copying a forum does not copy any normal, unpinned messages inside the forum's topics, however you can copy or move individual messages from existing topics once the new topics are created (see *Copying or moving a message*, p. 34).

If you want to copy forums into another course offering, see *Editing Course Tools and Properties User Guide*.

#### ► To copy a forum

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Copy** on the top tool menu.
- 2 Click  **Copy a Forum**.
- 3 From the **Forum to Copy** list, select the forum you want to copy.
- 4 In the **New Forum Title** field, type a name for the new forum.
- 5 Select the options you want:

**Copy topics** Select this option to copy all of the topics inside the forum; new topics are created with the same titles and properties as the existing ones.

**Copy pinned messages** If you choose to copy topics, select this option to copy any pinned messages within those topics. If you use pinned messages to post information about a topic (rules, evaluation criteria, etc.) you may want to copy these messages along with the topics.

- 6 Click **Copy**.



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## Copying a topic

Copying a topic creates a new topic with the same properties as the original. Links to grade items or competency activities are not copied. You can choose to copy pinned messages along with the topic. Copying a topic does not copy any normal, unpinned messages inside the topic, however you can copy or move individual messages from inside the existing topic once the new topic is created (see *Copying or moving a message*, p. 34).

If you want to copy topics into another course offering, see *Editing Course Tools and Properties User Guide*. If you want to move a topic from one forum to another, edit the topic and select a new forum from the **Forum** drop-down list on the **Properties** tab.

### ► To copy a topic

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Copy** on the top tool menu.
- 2 Click  **Copy a Topic**.
- 3 From the **Forum to Copy** list, select the forum containing the topic you want to copy.
- 4 From the **Topic to Copy** list, select the topic you want to copy.
- 5 In the **New Topic Title** field, type a name for the new topic.
- 6 From the **Copy Destination** list, select the forum you want to copy the topic to. If you select multiple forums, multiple copies of the topic are created.
- 7 Select **Copy pinned messages** if you want pinned messages to be copied into the new topic. If you use pinned messages to post information about the topic, you may want to copy these messages.
- 8 Click **Copy**.

---


## Re-ordering forums and topics

You can change the order in which forums are listed on the main discussions page, and the order in which topics are listed inside each forum.

If you want to move a topic from one forum to another, edit the topic and select a new forum from the **Forum** drop-down list on the **Properties** tab.

### ► To re-order forums and topics

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Re-Order** on the top tool menu.
- 2 From the drop-down list in the **Sort Order** column, select the position in the list where you want each forum or topic to appear. Forums are ordered relative to each other; topics are ordered within each forum.

If the topics in a forum are not visible, click the  **Expand** icon next to the forum, or click **Expand All** at the top of the list.

- 3 Click **Save**.

## Restricting access to forums and topics

For some types of discussions, you will want everyone in your course to have access for the entire semester. For other discussions, you may want to restrict access to a shorter time period or to a specific group of users. You can restrict access to forums and topics in four ways:

- Hide the forum or topic for all users
- Lock the forum or topic for all users
- Use release conditions to display a forum or topic based on other activities within the course (for example, reading a content topic, completing a quiz)
- Restrict access to members of specific groups or sections

**Note** Any restrictions placed on a forum also apply to all topics within the forum.

---

### Hiding a forum or topic

Hidden topics are not displayed on the main discussions page (except for users with permission to see hidden forums and topics or to manage discussions). By hiding topics, you can control which topics users can access at different times throughout the course. For example, you could create weekly discussion topics for users to reflect on the material covered in each week of the course and make each topic available for one week only.

You can specify start and end dates for when a forum or topic is visible so you can set up visibility ahead of time to match your course's schedule.

**Tip** Instead of scheduling a topic to disappear as soon as you want the discussion to end, consider locking the topic at that point and keeping it visible for another few days. This allows users to review the discussion after it has closed so that they don't miss the last messages added.

#### ► To hide a forum or topic

- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to hide.

You can also set visibility options when creating a new forum or topic.

- 2 If the options in the **Availability** section are not visible, click **Show forum visibility options** or **Show topic visibility options**.
- 3 Select the options you want:

- To hide the forum or topic immediately, select **Hide this forum** or **Hide this topic**. The forum or topic will remain hidden until you select **Forum is always visible** or **Topic is always visible** again.
- To hide the forum or topic until a certain date or after a certain date, select **Forum is visible for a specific date range** or **Topic is visible for a specific date range**, then select **Has Start Date** or **Has End Date** and specify the dates.

4 Click **Save**.

---

## Locking a forum or topic

Locking a topic prevents users from posting new messages or modifying existing messages, essentially making the conversation “read only.” (Users with permission can modify the contents of a locked topic.) Locking a topic can be an effective way of closing a conversation while allowing users to refer back to messages.

You can specify start and end dates for when a forum or topic is unlocked so you can set things up ahead of time to match your course’s schedule.

**Tip** Consider locking a topic to end a conversation, then using a pinned message to post a summary inside topic. This way when users access the topic your summary appears at the top.

### ► To lock a forum or topic

1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to lock.

You can also set locking options when creating a new forum or topic.

2 If the options in the **Locking options** section are not visible, click **Show locking options**.

3 Select the options you want:

- To lock the forum or topic immediately, select **Lock forum** or **Lock topic**. The forum or topic will remain locked until you select **Unlock forum** or **Unlock topic** again.
- To open the forum or topic within a date range, select **Unlock forum for a specific date range** or **Unlock topic for a specific date range**, then select **Has Start Date** or **Has End Date** and specify the dates.

4 Click **Save**.

---


## Setting Release Conditions

Release conditions allow you to specify requirements that users must satisfy before they can access a discussion forum or topic. For example, you might require that users view a

content topic or submit an assignment to a dropbox folder before accessing a discussion topic. Or you might create an extra-help discussion topic for users who fail a particular quiz.

For more information about release conditions, see *Release Conditions User Guide*.

► **To add release conditions to a forum or topic**




- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to add release conditions to.

OR

If you are creating a new forum or topic, you can add release conditions after clicking **Save**.

- 2 Click the **Restrictions** tab.
- 3 If the controls in the **Release Conditions** section are not visible, click **Show Forum Release Conditions** or **Show Topic Release Conditions**.
- 4 Do one of the following:
  - If you have already created a release condition elsewhere and want to attach it to this forum or topic, click **Attach Existing**. Select the condition(s) you want to add, then click **Attach**.
  - If you want to add a new release condition that does not already exist, click **Create and Attach**. Enter the details for the new release condition, then click **Create**.
- 5 Click **Save**.

► **To remove release conditions from a forum or topic**

- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to remove release conditions from.
- 2 Click the **Restrictions** tab.
- 3 If the controls in the **Release Conditions** section are not visible, click **Show Forum Release Conditions** or **Show Topic Release Conditions**.
- 4 Do one of the following:
  - Click the  **Remove Condition** icon next to each condition you want to remove.
  - To remove all conditions, click the  **Remove All Conditions** icon at the top of the list of conditions.
- 5 Click **Save**.


## Setting group and section restrictions

You can restrict a forum or topic so that it is only accessible to members of a specific group or section. This enables you to:

- Create group discussion areas where members of a group can collaborate on assignments or discuss course material in small teams.
- Create separate forums or topics for each section in a course offering.

**Note** You must create groups or sections before you can set group or section restrictions. See *Groups and Sections User Guide*, for more information.


### ► To restrict a single forum or topic

- 1 Do one of the following:
  - On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the forum or topic you want to add group restrictions to.
  - If you are creating a new forum or topic, you can create group restrictions after clicking **Save**.
- 2 Click the **Restrictions** tab.
- 3 If the options in the **Group Restrictions** area are not visible, click **Show Forum Group Restrictions** or **Show Topic Group Restrictions**.
- 4 Select **Restrict this forum to the following groups** or **Restrict this topic to the following groups** and click **Add Groups**.
- 5 Select a **Group Category**. Select “Sections” to restrict access to sections.
- 6 Select the groups or sections.
- 7 Click **Add**.
- 8 Click **Save**.

To remove a group’s access, click the  **Delete this item** icon next to the group and then click **Save**.

To open the forum or topic to everyone again, clear the **Restrict this forum to the following groups** checkbox or **Restrict this topic to the following groups** checkbox and click **Save**.

### ► To restrict multiple forums or topics simultaneously

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Group Restrictions** on the left tool menu.
- 2 Select a **Group Category**. Select “Sections” to restrict access to sections.
- 3 Select the **Forum** containing the topics you want to restrict, or select “All Forums.”
- 4 To restrict a forum or topic to specific groups or sections, select the checkbox in the **Restricted** column, then select the groups you want to be able to access the forum or topic.

- Click **Save**.

To open a forum or topic to everyone, clear the checkbox in the **Restricted** column and click **Save**.

The screenshot shows the 'Group Restrictions' page. On the left is a navigation menu with 'Discussions List', 'Group Restrictions', 'Statistics', and 'Settings'. Below it is an 'Instructions' section. The main area is titled 'Group Restrictions' and includes 'View Options' with a 'Group Category' dropdown set to 'Group Presentations' and a 'Forum' dropdown set to 'Contemporary Issues'. There is a link for 'Automatically create restricted topics'. Below this is a table for 'Edit Group Restrictions' with columns for 'Forums and Topics', 'Restricted?', and four 'Group Presentations' (Group 1-4). The table contains rows for 'Contemporary Issues', 'Explosives and earthquakes', 'Organic Foods', and 'Farming and Horticulture'. Callouts 1-4 point to the 'Group Category' dropdown, the 'Forum' dropdown, the 'Restricted?' column, and a specific cell in the table respectively.

Forums and Topics	Restricted?	Group Presentations			
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Contemporary Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explosives and earthquakes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Organic Foods	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Farming and Horticulture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Group Restrictions page

## Automatically creating group or section restricted topics

You can automatically create a discussion topic for each group in a selected category. Topics are named after the group categories and groups they are associated with.


- On the main discussions page, click **Group Restrictions** on the left tool menu.
- Click the **Automatically create restricted topics** link.
- Select a **Group Category**. Select “Sections” to create topics for each section.
- Select the **Forum** in which to create the topics. If you want to create a new forum for the restricted topics, click **New Forum**.
- Click **Create**.

## Best practice for creating section-restricted discussions

If your course has multiple sections and you want to offer separate but identical discussion topics for each section, follow these steps:

- Create a new forum. This forum is for the first section.
- Create all of the topics for your course within that forum.
- Copy the forum for each additional section, selecting the option to include topics.
- Go to the Group Restrictions page and restrict each forum to one of the sections in your course.

**Group Restrictions**

 **Group Restrictions**

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**View Options**



Group Category: Sections ▼

Forum: All Forums ▼

[Automatically create restricted topics](#) ?


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**Edit Group Restrictions**

Forums and Topics	Restricted?	Sections	
		Section 1	Section 2
<b>Forum for Section 1</b> 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology and Scientific History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Current Issues in Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technologies of Tomorrow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading Response: "Parkinson's Disease: Hope Through Research"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading Response: "The Trillion-Barrel Tar Pit"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Forum for Section 2</b> 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Technology and Scientific History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Current Issues in Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technologies of Tomorrow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading Response: "Parkinson's Disease: Hope Through Research"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading Response: "The Trillion-Barrel Tar Pit"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Group Restrictions page showing two section-restricted forums with identical topics

## Deleting a forum or topic

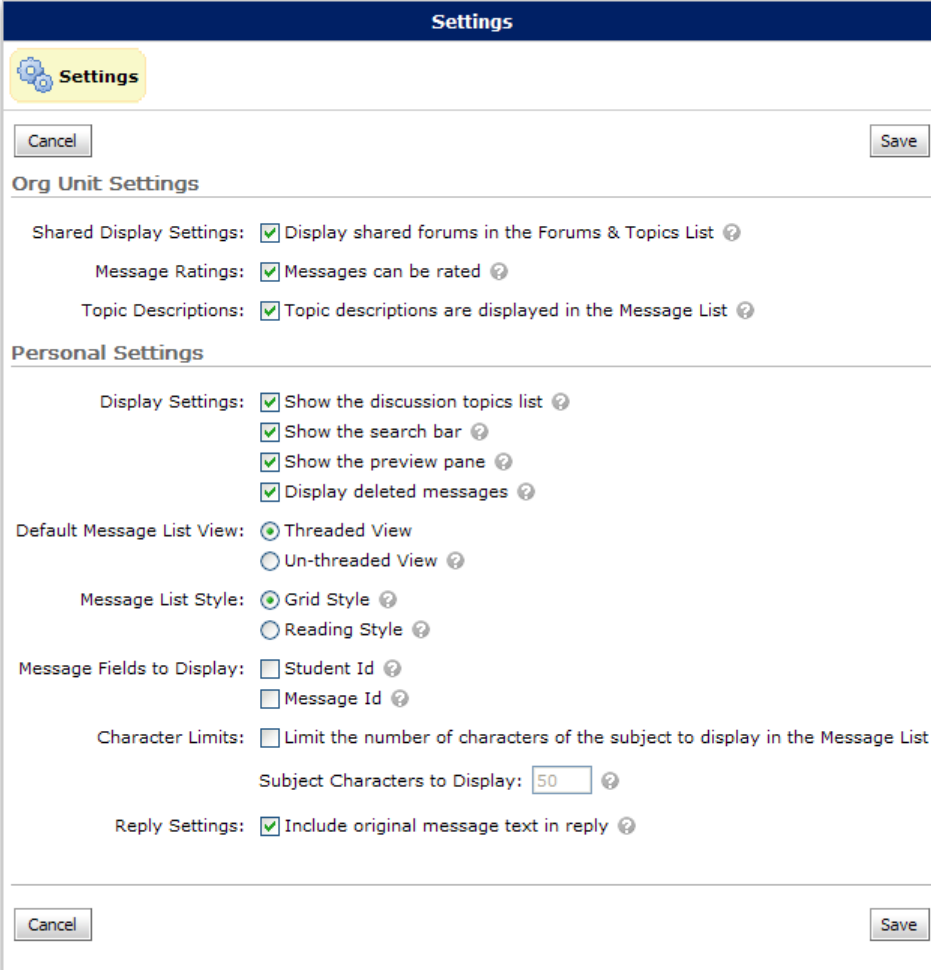
- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Delete** on the top tool menu.
- 2 Select the forums and topics you want to delete.
- 3 Click the **Delete Selected** button.

## Changing settings and preferences

Discussion settings are divided into two types: **Org Unit Settings** allow you to change the way the Discussions tool works for everyone in your course offering, while **Personal Settings** let you specify how you want to view messages inside topics.

► **To access the Settings page**

On the main discussions page, click  **Settings** on the left tool menu.



The screenshot shows the 'Settings' page with a dark blue header and a yellow 'Settings' button. Below the header are 'Cancel' and 'Save' buttons. The page is divided into two sections: 'Org Unit Settings' and 'Personal Settings'. 'Org Unit Settings' includes 'Shared Display Settings' (checked), 'Message Ratings' (checked), and 'Topic Descriptions' (checked). 'Personal Settings' includes 'Display Settings' (checked), 'Default Message List View' (radio buttons for Threaded and Un-threaded), 'Message List Style' (radio buttons for Grid and Reading), 'Message Fields to Display' (checkboxes for Student Id and Message Id), 'Character Limits' (checkbox for limiting subject characters and a text input for 50), and 'Reply Settings' (checked).

The Settings page

**Tip** You can also modify some of your personal display settings from **My Preferences**. See *Introduction to the Learning Environment User Guide*.

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## Org Unit Settings

Org unit settings apply to all users and all forums and topics in your course.

**Shared Display Settings** Controls whether shared forums and topics are displayed in the discussions list in your course offering. If you clear this option, users will not be able to access shared forums and topics from within your course offering.

**Message Ratings** Turns the message ratings control on or off for all topics within the course offering (see *Rating Messages*, p. 27).



**Topic Descriptions** Controls whether topic descriptions are displayed in the message list. You may want to turn off this feature to save space for users with small screens. Consider using pinned messages to provide explanations or instructions instead (see *Pinned messages*, p. 30).

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## Personal Settings

Personal settings control the way you view messages inside a topic. These settings apply to all course offerings wherever you access discussions but do not affect other users.

**Display Settings** The following display settings are available:

- **Show the discussion topics list** The discussion topics list appears at the left of the message list and provides quick navigation between topics.
- **Show the search bar** The search bar allows you to search for messages. You can also show or hide the search bar by clicking  **Show Search** or  **Hide Search** on the action bar inside a topic.
- **Show the preview pane** If you are using the Grid Style message list, you can choose to open messages in a preview pane at the bottom of the screen or in a pop-up window. Select this option to use the preview pane, clear it to use a pop-up window.
- **Display deleted messages** Displays deleted messages in the message list. This option is only available if you have permission to see deleted messages.

**Default Message List View** Controls whether messages are displayed in threaded or unthreaded view when you enter a topic. In threaded view, messages are grouped together with their replies, allowing you to follow the thread of a conversation. In unthreaded view, messages can be sorted by author, date, subject, message ID, or average rating.

**Message List Style** The following message list styles are available:

- **Grid Style** The Grid Style message list resembles a traditional email reader where each message's subject, author, and date appear in a list without the full text of the message. To read a message, you click the subject; the full text is displayed in a separate area.

- **Reading Style** The Reading Style message list shows the full text of all messages in a single view. You read messages simply by scrolling through the page, without having to select messages and read them one at a time in a dedicated reading pane or a pop-up window.

**Message Fields to Display** You can choose to display the following fields:

- **Org Defined Id** Select this option to see ID numbers beside author names.
- **Message Id** Select this option to see ID numbers when viewing messages.

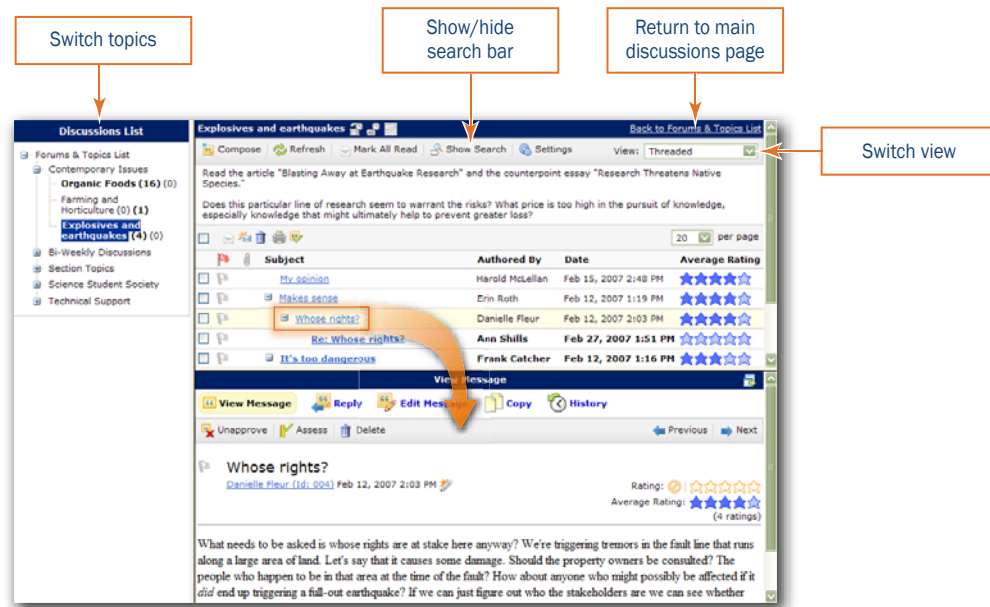
**Character Limits** If you are using the Grid Style message list, you can choose to display only the first few characters of each message's subject to save screen space. Select the checkbox and enter the maximum number of characters of each message's subject you would like to see.

**Reply Settings** Select this option to automatically include the text of any message you reply to when composing a reply.

## Joining a topic

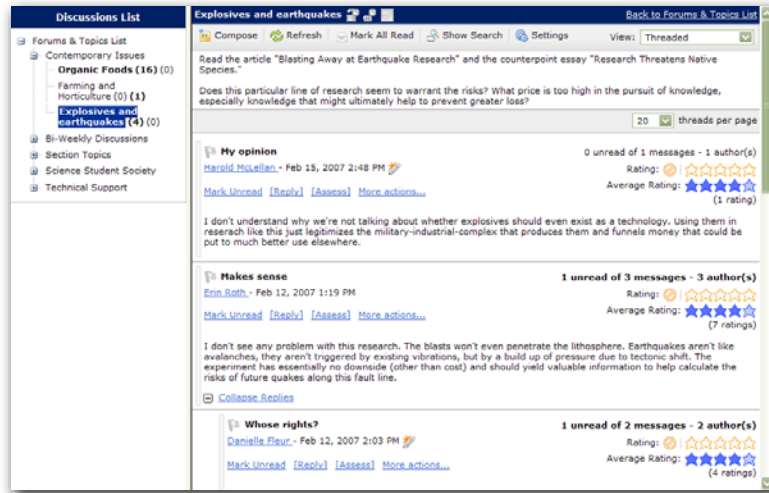
To enter a topic, click the topic's name on the main discussions page.

If you are using the Grid Style message list, the Learning Environment displays a list of messages posted to the topic. Click the subject of a message to view the full text.



Grid Style message list

If you are using the Reading Style message list, the Learning Environment displays the full text of all messages.



### Reading Style message list

You can navigate between topics using the **Discussions List** at the left if it is displayed.

For information about changing your message list view and displaying the **Discussions List**, see *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20.

To return to the main discussions page, click the **Back to Forums & Topics List** link in the top right corner of the page.

To choose whether to show messages in threads (where replies are grouped with their original messages) or as a list that you can sort, use the **View** drop-down list in the top right corner. You can also choose to display only unread, flagged, or unapproved messages.

## Reading messages

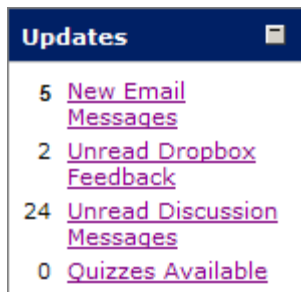
### Opening a message

If you are using the Grid Style message list, click on the subject of any message to view that message. The message is displayed either in a preview pane at the bottom of the window or in a separate window, depending on whether you have selected the option **Show the preview pane** on the Settings page (see *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20).

### Finding new messages

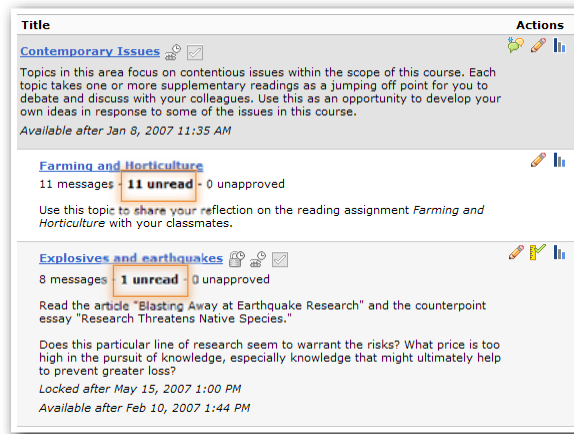
To help you keep up with new messages added to your course's discussions, the Learning Environment identifies unread messages in a number of places:

- If you use the **Updates** widget on your course homepage, the widget displays the total number of unread messages for all discussion topics in your course.



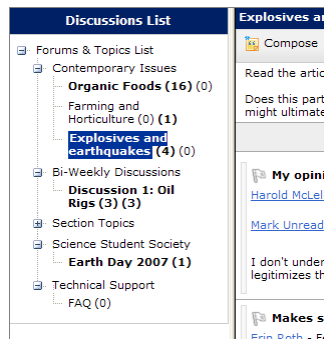
The **Updates** widget

- On the main discussions page, the number of unread messages appears beneath each topic.



Unread messages are listed beneath each discussion topic

- On the main discussions page, you can also use the **Display** drop-down list in the top right corner to show only topics with unread messages.
- Inside a topic's message list, the **Discussions List** at the left of the screen displays topics with unread messages in bold.




Inside a topic, topics with unread messages appear in bold in the **Discussions List**

- In a topic's message list, you can also use the **View** drop-down list in the top right corner to display only unread messages.

## Searching for messages

You can search for messages containing a specific word, written by a specific author, posted within a date range, flagged or unflagged, read or unread, and so on.

### ► To search for a message

- 1 Join the topic you want to search.
- 2 If the **Search For** field is not visible at the top of the message list, click  **Show Search** on the top tool menu.

- 3 Enter the word you want to find in the **Search For** field and click **Search**.

The message list displays the messages that match your search. To see all messages again, click **Clear Search** at the top of the list of messages.

► **To perform an advanced search**

- 1 Click the **Show Search Options** link to the right of the **Search** button.
- 2 Specify additional criteria from the options displayed beneath the **Search For** field.
- 3 Click the **Search** button.

---


## Rating Messages

If you turn on message rating for your course, users can anonymously rate each message posted to any discussion topic. The resulting average is displayed above each message and you can search for messages based on their average rating, which makes it easy to locate the best or most insightful messages posted to a topic. Turning on message ratings can also serve as a participation incentive for users.

For example, you might set up a discussion topic for users to help each other with assigned problems. When a user posts a question to this topic, all users could rate each answer and the average would identify the best solutions and help to separate them from less helpful messages such as “I agree” or “Good suggestion. Thanks.”

**Note** Message rating can only be enabled for the entire course. You cannot turn message ratings on for one topic and off for another.

► **To enable message rating**

- 1 On the main discussions page, click  **Settings** on the left tool menu.
- 2 In the **Org Unit Settings** section, select **Messages can be rated**.
- 3 Click **Save**.

► **To rate a message**

Click one of the orange stars in the message rating control located at the top right of the message.



The message rating control

---

## Flagging a message

You can use message flags to mark a message you want to review later, monitor for replies, or follow-up on. In a topic's message list, you can search for flagged messages or

use the **View** drop-down to view flagged messages only. Your message flags are visible only to you; other users cannot see them.

► **To flag or unflag a message**

Click the  **Not Flagged – Click to Flag this item** or  **Flagged – Click to Unflag this item** icon beside the message subject.

---




## Marking a message read or unread

If you are using the Grid Style message list, messages are automatically marked as read when you open them (depending on your site's configuration), but if you are using the Reading Style message list or you print messages to read them you will need to manually mark messages as read to indicate to the Learning Environment that the message is no longer new.

In some cases you may also want to manually mark a message as unread—for example, if you open the message from the Grid Style message list but do not finish reading it.

► **To mark a message read or unread**

Do one of the following:


- In the Grid Style message list, select one or more messages from the list and click the  **Mark Read** or  **Mark Unread** icon at the top of the list.
- In the Reading Style message list, click the **Mark Read** or **Mark Unread** link below the message header.
- In either view, to mark all messages in the topic read click  **Mark All Read** on the action bar.

---

## Printing messages


If you prefer reading from paper, you can print messages from the Grid Style message list. You cannot print messages from the Reading Style message list. See *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20, for information about changing your message list style.

► **To print messages**

- 1 In the Grid Style message list, select the messages you want to print.
- 2 Click the  **View Selected Messages as Printable** icon at the top or bottom of the list.
- 3 Click the **Print** button.

## Posting messages

### Posting a new message

- 1 Join the topic where you want to post a message.
- 2 Click  **Compose** on the action bar.
- 3 Enter a **Subject**.
- 4 Enter the **Message**.
- 5 Set any options you want:

To	Do this
Pin your message to the top of the topic	Select the <b>Pin message</b> checkbox.
Make your message anonymous (conceal your name)	Select the <b>Author anonymously</b> checkbox. This checkbox is only available if the topic or the topic's forum allows anonymous messages (see <i>Creating a topic</i> , p. 8, or <i>Creating a forum</i> , p. 7).
Attach a file	Click the <b>Add a File</b> button and select the files you want to attach.
Post your message to multiple topics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 If the <b>Add Topics</b> button is not visible in the <b>Message Posting Options</b> section, click <b>Show the message posting options</b>.</li> <li>2 Click the <b>Add Topics</b> button.</li> <li>3 Select the topics you want to post the message to.</li> <li>4 Click <b>Insert</b>.</li> </ol>

- 6 Click **Post** to post the message now, or **Save Draft** to save the message without posting.

### Draft messages


When composing a new message, you can save the message as a draft to continue working on it later. This is useful if you are composing a long or complex message and want time to review it before you post it for others to read.

**Note** You can only save new messages as drafts. You cannot save a draft when replying to another message.

▶ **To save a draft**

When composing a message, click the **Save Draft** button.

▶ **To open a draft message**

- 1 Join the topic where you created the message.
- 2 In the **View** drop-down at the top right of the page, select “Drafts.”
- 3 Do one of the following:
  - If you are using the Grid Style message list, click the message’s subject to open the message and then click  **Edit Message** on the top tool menu.
  - If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **Edit** link beneath the message header.

---

## Pinned messages

Pinned messages always appear at the top of the message list, regardless of how the list is sorted or displayed. In threaded view, the thread following a pinned message appears as the first thread in the list.

You can use pinned messages to post announcements, rules of conduct, discussion summaries, or any other important information you want to display at the top of a message list.

Pinned messages can also be copied along with the topic they belong to; normal messages cannot.


**Note** You cannot pin a message if it is a reply to another message.

▶ **To pin a message**

When composing or editing a message, select the **Pin message** checkbox.

---

## Replying to a message

- 1 Do one of the following:
  - If you are using the Grid Style message list, click the subject of the message you want to reply to, then click  **Reply** on the top tool menu.
  - If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **Reply** link below the message header.
- 2 Type your reply in the **Message** area.
- 3 If you want to include the original message text in your reply, click the **Add Original Message Text** link.

**Tip** You can specify whether you want to automatically include original message text in your replies. See *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20.

- 4 Set any options you want:

To	Do this
Make your message anonymous (conceal your name)	Select the <b>Author anonymously</b> checkbox. This checkbox is only available if the topic or the topic's forum allows anonymous messages (see <i>Creating a topic</i> , p. 8, or <i>Creating a forum</i> , p. 7).
Attach a file	Click the <b>Add a File</b> button and select the files you want to attach.

- 5 Click **Post**.

# Moderating discussions

## Message approval

If a topic requires message approval, when messages are posted they are only visible to users with permission to approve messages. To make these messages visible to all users, you must manually approve them. (Messages posted by users with permission to approve messages are automatically approved.)


You can turn message approval on or off from the **Properties** tab when creating or editing a Forum or Topic.

If a message is not appropriate for the topic and you do not want to approve it, you can do any of the following:

- Leave the message unapproved
- Edit the message before approving it
- Delete the message

## Finding messages that require approval

You can find unapproved messages in the following ways:


- On the main discussions page, the number of unapproved messages is displayed beneath the topic's name. To see only topics that contain unapproved messages, select "Topics with Unapproved" from the **Display** drop-down list at the top of the page.
- Inside a topic, if you have the **Discussions List** turned on, the number of unapproved messages is the second number displayed in parentheses beside each topic. E.g. a topic that read "First Test Questions (5) (3)" would have three unapproved messages.
- In the message list inside a topic, unapproved messages are indicated by the  **Message Requires Approval** icon. To see only messages that require approval, select "Unapproved Only" from the **View** drop-down list at the top left of the page.

## Approving messages

### ► To approve a message

If you are using the Grid Style message list, do one of the following:



- Open the message and click  **Approve** on the action bar.

- Select one or more messages from the message list and click the  **Approve** icon at the top or bottom of the list.

If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **Approve** link below the message header.

► **To unapprove a previously approved message**

Do one of the following:

- In the Grid Style message list, open the message and click  **Unapprove** on the action bar.
- In the Reading Style message list, click the **More actions** link below the message header, then click  **Unapprove** on the action bar above the message.

---



## Editing a message

Editing a message allows you to change the subject or message text, add or remove attachments, or change whether the message is pinned. You cannot make a message anonymous or change the name of the message author—the original author’s name will remain even after a message has been edited. Users who have edited a message are listed in the message’s history.

Edited messages are indicated by the  **Last Edited** icon in the message header.

► **To edit a message**

1 Do one of the following:


- If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click  **Edit Message** on the top tool menu.
- If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **More Actions** link below the message header, then click  **Edit** on the action bar at the top of the message.

2 Make the changes you want.

3 Click **Save**.



---

## Viewing a message’s history

If a message has been edited, the message history records all previous versions of the message, who edited it, and when it was approved. Edited messages are indicated by the  **Last Edited** icon in the message header.

► **To view a message’s history**

Do one of the following:

- If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click  **History** on the top tool menu.
- If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **More actions** link below the message header, then click  **History** on the action bar at the top of the message.



---

## Copying or moving a message

Messages don't have to stay in the topics they are initially posted to. If you think a message belongs in a different topic, you can move it by copying it and choosing the option to delete the original message. If a message is applicable to more than one topic, you can copy it into as many other topics as you want.

► **To copy or move a message**

1 Do one of the following:

- If you are using the Grid Style message list, open the message and click  **Copy** on the top tool menu.
- If you are using the Reading Style message list, click **More actions** beneath the message header, then click  **Copy** on the action bar above the message.

2 Select the forum and topic you want to copy the message into.

3 Select any additional options you want:

- To copy any replies made to the message, select **Copy message replies**.
- To move the message from the current topic into the selected one, select **Delete original message after copy completes**.

**Caution** If you choose to delete the original message and do not choose to copy replies, any replies made to the message are deleted.

4 Click **Copy**.

---



## Deleting a message


You can delete a message to remove it from a topic.

**Caution** Deleting a message also deletes any replies to that message.

► **To delete a message**

If you are using the Grid Style message list, do one of the following:

- Select the messages you want to delete in the message list and then click the  **Delete Selected Messages** icon at the top or bottom of the list.
- Open the message you want to delete and click  **Delete** on the top tool menu.

If you are using the Reading Style message list, click the **More actions** link below the message header and then click  **Delete** on the action bar above the message.



---

## Restoring a deleted message

To restore a deleted message, you must have permission to view deleted messages and you must have the **Display deleted messages** option enabled on the Settings page. See *Changing settings and preferences*, p. 20.

### ► To restore a deleted message

Do one of the following:

- In the Grid Style message list, open the message and click  **Undelete** on the top tool menu.
- In the Reading Style message list, click the **More actions** link below the message header, then click  **Undelete** on the action bar above the message.

**Note** If the message restored was a reply to another message, and the other message has also been deleted, both messages are restored.

# Evaluating messages

## Overview

There are two ways to evaluate user contributions to a discussion topic: you can use a numeric score, or you can associate the topic with a competency activity and evaluate users using a rubric. If you use a numeric score, you can link the score to a grade item in your course's grade book.


This section explains how to configure a topic for assessment using a numeric score, how to evaluate users using a numeric score, and how to link the score to a grade item. Setting up a competency activity is mentioned briefly, but is explained in detail in the *Competencies and Rubrics User Guide*.

## Assessing a topic with a numeric score

### Setting up assessment

You can choose to evaluate user's individual messages and have the Learning Environment automatically calculate a topic score for each user, or you can assign a topic scores directly to each user. If you choose to assess individual messages, you can specify how you want the system to calculate each user's overall topic score.

#### ► To configure a topic for assessment

- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Edit** icon for the topic you want to configure.
- 2 Click the **Assessment** tab.
- 3 If you want the score to be linked to a grade item, select the item from the **Grade Item** drop-down list. See *Linking a topic to a grade item*, p. 38, for more information.
- 4 Specify the number you want to **Score Out of**. You will evaluate users using a scale ranging from zero to the number entered here. E.g., if you enter 15, you will assess users on a scale from zero to fifteen.
- 5 If you want to assess individual messages (rather than assigning an overall topic score directly for each user):
  - a) Select the **Score each message and automatically calculate the topic score** checkbox.

- b) Select the **Calculation** method you want to use to determine users' overall topic scores based on message scores.
  - c) If you want the calculation to treat unassessed messages as if those messages had received a score of zero, select **Include non-scored messages in the calculated score as zero**. By default, unassessed messages are ignored when calculating the topic score.
- 6 Click **Save**.



## Assessing users

Once a topic is configured for assessment, you can assess users from two places: inside the topic while reading messages, or on the Assess Topic page. Assessing users from within the topic lets you read users' messages in context and evaluate as you perform other reading-related tasks (approving messages, marking messages read, replying, etc.). Assessing users from the Assess Topic page enables you to see topics scores for all users and view all of a user's messages together on one screen.

**Note** If a topic uses message approval, you must approve a message before you can assess it.


### ► To assess users from within a topic


- 1 Enter the topic.
- 2 Do one of the following:

To assess	In	Do this
Individual messages	The Grid Style message list	Open the message you want to assess, then click  <b>Assess</b> at the top of the message.
Individual messages	The Reading Style message list	Click the <b>Assess</b> link below the header of the message you want to assess.
The topic as a whole	The Grid Style message list	Open any message by a user you want to assess, then click  <b>Assess</b> at the top of the message.
The topic as a whole	The Reading Style message list	Click the <b>Assess</b> link below the header of any message by a user you want to assess.

- 3 Enter the **Message Score** or **Topic Score**.
- 4 Click **Save**.

### ► To assess users from the Assess Topic page

- 1 From the main discussions page, click the  **Assess Topic** icon for the topic you want to assess.

**Tip** If the **Score** column is empty on the Assess Topic page, click  **Display Options** on the action bar, select **Score Value** or **Percentage**, and click **Save**.

- 2 Do one of the following:
    - On the **Users** tab, click the **Topic Score** link beneath the name of the user you want to assess.
    - Click the **Assessments** tab, then click the name of the user you want to assess.
- Tip** On either tab, you can search for specific users by typing all or part of a user's name or user ID in the **Search For** field and clicking **Search**. You can also filter the view to display members of a specific group or section using the **View By** drop-down list.
- 3 In the pop-up window, do one of the following, depending on the type of assessment:
    - If you are evaluating the entire topic holistically, enter the score for this user in the **Topic Score** field.
    - If you are evaluating individual messages, enter a score for one or more messages in the **Score** column at the bottom of the page.
- Note** If the user's messages are displayed across multiple pages, be sure to save the page before navigating to another page of messages. Any new message scores entered will be lost if you change pages without saving.
- 4 Click **Save**.
  - 5 Click **Close**.

---

## Linking a topic to a grade item

You can link a topic's score to a grade item in your course's grade book so that users' scores are automatically transferred to the grade book. This enables you to factor the topic score into users' final grades for the course. It also enables you to display the result to users; users cannot view their topic score directly through the Discussions tool, but they can view their grades in the grade book.

► **To associate a topic with a grade item**

On the **Assessment** tab where you configure a topic for assessment, select the grade item from the **Grade Item** drop-down list, or click the **New Grade Item** link to create a new grade item for the topic. See *Setting up assessment*, p. 36, for more information about configuring a topic for assessment; see *Grades User Guide* for more information about creating grade items.



**Note** Only numeric grade items can be linked to discussion topics.

## Releasing topic scores to the grade book

You assess topics linked to grade items in the same way you assess stand-alone topics, by assigning a score to each message or to each user for the topic overall. (See *Assessing users*, p. 37, for more information.) However, the Learning Environment will not update the grade item until you release the score to the grade book. This prevents inaccurate grades from being displayed before you are finished assessing users.

When you release the topic score, the Learning Environment updates the grade item in the grade book. Any additional changes you make to a user's score are automatically sent to the grade book.

### ► To release a topic score to the grade book

- 1 On the main discussions page, click the  **Assess Topic** icon for the topic.
- 2 On the Assess Topic page, do one of the following:
  - Select the checkbox in the **Graded** column beside each user whose score you want to release to the grade book, then click **Save**.
  - To release scores for all users, click  **Mark All Graded** on the action bar.

**Tip** You can also release a user's score in the same place that you enter it by selecting the **Graded** checkbox.

---

## Adding activities to a topic

You can associate a discussion topic with a competency activity to tie the topic's assessment to a set of learning objectives and a competency you want your users to master. You will also be able to evaluate the topic using a rubric.

For information about activities, competencies, and rubrics, see the *Competencies and Rubrics User and Reference Guide*.

## Viewing statistics



Statistics give you an overview of user activity in your discussion topics and forums. You can use this information to determine which topics are stimulating conversation and which are not, or who is posting frequently and who is hanging back. As the semester unfolds, you can use statistics to pinpoint topics in need of conversation-starters and to follow the participation levels of different users so you can send email reminders to users who have not been participating, or ask overly vocal users to slow down and give others a chance to contribute. When the semester is finished, statistics help you identify the topics that were most effective and the ones you may want to omit or modify for the next course.

### Notes

- Unapproved and deleted messages are not included in message counts.
- When viewing statistics by user, only users who appear in the classlist are listed, but totals include messages posted by *all* users.

### ► To view statistics

Do one of the following:

- To view statistics for a specific forum or topic, click the  **View Statistics** icon for that forum or topic.
- To view statistics for the entire course, click  **Statistics** on the left tool menu on the main discussions page.

**Tip** You can sort statistics by clicking on any column heading.

The screenshot shows a web interface for a discussion forum. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options like 'Discussions List', 'Group Restrictions', 'Statistics', and 'Settings'. The main area is titled 'Forums & Topics List' and contains a list of forum topics. One topic, 'Contemporary Issues (closed)', is selected, and a 'Forum Statistics' window is open over it. This window shows summary statistics for the forum and a table of topic statistics.

**Forum Statistics - Contemporary Issues (closed)**


Total Messages (all forums): 42  
 Total Messages (this forum): 10  
 Pinned Messages: 1  
 Unapproved Messages: 0

**User Statistics**

Total Messages (all forums): 42  
 Total Messages (this forum): 10  
 Pinned Messages: 1  
 Unapproved Messages: 0

**Topic Statistics**

Topic Name	Number of Messages			Average Rating
	Total	Pinned	Unapproved	
Organic Foods	3	1	0	N/A
Explosives and earthquakes	7	0	0	☆☆☆☆☆

Click the  **View Statistics** icon for a forum or topic to see its statistics

The screenshot shows the 'Statistics' page for a course. The left sidebar contains a 'Statistics' icon, which is highlighted with an orange arrow. The main content area displays the following information:

- Statistics** (Action bar)
- Export to CSV File
- Users: Forums and Topics
- Statistics
- Total Messages (all Forums): 42
- Unapproved Messages: 4
- User Statistics
- View By: User
- Search For: [input] Search Show Search Options
- Table with 5 columns: First Name a, Last Name, Authored, Read, Unapproved, Scored


First Name a, Last Name	Number of Messages			
	Authored	Read	Unapproved	Scored
<a href="#">Carl Parker</a>	0	0	0	0
<a href="#">Danielle Fleur</a>	1	0	0	0
<a href="#">Eric Roth</a>	2	0	0	0
<a href="#">Frank Catcher</a>	1	0	1	0
<a href="#">Harold McEllan</a>	1	0	0	1
<a href="#">Hillary Terrell</a>	0	0	0	0
<a href="#">Jodi Singh</a>	0	0	1	0
<a href="#">Miguel Mendoza</a>	1	0	0	0
<a href="#">Ninh Tran</a>	0	-2	1	0
<a href="#">Peter VanBrook</a>	2	1	0	0

Click **Statistics** in the left tool menu to view statistics for all topics in your course

## Exporting statistics to a CSV file

You can export statistics to a CSV file and then import the data into a spreadsheet application to perform further analysis.

### ► To export statistics

- 1 Go to the page displaying the statistics you want to export.
- 2 Click  **Export to CSV File** on the action bar.
- 3 Once the file has finished processing, click the file name to download the file.

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