

1. Managing & Assessing Discussion Forums

The Discussion Forum is one of the most powerful communication tools in Blackboard. Faculty will attest that it is one thing to create a forum but there are a whole other set of considerations when it comes to manage and assessing it.

***Refer to the tip sheet on *Setting up Discussion Forums* for information on the forum settings and design options.**

Overview

This handout describes strategies and tools to manage a forum in progress, and tools and tips for assessing learner performance in a forum.

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This guide has instructions and tips for using the forum settings.

Tips are posted in shaded boxes such as this.

2. Tools and Strategies for Managing a Forum

The Discussion forum has several tools to help manage how participants are engaged in the discussion, post messages, or add attachments.

TIPS

- * The purpose and design of the forum will dictate which management and assessment tools are available.
- * Refer to the tip sheet on *Setting up Discussion forums in Blackboard* for information about selecting forum settings.

1. A. Managing Forum Users

- The *Manage* area in the Discussion Forum only relates to the different **roles you can assign** to users and not other management issues related to opening, reading, grading, and sorting the posts. Refer to these areas in this guide for detailed information.
- For example, in this snapshot of the *Manage* screen, there are

- 2 participants
- 2 readers
- 2 moderators
- 1 manager
- 1 blocked
- 2 graders


student_allang	Blocked
teacher25	Participant
student19	Reader
student18	Participant
student17	Moderator
student16	Grader
student15	Moderator
teacher15	Manager
teacher16	Reader
teacher18	Grader

Role Descriptions/Ideas for Their Use/Cautious Note

Role	Description & Tips
Participant	- By default, students are participants which permits reading and writing posts in that forum.
Manager	- A forum role that grants all privileges. - The instructor, by default, is a manager. - Students assigned to the manager role have all of the privileges for managing and grading posts but no access to the control panel . - Student managers have a <i>grade forum column</i> view in their forums.
TIP	* Assigning the manager role to a student(s) can support group autonomy and assumes a level of comfort working in forums. * Provide clear guidelines for performing this role.



Role	Description & Tips
<p>Moderator with <u>No</u> Forced Moderation Option</p> <p>TIP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Manager is the default moderator for a forum. - This moderator role can be assigned to student/students even if the forum does not have <i>forced moderation</i> selected as a design option. - The moderator can reply to/remove/modify/lock/unlock the author's post. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide clear guidelines for moderating the posts. * Monitor the moderator activities, providing feedback and support especially if you have appointed first-time moderators.
<p>Moderator <u>With</u> Forced Moderation Option</p> <p>TIP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By default, the manager (teacher) is the moderator of a forum. - In a forum where there is forced moderation of the posts, the moderator must first scrutinize the post and decide whether to publish it or return it with an explanation. - Once published, the moderators can also remove/modify/reply to/lock/unlock posts. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide clear scope of responsibilities and guidelines to a student for assuming this role, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ways to provide constructive feedback using the assignment expectations -how to provide specific suggestions for modifying a returned post -how to manage the moderation queue posts -when to communicate with the teacher for consultation * This role can be turned on and off while the forum is in progress. Remember to CLEAR THE MODERATION QUEUE before turning off the forced moderation feature. Otherwise, these posts will be virtually inaccessible and will viewable in the Collect view which holds no function other than to read the posts.
<p>Reader</p> <p>TIP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This user can read the forum contents but cannot participate in the discussion. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Readers can be part of or external to the group. E.g., you can add students from other groups/courses to this one as part of a jigsaw experience. * Assign this role carefully as the user cannot participate in the discussion which could be very frustrating in some circumstances.
<p>Blocked</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevents the user from accessing the forum.

Role	Description & Tips
 T i p	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This role should be used sparingly, if at all. * Establish clear expectations of acceptable behaviour and consequences in the discussion forum right from the outset (ideally a collaborative group effort).

1. B. Moderating a Forum

- Refer to the moderator role descriptions in the previous section regarding the scope of responsibilities which differ when the forum has forced versus not forced moderation
- 2 common reasons for moderating a forum are to
 - (i) ensure that the discussion is unfolding as it should in terms of process and due dates (don't have to use the forced moderation option here)
 - (ii) monitor and assess the posts vis-à-vis the assignment expectations before publishing them to the forum (refer to forced moderation option)

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 - * Although the forced moderation potentially raises the quality and quantity of exchanges between the participants and the manager (teacher), it does increase the manager's workload throughout the discussion.
 - * The Discussion Board in version 7.2.3 is slower overall than in 6.3. Given that adding forced moderation increases the time spent in the forum, it is important to choose times during the day when the network traffic is not at its peak (later in the evening (after 18:00) or very early in the morning – before 07:00)
 - * The moderation queue is only used when the forced moderation option is active.
 - * Clear the moderation queue at regular intervals in order to provide prompt feedback to participants.
 - * If you are going to turn off the forced moderation option, be sure to clear the queue first otherwise you will not have access to the unmoderated posts.

1. C. Using the Search Features

- You can search in a 2 ways: within a forum, or within the discussion board for that course.
- You can use discrete date search criteria in the board and forum view. Discrete word search is only applicable in the forum view.

1. D. Using the Availability & Lock Controls

- The available command, once selected when setting up the forum, can be turned off and on throughout the life of the forum.
- **Only the manager can see an unavailable forum.**

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- * Add a code in front of the unavailable forums to remind you that this forum that is visible only to you.
- * Remove the invisible code once you make the forum available to students.



- Only threads, not the entire forum, can be locked. This feature replaces the archive function in the previous Blackboard version.
- Locking a thread allows participants to read the posts but they cannot reply/modify/remove no matter what role they hold in the forum.
- Threads can be locked and unlocked throughout the forum.

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- * Locking threads so users can use the posts as reference without adding/modifying them can be very useful as an organization/staying-on-task function. i.e., Due dates for posting can be reinforced by locking the forum at a certain date/time.
- * Locking a thread until the posts are moderated is also a useful management strategy.

1. E. Copying Forums

- The copy feature within a forum allows copying within that BlackBoard course, **not across courses**. Copying forums across courses is done using the Control Panel Course Copy feature.

1 Forum Information

Specify a name for the copy and a Discussion Board where the copy should be placed. Also select whether the entire forum or only its settings should be copied to the selected location. If copying the entire forum, all content except for uploaded file attachments will be copied to the new location.

* Name

Copy

Entire forum

Forum settings only

* Location

- Copying the entire forum brings with it all of the settings and posts from all of the participants.
- Copying forum settings does just that – only the settings chosen in the original forum will be copied.

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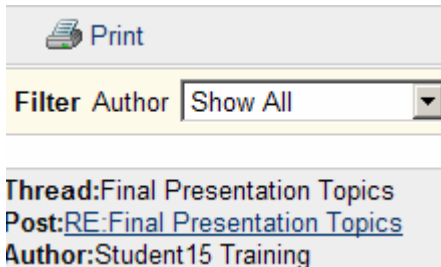
Why copy a forum within a course? Here are some common reasons:

- * **Move** the forum to another location in the course.
- * **Copy** the forum across group within the course (this is a big time-saver). Remember to only copy the settings and not the entire forum.
- * **Re-purpose/rename** the forum using the same forum settings.

1. F. Printing Forums

You can print an entire forum or selected threads in the collect view.

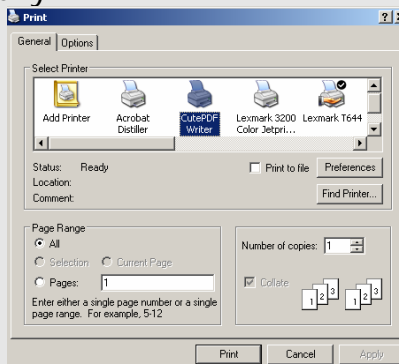
- Collect the threads/forum as per the instructions in this handout.
- Click on the Print button in the upper left corner of the screen.



- The header and footer will show the name of the forum, numbers of pages in the file, and the date printed.

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* If your computer has a pdf writer, you can create a pdf version of the forum and save it locally.



* In the Save As view, rename the file using the title of the thread or forum.

* Save the file to the folder/directory of your choice.

2. Tools and Strategies for Assessing Forums

2. A. View/Collect/Sort Posts

Viewing Posts

- i. To view a post, click on the title of the thread to reveal both the content of that post and a list of all of the replies to that original *post* (also called "*parent post*").

- ii. There are **three important icons** you can use to manage how the list of posts and their contents are viewed.

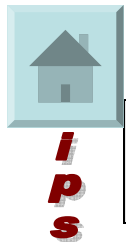
- iii. The above snapshot also shows 2 important navigation features that makes move from *previous to next threads*.

- You can only view 25 posts at a time in the list view.

- A page sorter at the bottom of this list allows you to proceed/return to other pages in that list.

Collecting Posts

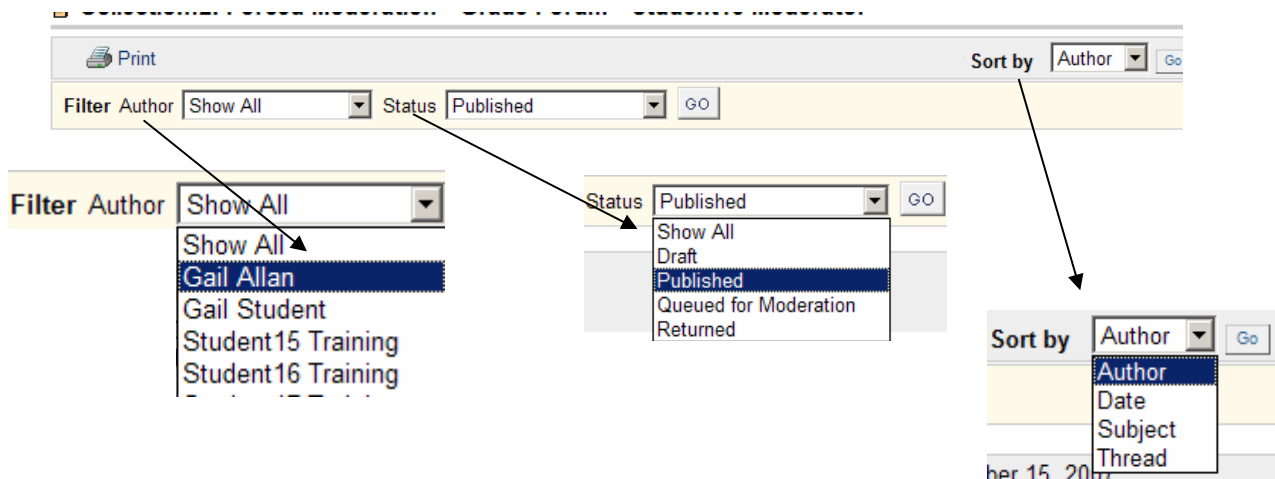
- To collect all of the posts in that forum, click on the *Go* button next to the Select All feature located at the bottom left of the shell.
- Then, click on the *Collect* icon in the menu bar at the top of the shell.
- Be patient if there are many posts to collect, especially if they also have file attachments, images, etc.
- You can also collect by individual thread by selecting only that thread then clicking on the collect icon.



* Students have the same view of the collected posts as the teacher, this includes those in the moderation queue and returned posts but **not** the teacher's message that accompanied the returned post.

Sorting Posts

- By **default they are sorted according to author, thread and date** (from most to least current). This means that all of the posts in one thread are kept together and sorted by author and date.
- Posts are sorted once they have been collected in one of three ways: a single thread, selected threads, or the whole forum.
- Remember the read and unread posts appear in the collection as published so there is no way in this view of discerning which ones have/have not been read.
- There are **three sorting areas** in the collect view



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Author	Status	Sort By
<p><i>Show All</i> is the default setting which lists all of the posts in that forum.</p> <p>Individual authors can be chosen.</p> <p>Remember that by default the posts are collected one thread at a time. Within each thread they are sorted by author and date (least to most recent).</p>	<p><i>In the Status frame, Published</i> appears as the default but in fact the <i>Show All</i> in the author filter takes precedence.</p> <p>So, you can view all of the posts including the drafts, those in the moderation queue, those that have been returned, and those that are published.</p> <p>Selecting the individual status options will collect only those types of posts.</p>	<p>Sorting by author, date, and thread are self-explanatory.</p> <p>Sorting by <i>Subject</i> gives you an alphabetical view of the threads.</p>
	<p>Use the <i>Status Go</i> button to use the individual status sorting options.</p>	<p>Use the <i>Sort Go</i> button to use the individual sort features.</p>

2. B. Grading Threads & Forums

The grade thread/forum options are chosen when setting up the forum. You can either grade the threads within the forum or the whole forum itself. You can't grade both. Refer to the tip sheet on **Setting Up Discussion Forums** for related instructions.

Grading Threads

- This option is selected when setting up the forum. Unlike grading the entire forum, you are not prompted to assign a point value to grade the threads because you **can opt to assign a different point value for each thread.**
- In the closed forum view, there is **no visible indication that this grade thread option has been chosen.**
- The **thread has to be opened** for the *Grade Thread* icon to appear in the menu at the top of the forum.
- Once a thread is opened and you **click on the *Grade Thread* icon at the top of the forum**, a grade list view appears where you can add the points earned for that thread for each participant. **This list is connected to the Grade Book** so you need only add the grades once.



Grading Forums

- This option is chosen when setting up the forum.
- A grading icon will automatically appear in the Grade Column in the forum view.
- In the forum list view you can tell which forums are being assessed because there is a Grade icon in the Grade column.
- Click on the **Grade icon to bring you to the class list**
- Click on the **Grade icon** next to each student's name where you can then add the points for that forum.
- A column for each forum is automatically setup in the Grade Book.

TIPS

- * Gradebook generates columns for threads/forums that are graded using the actual name assigned to these areas. So, long forum titles or thread subjects will have equally wide columns in the gradebook.
- * You can re-name these grade book headings in the *Manage Items* area. The original names will not change in the forum.

2. C. Tools for Assessing Threads/Forums

Grade Threads/Forums

Refer to the instructions above for grading threads and forums.

Peer Assessment

- The post rating scale allows for public display of peer assessments of another's posts.
- Users can rate each other's posts by assigning from 1 to 5 gold stars based on a set of criteria established by the instructor or collaboratively with the group.

Thread: 8 Components of Powerful Teaching
 Post: [RE: 8 Components of Powerful Teaching](#)
 Author: Student15 Training
 Date: Wednesday, October 31, 2007
 Status: Published
 Overall rating: ★★★★★
 Would rather be basking on a beach in Southern France.

Thread: 8 Components of Powerful Teaching
 Post: [RE: 8 Components of Powerful Teaching](#)
 Author: Student17 Training
 Date: Monday, October 15, 2007
 Status: Published
 Overall rating: ★★★★★
 Here's what is missing:

- Participants cannot self-assign these stars.
- Steps for assigning the stars:

- (1) open the post
- (2) Open the *rate this post menu*
- (3) Select the numbers of stars
- (4) Click on the *Rate* button next to the stars



Tracking Posts

- There are several tools already discussed in this handout that help track the numbers and patterns of posts throughout the discussion (refer to the section on *View/Collect/Sort Posts*).
- The *Performance Dashboard* in the Control Panel also provides a quick snapshot of a student's activity across all forums in that particular course.

Last Name	First Name	Username	Role	Last Course Access	Days Since Last Course Access	Review Status	Adaptive Release	Discussion Board	Early Warning System	View Grades
Student	Gall	student_allang	Student	Nov 5, 2007 3:12:30 PM	1	0	⊕	2	2/2	⊕
Training	Student15	student15	Student	Nov 5, 2007 9:51:16 AM	1	0	⊕	7	0/3	⊕
Training	Student16	student16	Student	Nov 5, 2007 9:01:32 AM	0	0	⊕	3	0/3	⊕
Training	Student17	student17	Student	Nov 5, 2007 2:39:03 PM	1	0	⊕	3	0/3	⊕
Training	Student18	student18	Student	Nov 6, 2007 9:28:01 AM	0	0	⊕	6	0/3	⊕
Training	Student19	student19	Student	Nov 5, 2007 3:03:43 PM	1	0	⊕	2	0/3	⊕

Shows numbers of students' posts in all forums in that course.

Rubrics and Checklists

- Discussions are typically assessed relative to the **process** (quality of the interactions) and the **product** (e.g., knowledge application, critical thinking, and problem-solving).
- Suggested guidelines for selecting and customizing an assessment tool for the forum:**
 - The expected outcomes for the discussion that are included in the instructions for the assignment will dictate how these two elements, process and product, are weighted.
 - Create a tracking tool that will help with grading the threads/forum. i.e., include the elements of the process and product that are to be graded.
 - Provide very clear, strict rules for students to notify you of posts they have modified/removed (if you are allowing this). E.g., adding a code in front of the subject line of a post that has been modified.
 - Use tools that provide direction for growth and emphasize the positive attributes of the student's participation in that forum.



3. Suggested Resources for Using Online Discussion Forums

1. Website: Middle State Tennessee University's Learning, Teaching & Innovative Technologies Center
http://www.mtsu.edu/webctsupport/faculty/manual/WebCT_DiscussionBoard_Tips-Pedagogy.pdf
An excellent resource with tips and strategies for using forums and several examples of marking tools (from simple to complex).
2. Allen, Marion n, and Field, Peggy Anne. Scholarly Teaching and Scholarship of Teaching: Noting the Difference. International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship. Vol. 2 Issue 1 2005 Article 12
Internet Site:
http://www.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?context=ijnes&article=1094&date=&mt=MTEyMjkzODIwNA%3D%3D&access_ok_form=Processing...
This article helps us view learning from the learners' perspective as we design learning activities that spur them on to success.
3. Penn State University Information Technology Services. Creative Use of Online Discussion Areas
Internet Site: <http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/discuss/>
A 14 page tips and strategies document with some very thoughtful considerations regarding using discussion forums to motivate learners to get involved in online discussions. This document also includes some suggestions for designing and assessing learner performance using intended learning outcomes.

4. Curtin University of Technology in Sydney, Australia Professional Development. Evaluating teaching/learning via groupware focus groups.
Internet Site: <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1998/atkinson-d.html>
This 7 page document examines how to use groupware for rich group discussion for assessing learning. The emphasis is on group dynamics and how to encourage learners to become involved at a deep level.

5. Khe Foon Hew and Wing Sum Cheung. Models to evaluate online learning communities of asynchronous discussion forums. Australian Journal of Educational Technology 2003, 19 (2), 241-259.
Internet Site: <http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet19/hew.html>
This detailed 16 page document critiques 6 different models for evaluating online discussion activities. A very worthwhile site to visit if you are interested in investigating ways to assess the social, interactive and critical thinking elements in online discussions.

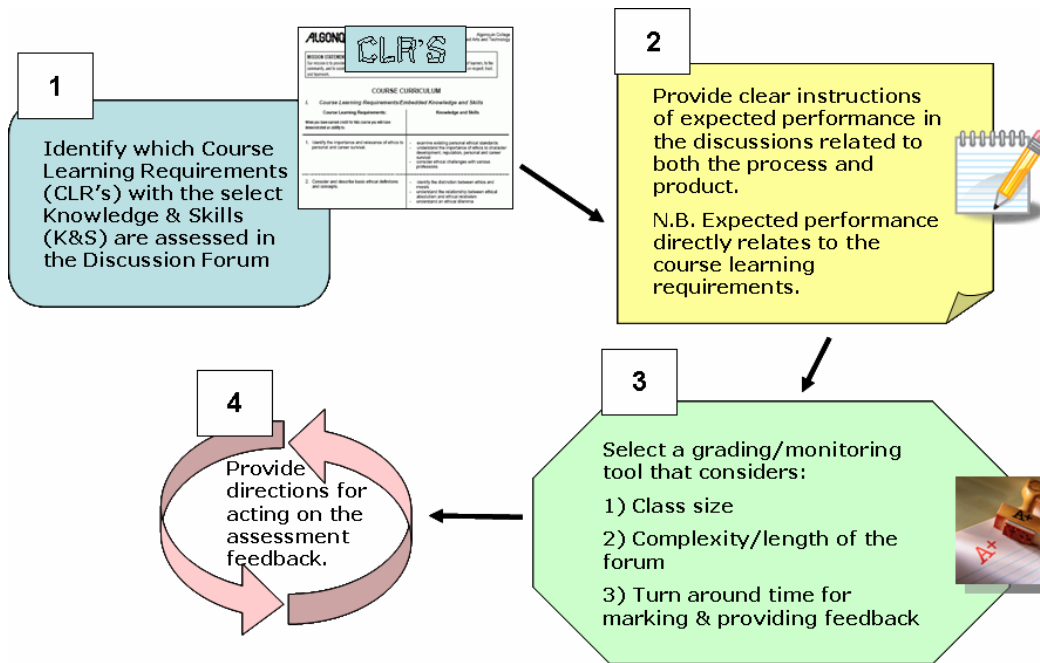
6. Rob Abel. Implementing Best Practices in Online Learning. Educause Quarterly Number 3 2005.
Internet Site:
<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eqm05312.pdf>
This 3 page research report summarizes a recent study that reveals common denominators for success in Internet-supported learning.

7. Study Skills – Successful Online Study : Making the Discussion Forum Work.
Internet Site: http://help-online.murdoch.edu.au/students/studyhelp/m_discu.html
This Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia student guide has some great tips to help students get the most of participating in a discussion forum. Written in a learner-centered context, this document is easy to read and understand.

8. Sue Fostaty Young and Robert J, Wilson.. Assessment & Learning: The ICE Approach. Portage & Main Press, Winnipeg, Canada. 2000 ed.



4. Steps in designing, managing, and assessing discussion forums



Notes