Making the Most of **Discussions**

Blackboard Learn 9.1

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1.0 Workshop Overview

Research supports the relationship between interpersonal interaction in the online environment and the learning that takes place. One study[1] of over 6,000 college students found that their course satisfaction and learning were related to their interactions with each other. Students who rated instructors highly on teaching presence behaviors, such as facilitating effective discourse, also reported high levels of satisfaction and learning in the course.

The Discussion Board offers an important vehicle for interpersonal interaction. Discussions can serve a range of purposes, such as:

- An online meeting place for social interaction among peers.
- An additional medium for collaboration and the exchange of ideas.
- A medium to pose questions about homework assignments, readings, and course content.
- A way to demonstrate the understanding or application of course material.
- A record of discussion that can be reviewed at a later point.
- A graded activity that demonstrates understanding or application of course material.

In this workshop, the first section presents the Discussion Board from the student point of view. Next, you take on the instructor role and learn how to use the tool throughout the lifecycle of discussions—from creating forums and threads to moderating, managing, and grading.

[1]Shea, P. J., Pickett, A. M., and Pelz, W. E. "A Follow-Up Investigation of 'Teaching Presence' in the SUNY Learning Network." JALN 7.2 (2003): 73-74. Web. 11 Jan. 2006.

Roadmap

2.0 Student Experience

- Learn to access forums and threads.
- Learn to reply to posts, create threads, and rate posts.
- Collect posts for printing and review. Use the Search function to locate posts.

3.0 Creating Discussions

- Create discussion forums and threads, choosing forum settings based on learning goals.
- During forum creation, set grading options and email subscriptions.
- Explain ways to organize your Discussion Board.
- Learn how to add forums to Content Areas, Learning Modules, Lesson Plans, or folders.

4.0 Moderating Discussions

- Assign users to forum roles.
- Use the Moderation Queue to return or approve posts.
- Change thread status or lock threads.

5.0 Managing Discussions

- Change forum availability and settings.
- Use the Copy function to save time when creating forums.
- Keep discussions organized by reordering forums, deleting forums and threads, and adding tags.

6.0 Grading Discussions

- Learn the discussions grading process.
- Learn how to assign grades to forums and threads, and how to edit or delete grades.
- Use the Email tool in conjunction with the grading of discussion posts.

2.0 Student Experience

In this section, you will use the Discussion Board as a student. You will explore common functions, such as navigating forums and threads, reading and replying to posts, and collecting and printing posts. The information will also provide some context for the decisions you make as an instructor.

Learning Outcomes

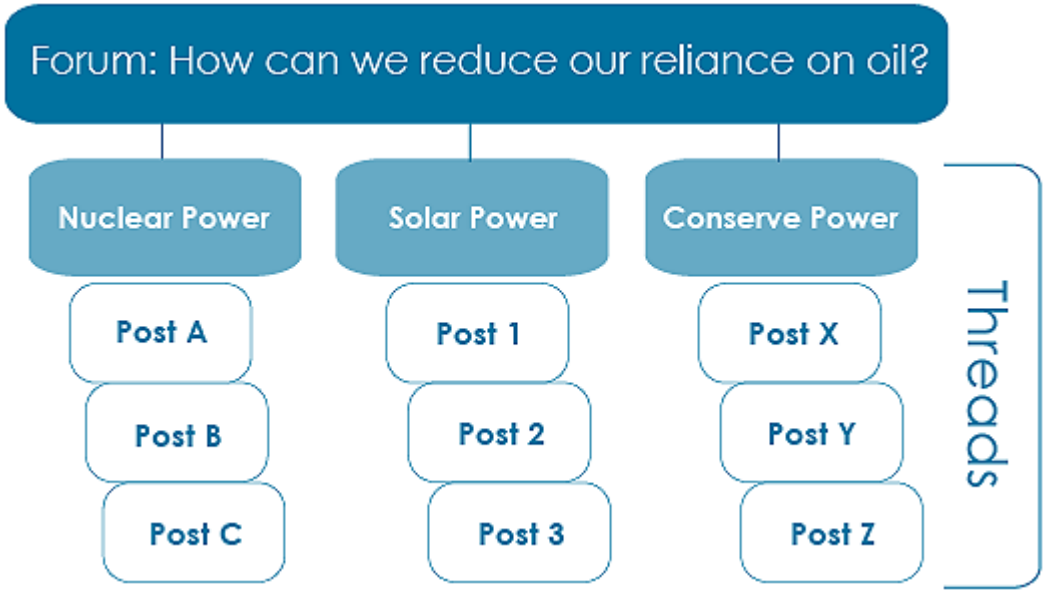
After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Navigate discussion forums and threads.
- Change the forum view.
- Select which type of threads to display.
- Create threads and reply to posts.
- Rate posts.
- Collect posts for sorting, filtering, and printing.
- Use the Search function to locate specific threads.
- Use appropriate discussion etiquette.

The Discussion Board

Depending on how the course has been set up, you access the Discussion Board from either the Course Menu or a course area, such as a Content Area, Learning Module, Lesson Plan, or folder.

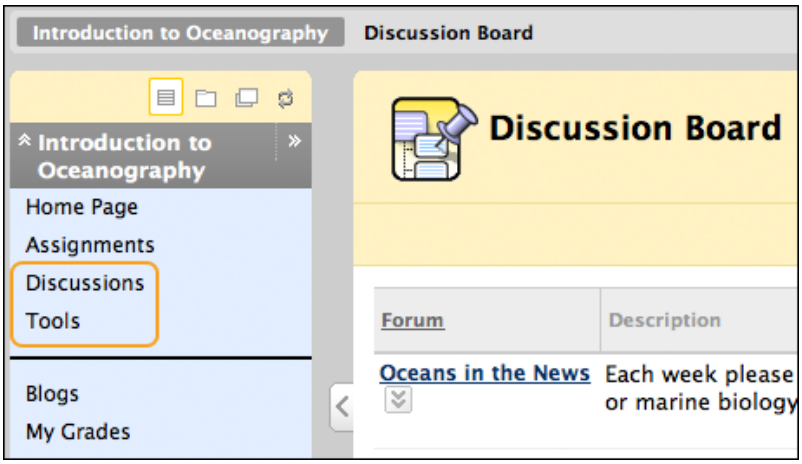
Each Discussion Board contains one or more forums. A **forum** is an area where a topic or a group of related topics are discussed. Within each forum, there can be multiple threads. A **thread** includes the initial post and any replies to it.



The Discussion Board is also available as a group tool that is used by smaller groups of students within a course. Group Discussion Boards are available only to users who are members of the Group. If a Group Discussion Board has been set up, access it from the **Groups** link on the Course Menu or in the **My Groups** area following the Course Menu.

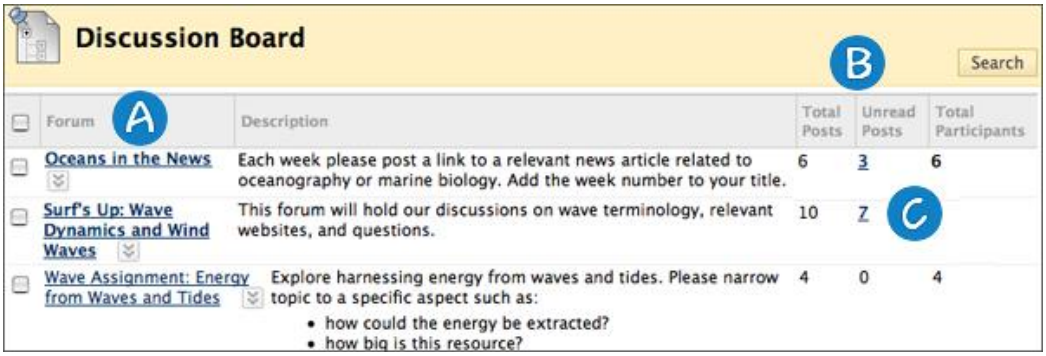
Note: The Blackboard administrator at your school controls whether this tool is available. If this tool is not available, you can contact your administrator to discuss its status.

In our example, the Discussion Board is accessed from the Course Menu. An instructor can rename the link. Students can also click the **Tools** link on the Course Menu to access the Discussion Board.



The Discussion Board Page

The main Discussion Board page displays a list of available forums. For each forum, the page displays the total number of posts, the number of unread posts, and the number of users who have participated in the forum.



A. Click the forum title to view the messages. Forums containing unread posts appear in bold.

B. View data on the number of posts and participants.

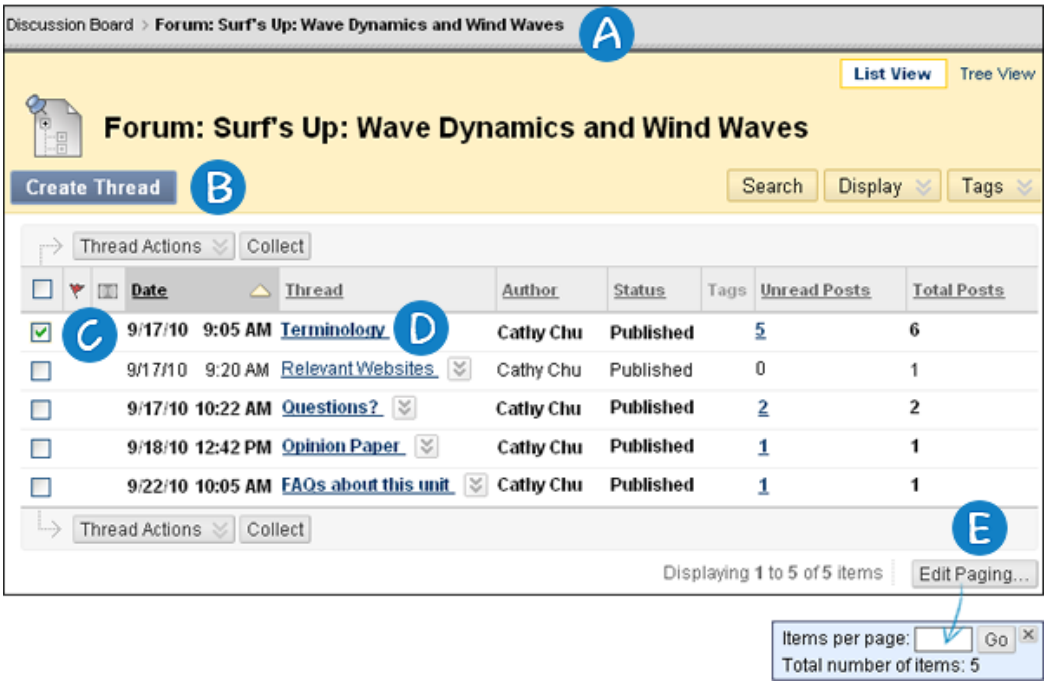
C. Click the number in the **Unread Posts** column for one-click access to the forum's unread messages.

Viewing a Discussion Forum

When you access a forum, a list of threads appears. The following columns display information for each thread:

- **Date**: Displays the date the thread was created.
- **Author**: Displays the name of the user who created the thread.
- **Status**: Indicates whether the thread is published, hidden, locked, or a draft.
- **Unread Posts**: Displays the number of posts not yet accessed.
- **Total Posts**: Includes both read and unread posts.

Forum Features



A. Use the breadcrumbs to navigate to a previous page. Do not use the browser navigation controls because page load errors may occur.

B. Use the Action Bar functions to perform various actions, including:

   - **Create Thread**: Add a new thread to a forum.
   - **Search**: Search for Discussion Board content. The search field is collapsed by default to save screen space.
   - **Thread Actions**: Make a selection from the drop-down list. Edit the status of the selected threads and perform other actions, such as marking threads

read or unread and setting or clearing flags. Flags mark threads for later attention.

- **Collect**: Gather selected threads onto one page where you can sort, filter, or print them.

C. Select one or multiple threads' check boxes or select the check box in the header row to select all threads for an action, such as collecting.

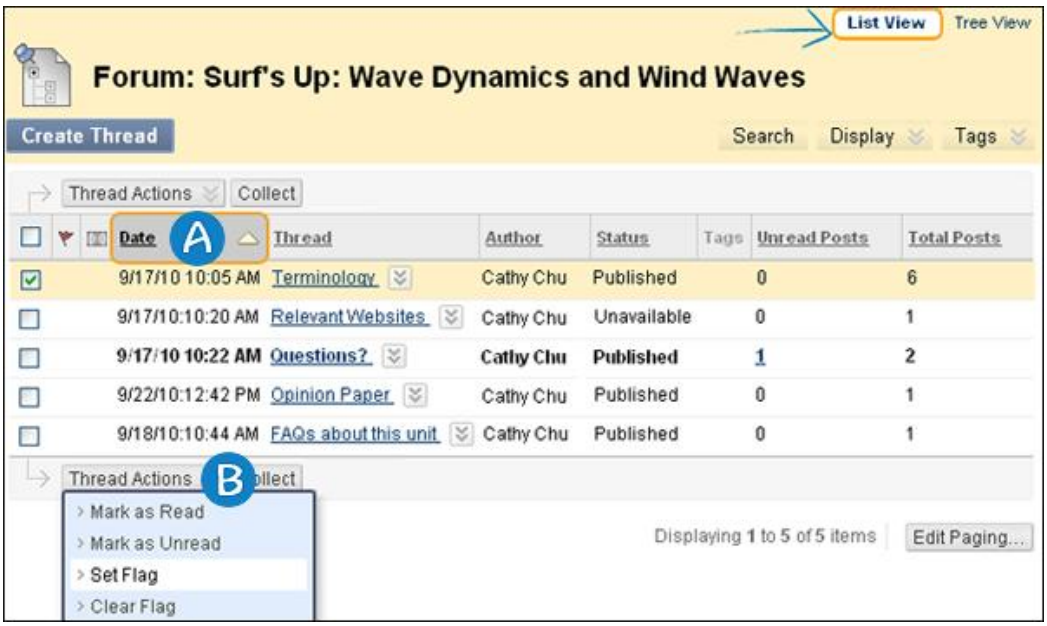
D. Click a thread title to read the posts. Forum titles containing unread posts appear in bold type.

E. Click **Edit Paging** to determine the number of items to view per page. Type a number in the box and click **Go**. Click the **X** to close the pop-up box.

List View and Tree View

After clicking a forum title, a page loads displaying all forum threads. You can view the page in either **List View** or **Tree View**. This choice remains in effect until you change it and you may change it at any time. On the forum page, in the upper-right corner, switch between the two views.

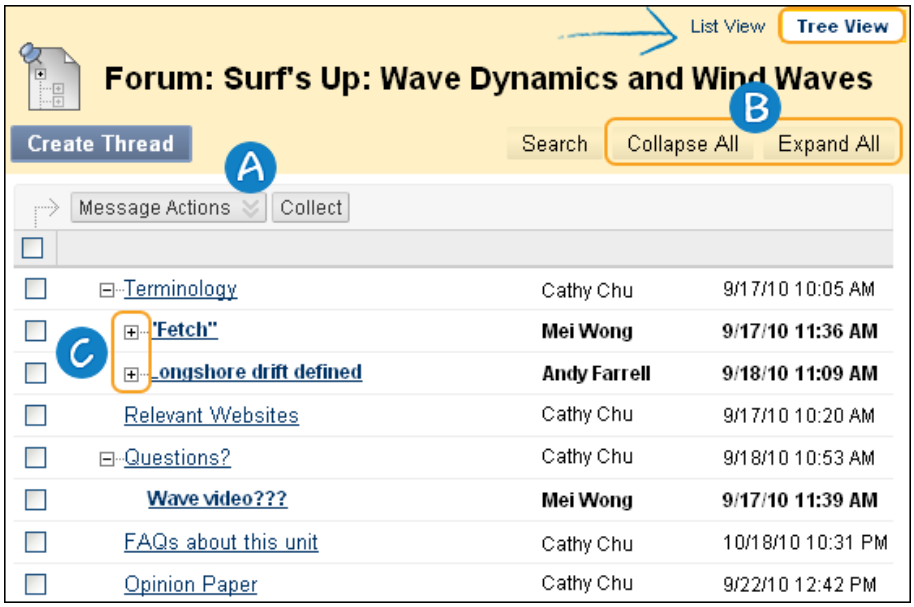
In **List View**, threads are presented in table format. Threads containing unread posts appear in bold type.



A. To sort a column, click the column heading or caret.

B. Select the check box next to a thread and make a selection from the **Thread Actions** drop-down list on the Action Bar. You can select multiple threads or select the check box in the header to select all threads. Actions include marking threads read or unread and setting or clearing flags.

Click **Tree View** to show the thread starter messages and their replies.



A. Select the check box next to a thread and make a selection from the **Message Actions** drop-down list on the Action Bar. You can select multiple threads or select the check box in the header to select all threads. Actions include marking threads read or unread and setting or clearing flags.

B. On the Action Bar, use the **Collapse All** and **Expand All** functions to hide or show all posts included in all threads. You can also create threads and collect posts.

C. You can expand and collapse threads by using the plus and minus icons next to the titles. If a thread starter message contains unread posts, the thread starter title appears in bold type.

Changing the Displayed Threads

Instructors set the thread status, such as published or hidden, but students choose which type of threads appears. By default, published threads appear.

QUICK STEPS: Changing the Displayed Threads

1. Access the forum.
2. Select **List View**.
3. On the Action Bar, point to **Display** to access the thread status options.
4. In the drop-down list, select the type of threads to view in the forum.

Thread Status

The following table describes the status options for threads.

Status	Goal for Thread
Publish	Make thread available to all users.
Hide	Hide the thread from immediate view, but still allow users the option of reading the threads. Unneeded content is hidden from view, helping users find relevant content. Users cannot reply to or edit hidden threads, even if editing is enabled for the thread.
Draft	A **Draft** thread is saved by an author for future editing, but is not submitted for publication. When it is published, it becomes available to other users. Users can only view their own drafts and must access them from the **Display** drop-down list.

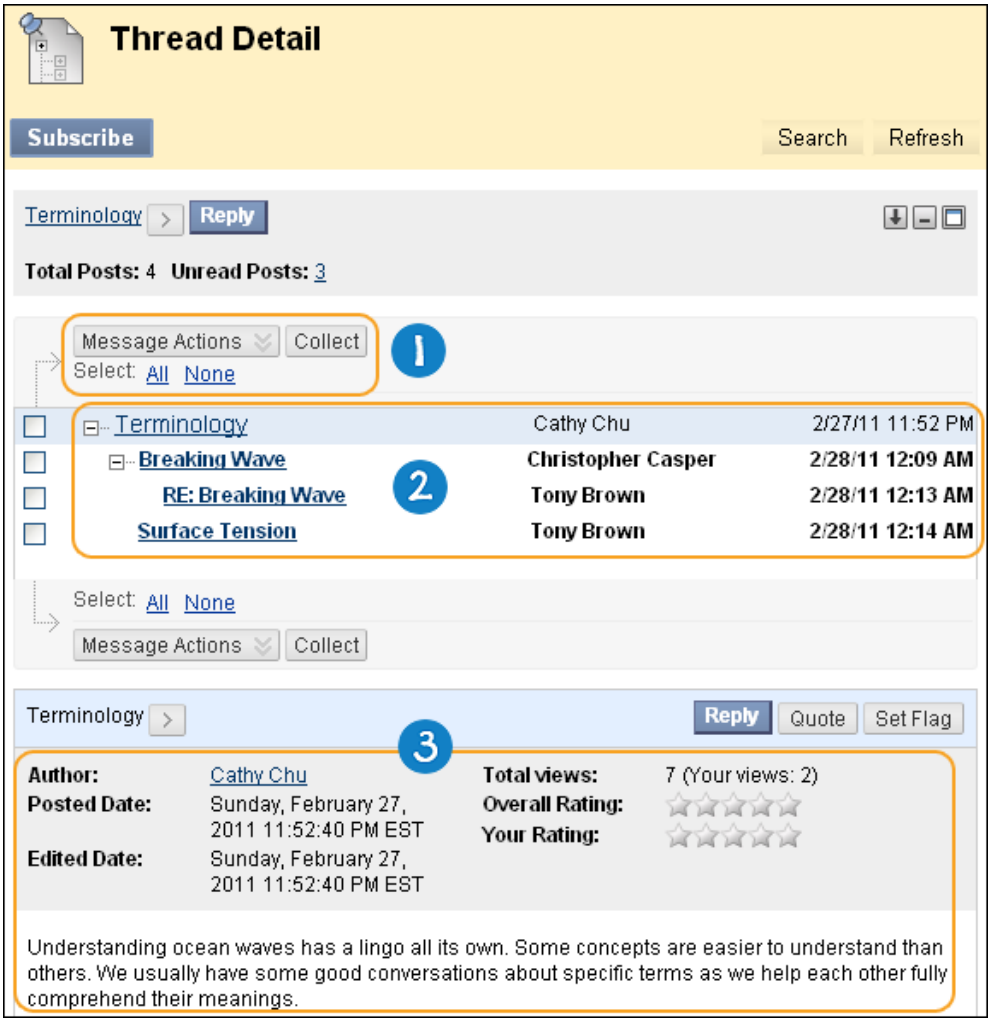
Viewing a Discussion Thread

When you click a thread, the **Thread Detail** page appears. The page is divided into three sections:

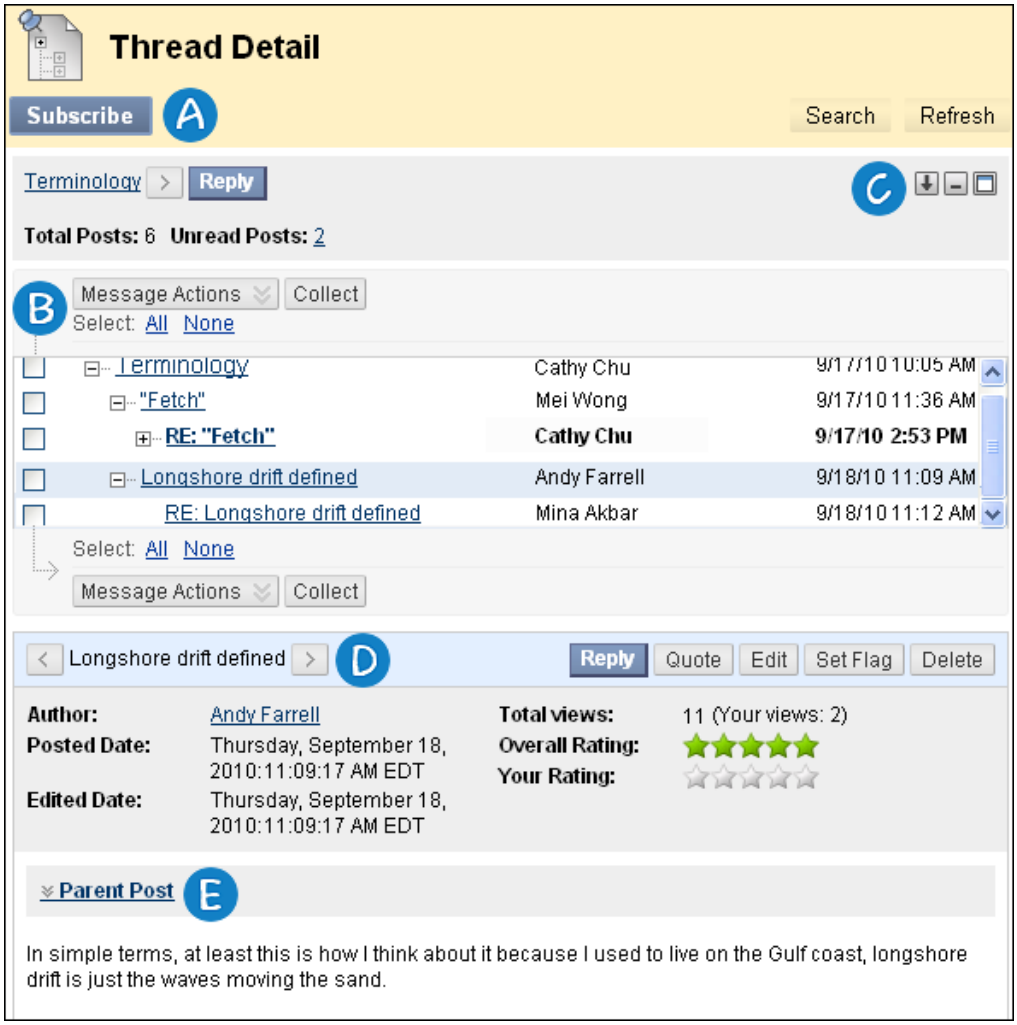
Section 1: The Action Bar contains functions that allow you to select, flag, mark read/unread, or collect posts.

Section 2: The message list contains a list of all the posts in the thread, beginning with the initial post. The selected post is highlighted. Use the plus and minus icons to expand and collapse the posts.

Section 3: The current post contains the text of the selected post and information about the post.



Functions on the Thread Detail Page



A. On the Action Bar, you can access functions such as **Subscribe**, **Unsubscribe**, or **Search**. When subscribed to a thread, you receive an email alert when a post is updated or a reply is posted. Instructors must enable this function when creating a forum. The search field is hidden by default to save screen space.

B. Select one or multiple threads' check boxes and make a selection in the **Message Actions** drop-down list on the Action Bar. Actions include marking threads read or unread and setting or clearing flags. You can also use the functions for collecting posts and selecting all posts.

C. Arrange your view using the icons on the Action Bar:

- **Swap Up** or **Down**: Switches the message tree section and the reply section of the screen.

- **Hide** or **Restore to Minimum**: Collapses or displays the message tree section of the screen.
- **Maximize** or **Minimize**: Displays the message tree fully or just a portion of the message tree.

D. Use the **Move to previous message** or **Move to next message** arrows for navigating between messages in the thread.

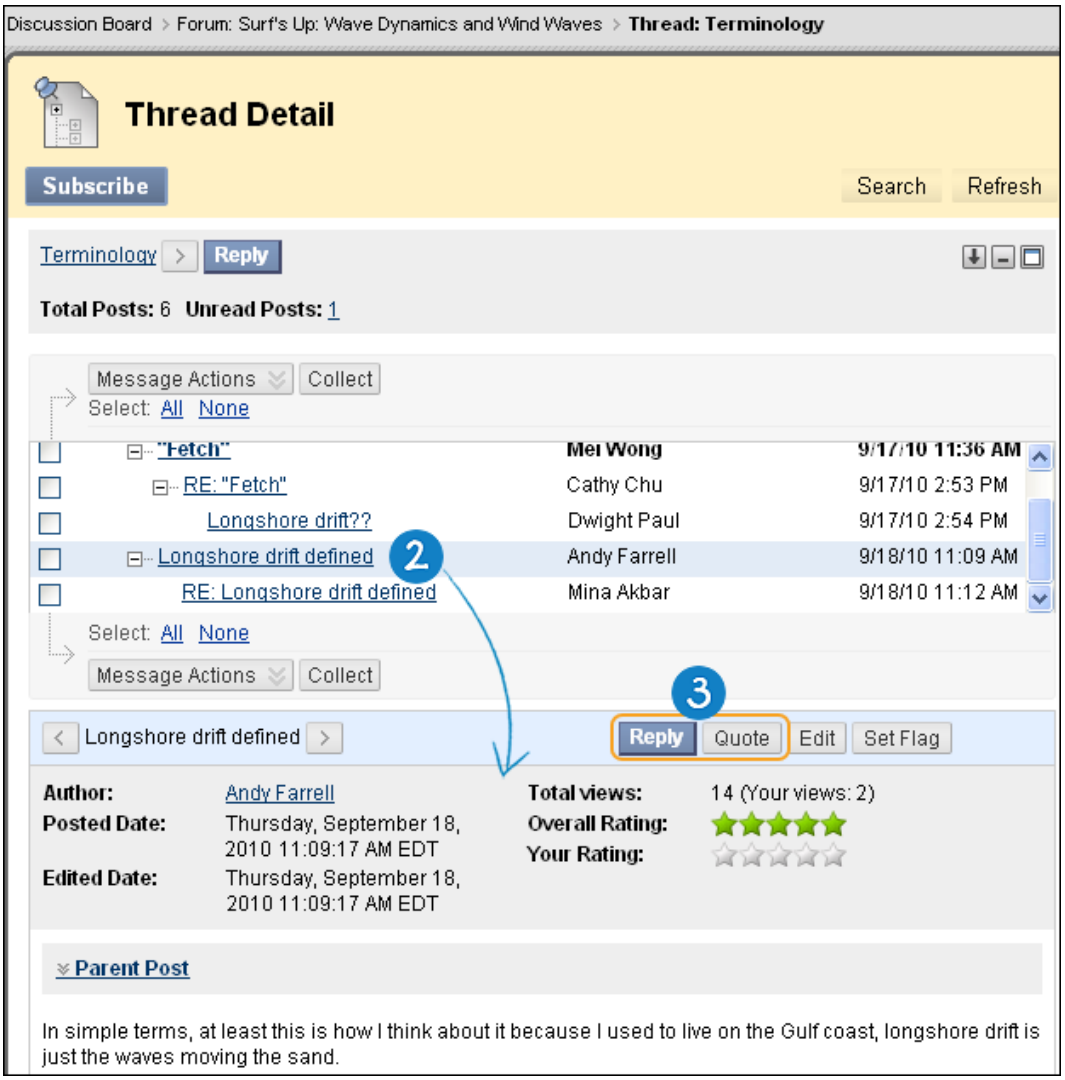
E. Click **Parent Post** to display or hide the parent message in the thread.

Replying to Posts

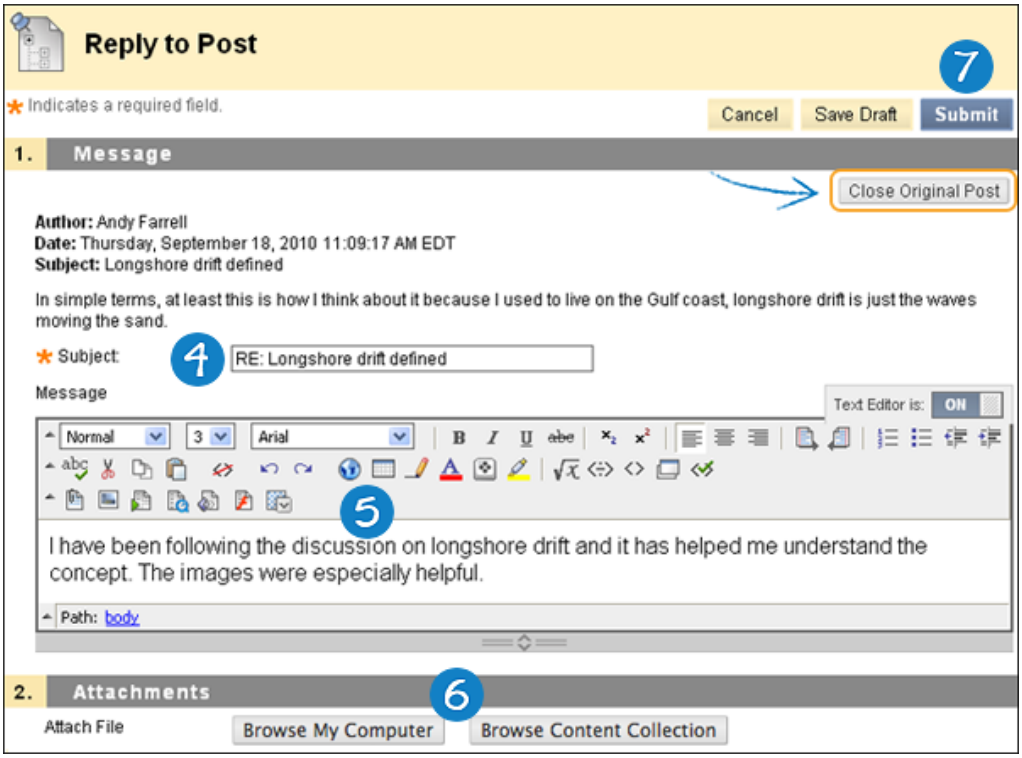
If the thread status is published, you can reply to posts. You cannot reply to posts in locked or hidden threads.

QUICK STEPS: Replying to Posts

1. Access a forum and select a thread.
2. On the **Thread Detail** page, click a post's title. The post appears in the current post portion of the content frame. You can view the text of the post and information about the post, such as the **Author** and **Posted Date**.
3. Click **Reply**. Alternatively, click **Quote** to include the post's text as part of your reply.



4. On the **Reply to Post** page, click **View Original Post** on the Action Bar to include the original message on the page while replying. Click **Close Original Pos**t to hide the original post from view. If needed, edit the **Subject**.
5. In the **Message** box, type your reply. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups.
6. Alternatively, in the **Attachments** section, attach a file using one of the following options:
    - To upload a file from your computer, click **Browse My Computer**.
    - If your school licenses content management, click **Browse Content Collection**.
7. Click **Save Draft** to store a draft of the message or click **Submit** to publish your reply.



Result

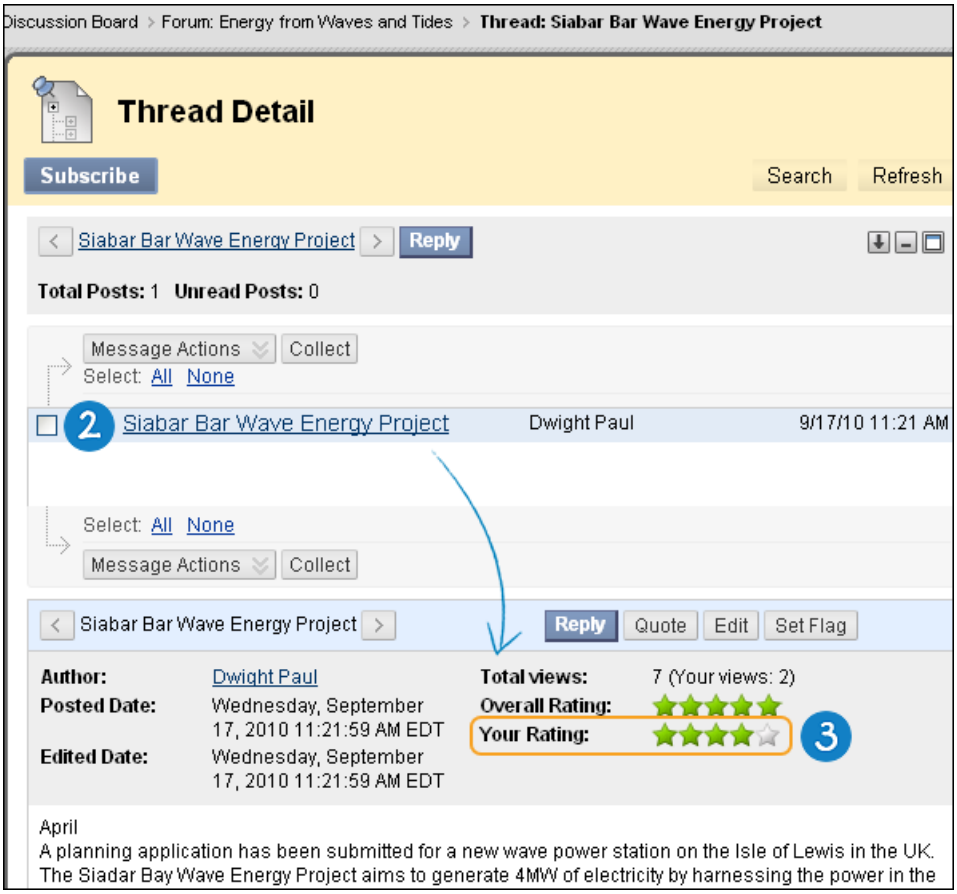
Your reply appears on the **Thread Detail** page, indented under the parent post. If you attached a file, a paper clip icon appears in the post's row. Click the title to open the post in the current post portion of the content frame. Use the **Move to previous message** and **Move to next message** arrows to view another post or use the breadcrumbs to return to the forum or the Discussion Board page.

Rating Posts

Instructors can use the Discussion Board for peer review. Students start threads and include their work in their initial posts. Other users review the work, assign a rating to the initial post, and may include comments in a response. Rating posts also allows users to focus on messages considered especially informative or useful by others. Depending on the forum settings, users can assign a rating to posts using a five star system. Instructors can also rate posts.

QUICK STEPS: Rating Posts

1. Access a forum and select a thread.
2. On the **Thread Detail** page, click a post's title. The post appears in the current post portion of the content frame.
3. For **Your Rating**, select one to five stars. You can add and delete stars at any time.



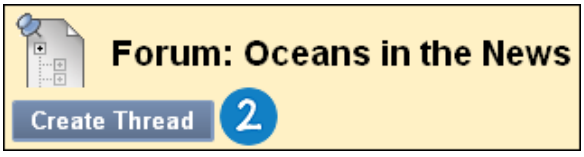
Your rating is included in the **Overall Rating**, which is the combined rating of all users.

Creating Threads

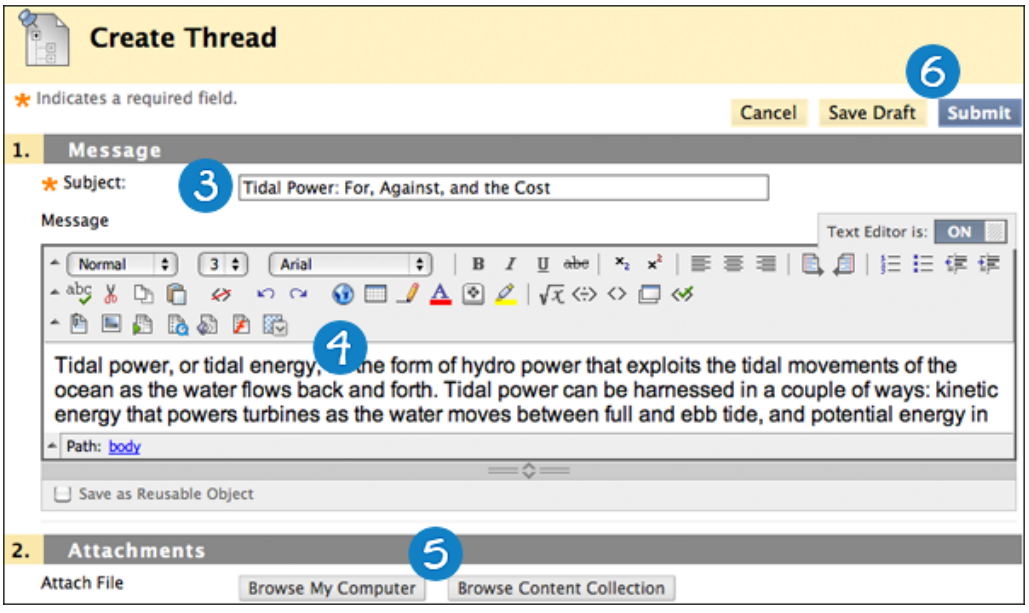
Depending on which forum settings an instructor has selected, students may be allowed to create new threads.

QUICK STEPS: Creating Threads

1. Access a forum.
2. On the Action Bar, click **Create Thread**.



3. On the **Create Thread** page, type a **Subject**.
4. In the **Message** box, type instructions, a description, or a question. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups.
5. Alternatively, in the **Attachments** section, attach a file using one of the following options:
    - To upload a file from your computer, click **Browse My Computer**.
    - If your school licenses content management, click **Browse Content Collection**.
6. Click **Save Draft** to store a draft of the post or click **Submit** to create a thread.



Collecting Posts

On the **Thread Detail** page, you can read one post at a time. To read multiple posts from the same page, use the **Collect** function. Once posts are collected, you can filter, sort, print, and tag them.

The **Collect** function is also available from the forum page, where you can gather all the posts made to different threads.

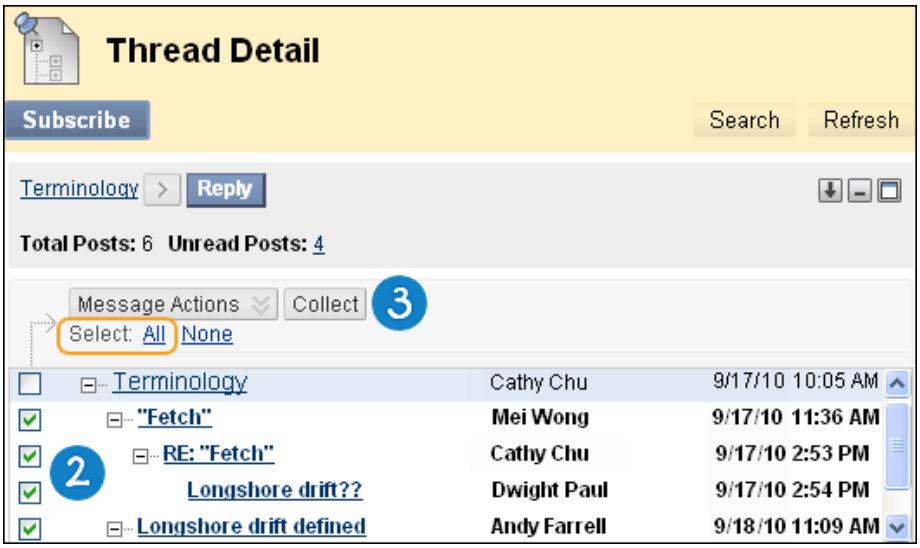
Example

A student posts a question to request help and seven classmates reply. The student can collect the initial post and the replies on one **Collection** page to read or print.

QUICK STEPS: Collecting Posts

1. Access a forum and select a thread.
2. On the **Thread Detail** page, select the check boxes of the posts to collect. If a post has replies and you want them to appear on the **Collection** page, click the plus sign to expand the post and select the check boxes for those messages.

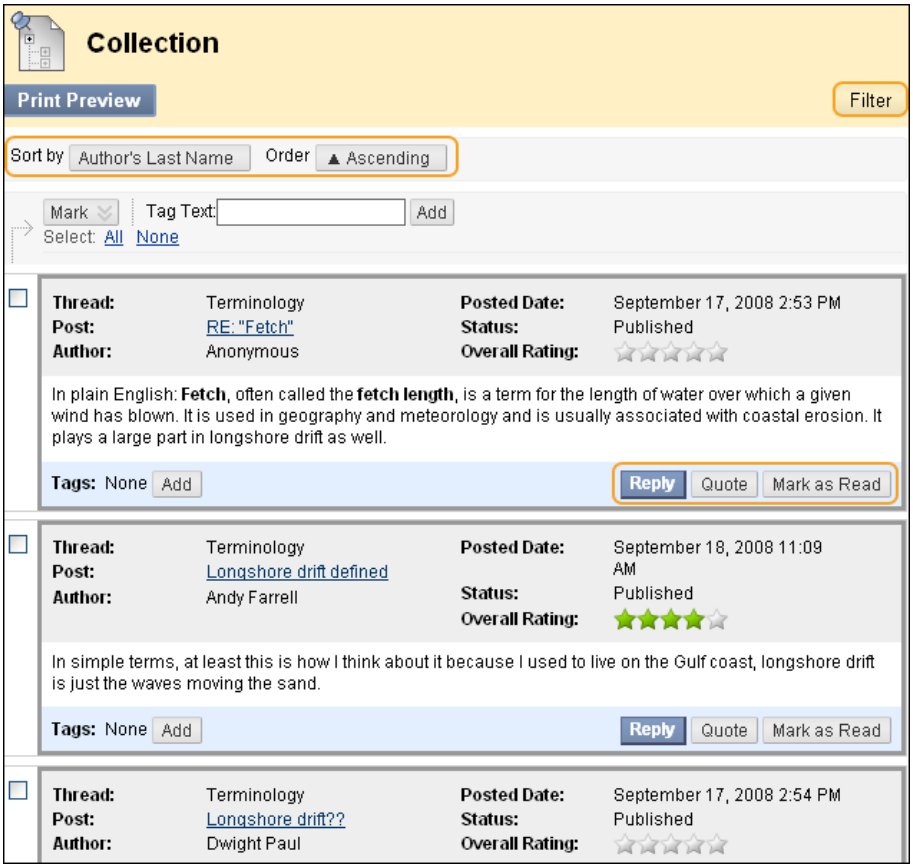
   Note: To select all the posts in a thread, click **Select: All** above the message list. All check boxes for all the posts are selected whether they are expanded or collapsed.
3. On the Action Bar, click **Collect**.



Result

On the **Collection** page, you can read and print the results. On the Action Bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists on the Action Bar. Sort options for messages include the following:

- Author's Last Name
- Author's First Name
- Subject
- Date of Last Post
- Thread Order
- Overall Rating, if the forum settings include rating posts



On this page, you can also reply to posts and mark messages read or unread. Click the **Quote** function to include the post's text as part of your reply. To view the responses to a post, click the post's hyperlinked title to navigate to the **Thread Detail** page.

Filtering Collected Posts

To narrow your results or sort a collection, you can use the **Filter** function. If you print the posts after filtering, they print in the order they appear on the page.

Note: If the author or authors of some posts are no longer enrolled in the course, the posts may appear out of order.

QUICK STEPS: Filtering Collected Posts

1. On the **Collection** page, click the **Filter** function on the Action Bar to expand the field and select options from the following drop-down lists:
    - **Author**: Select All or select an author.
    - **Status**: Show All or select a status.
    - **Read Status**: Select Show All, Read, or Unread posts.
    - **Tags**: Show All tags or select a tag. Tags are text labels that act like bookmarks. Tagging is discussed later in the workshop.
2. Click **Go** to apply the selections. You can further organize the results using the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists.
3. Click the **X** to close the **Filter** field.

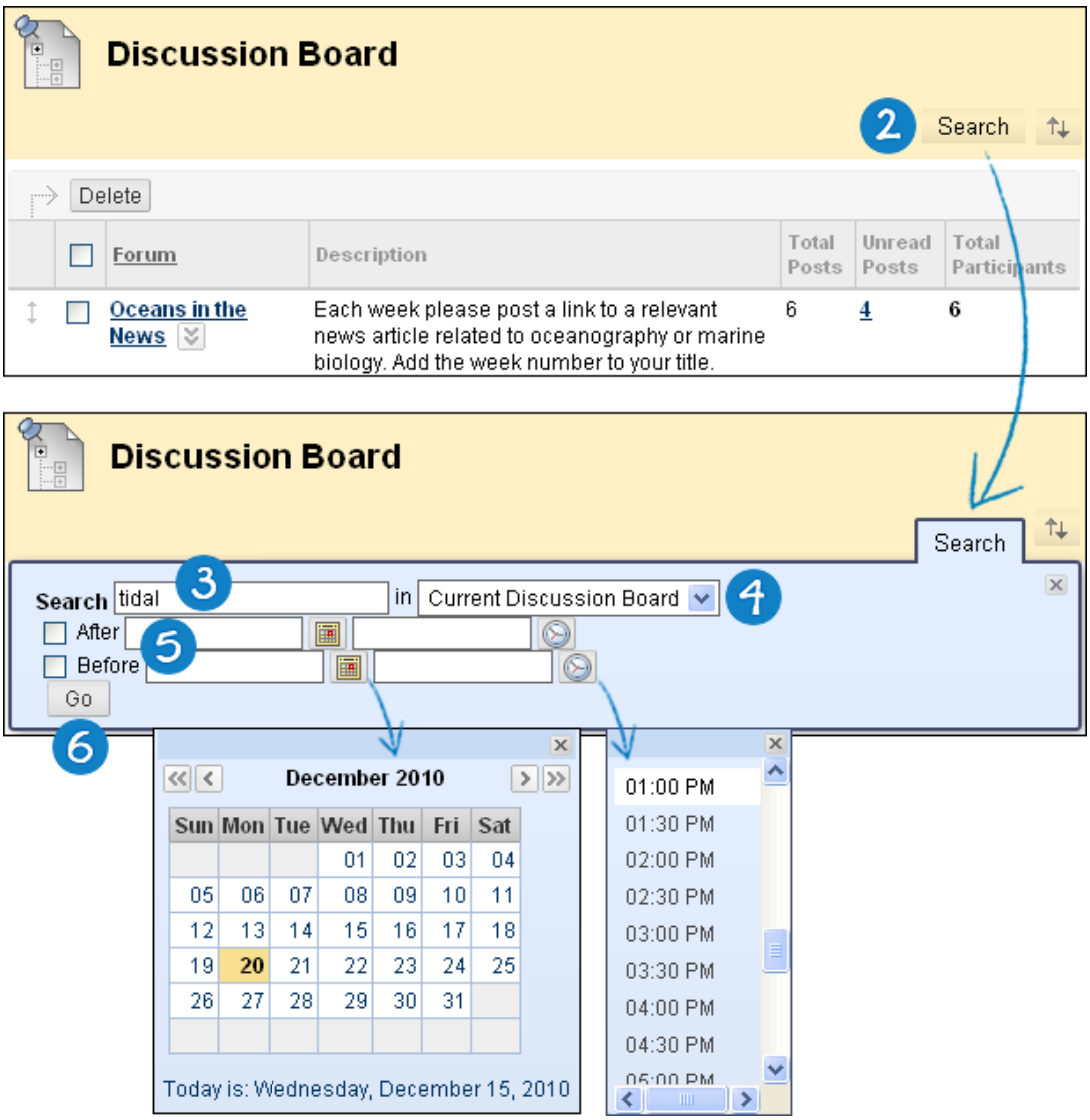
Searching Posts

You can search for specific text—a phrase, word, or part of a word—in the Discussion Board. The results appear on a **Search Results** page.

QUICK STEPS: Searching Posts

1. Access the Discussion Board, a forum, or a thread.
2. On the Action Bar, click **Search**. The **Search** field expands.
3. Type a search criterion in the **Search** box.
4. In the drop-down list, select an area to search:
    - **Current Discussion Board**
    - **All Forums in Course**
    - **Current Forum**
    - **Current Thread**

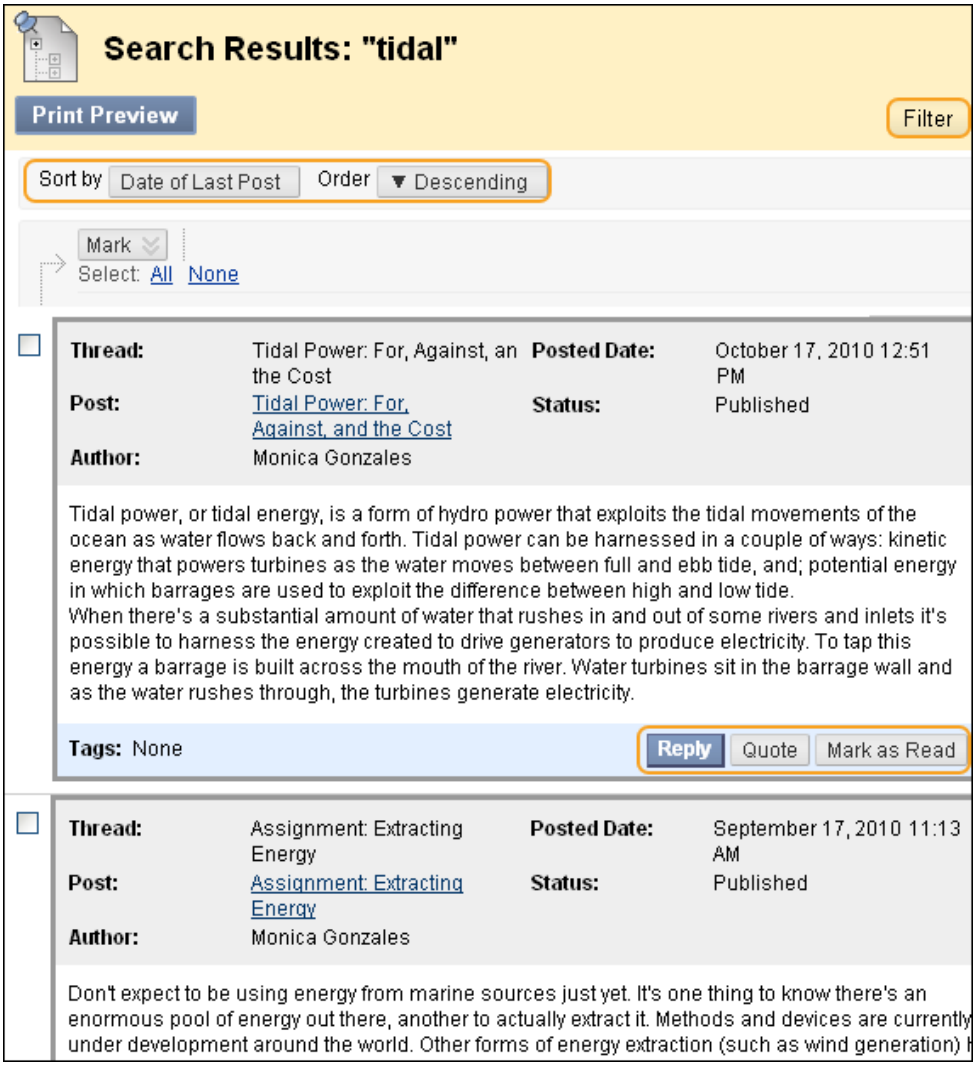
    Note: The options in the drop-down list depend on where your search began. **All Forums in Course** includes any Group Discussion Boards in your course. Students do not see results from Group Discussion Boards unless they are members of that group.
5. To further narrow your search results, select the **After** and **Before** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times.
6. Click **Go**.


Discussion Board
2
Search
Delete
Forum
Description
Total Posts
Unread Posts
Total Participants
Oceans in the News
Each week please post a link to a relevant news article related to oceanography or marine biology. Add the week number to your title.
6
4
6
Discussion Board
Search
Search
tidal
3
in
Current Discussion Board
4
After
5
Before
Go
6
December 2010
Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
01 02 03 04
05 06 07 08 09 10 11
12 13 14 15 16 17 18
19 20 21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30 31
Today is: Wednesday, December 15, 2010
01:00 PM
01:30 PM
02:00 PM
02:30 PM
03:00 PM
03:30 PM
04:00 PM
04:30 PM

Result

On the **Search Results** page, you can read and print the results. On the Action Bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists on the Action Bar.

On this page, you can also reply to posts and mark messages read or unread. Click the **Quote** function to include the post's text as part of your reply. To view the responses to a post, click the post's hyperlinked title to navigate to the **Thread Detail** page.



Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course and access the Discussion Board.

Icebreaker forum

- Create a new thread with your name as the title. In the message, introduce yourself. Include one or two details about your life to share with the class.
- Navigate through other threads.
- Reply to a post.

Scavenger Hunt forum

- Navigate through the posts.
- Collect some interesting posts and use the **Sort** and **Filter** features.

Ellis Island forum

- Navigate through the posts and rate them.

Best Practice: Set Etiquette Guidelines

At the beginning of an online course, it is a good idea to establish guidelines for discussion etiquette. As you complete the hands-on activities, keep these guidelines in mind. Later, during development of your online course, consider sharing these guidelines with your students.

Be thoughtful

- Include something new in your reply. For example, include more than "I do not agree" or "Good point."
- State why you agree or disagree. Be considerate of the points made by others.

Be concise

- Keep posts short. Include web addresses or attachments where necessary.

Stay on the topic

- Make sure your message fits within the general topic of the forum. If it does not, look for a suitable forum.

Include a descriptive subject

- Make threads easy to follow by using accurate and descriptive subject lines.

Create new threads as needed

- If your message will take the current thread's topic in a new direction, start a new thread.

Use plain English

- Use simple, conversational, uncomplicated language. Remember, your audience is reading on-screen and may have several messages to read. Also, English may not be the first language of all participants.

3.0 Creating Discussions

In this section, we will turn to the instructor role and learn to create discussion forums and threads. You can create forums and threads to organize discussions into units or topics relevant to the course.

As you create forums, select the appropriate settings based on the pedagogical goals for your course:

- Evaluate student performance by grading forums and threads.
- Use the **Moderation Queue** and rating features to ensure quality postings and to assist with the workload.
- Allow anonymous posting and thread editing to encourage forthright discourse and increase student participation.

To help students stay connected with Discussion Board content, you can enable email alerts and add a Discussion Board link alongside content in the course.

If you have created groups in your course, you can enable the Group Discussion Board. Group members are allowed to create their own forums and threads, and apply the settings to fit their needs.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

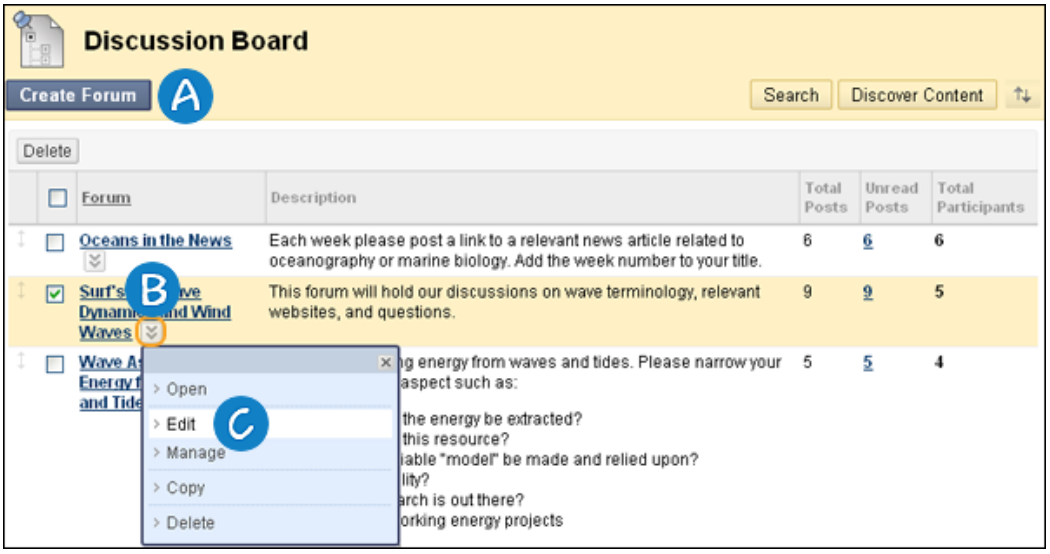
- Explain the difference between the student and instructor views of the Discussion Board.
- Create discussion forums and threads, selecting forum settings based on pedagogical goals.
- Set grading options for forums and threads.
- Explain ways to organize the Discussion Board.
- Enable email subscriptions to forums and threads.
- Add a forum to a course area.
- Describe techniques for crafting effective questions and encouraging participation.

The Discussion Board

Instructors have the same Discussion Board functions as students, with these additional functions:

- Create forums
- Edit forum settings
- Grade forums
- Manage forum roles
- Copy forums
- Delete forums

Instructor's View of the Discussion Board



A. **Create Forum**: Click to create a new forum and select settings.

B. Action Link ( ): Click to access the contextual menu.

C. Contextual menu: Select an option.

Creating Forums

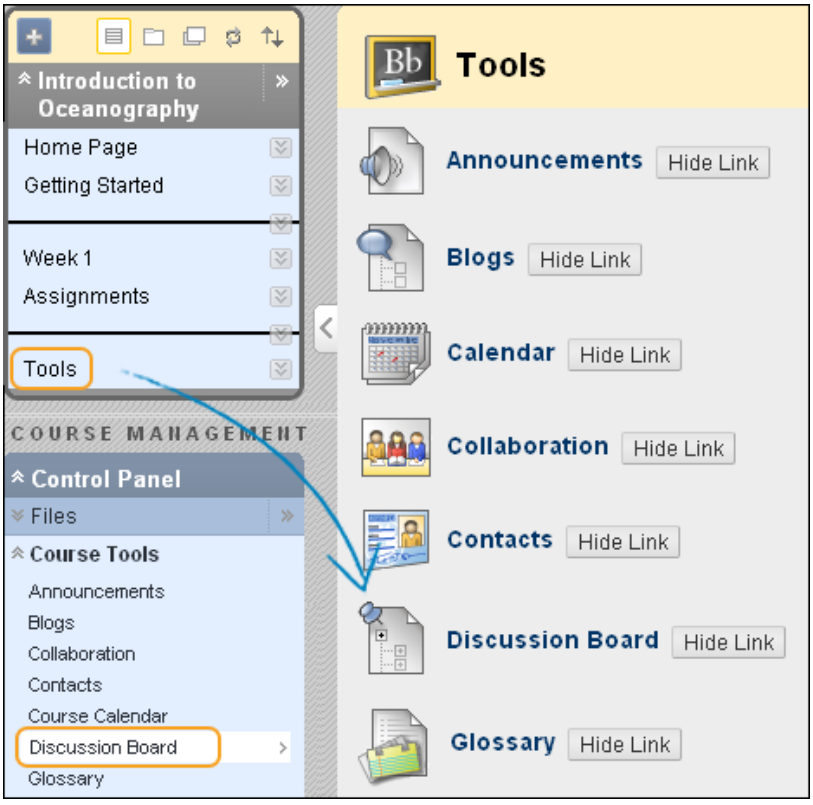
Forum settings allow you to use the Discussion Board in different ways. For example, to control a forum, an instructor creates all threads, and moderates and grades the posts. For a student-led discussion, allow students to create new threads with the option of posting anonymously.

QUICK STEPS: Creating Forums

1. On the Course Menu, click the **Tools** link. On the **Tools** page, select **Discussion Board**.

   -OR-

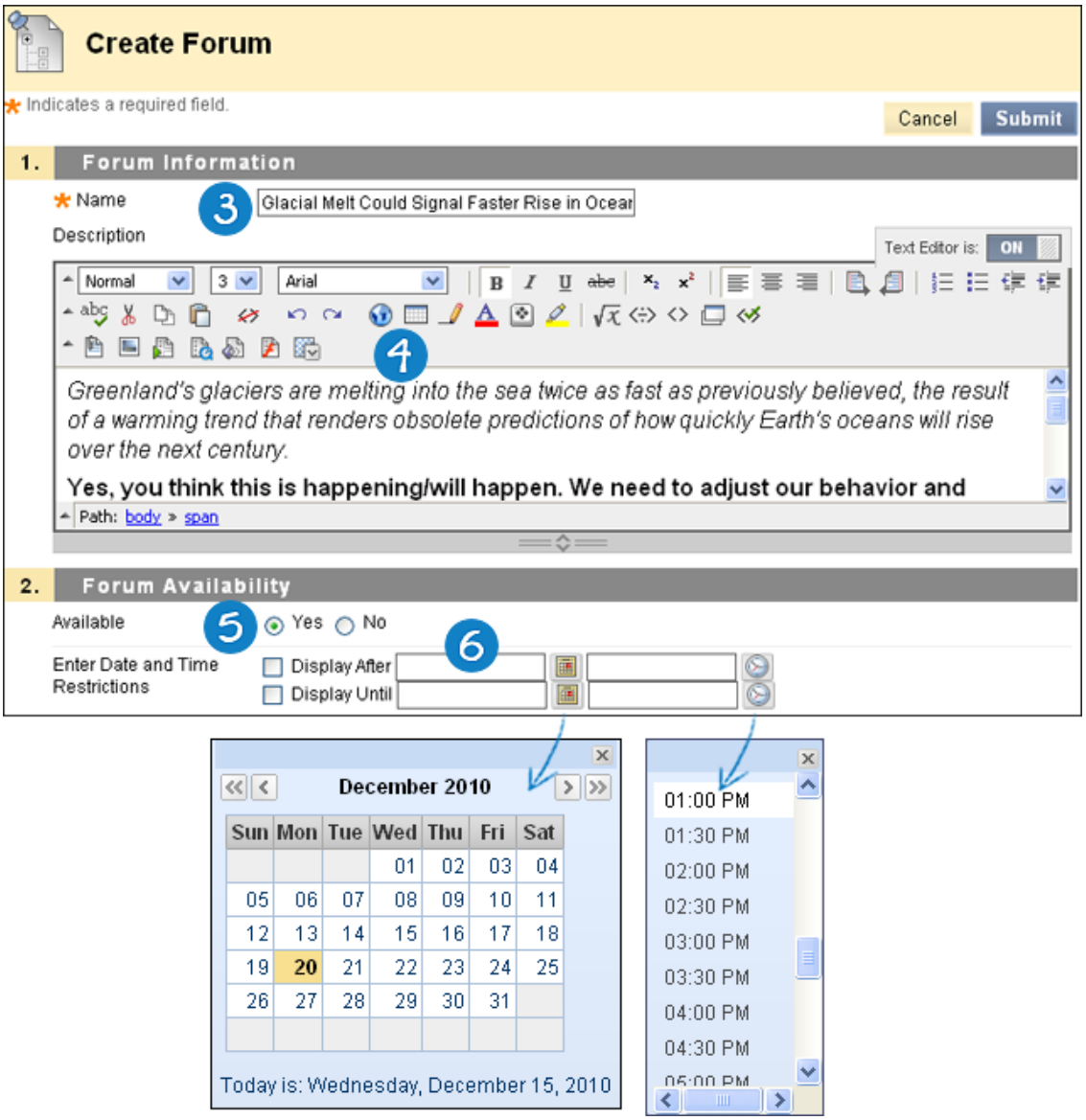
   On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section and select **Discussion Board**.



2. On the **Discussion Board** page, click **Create Forum** on the Action Bar.

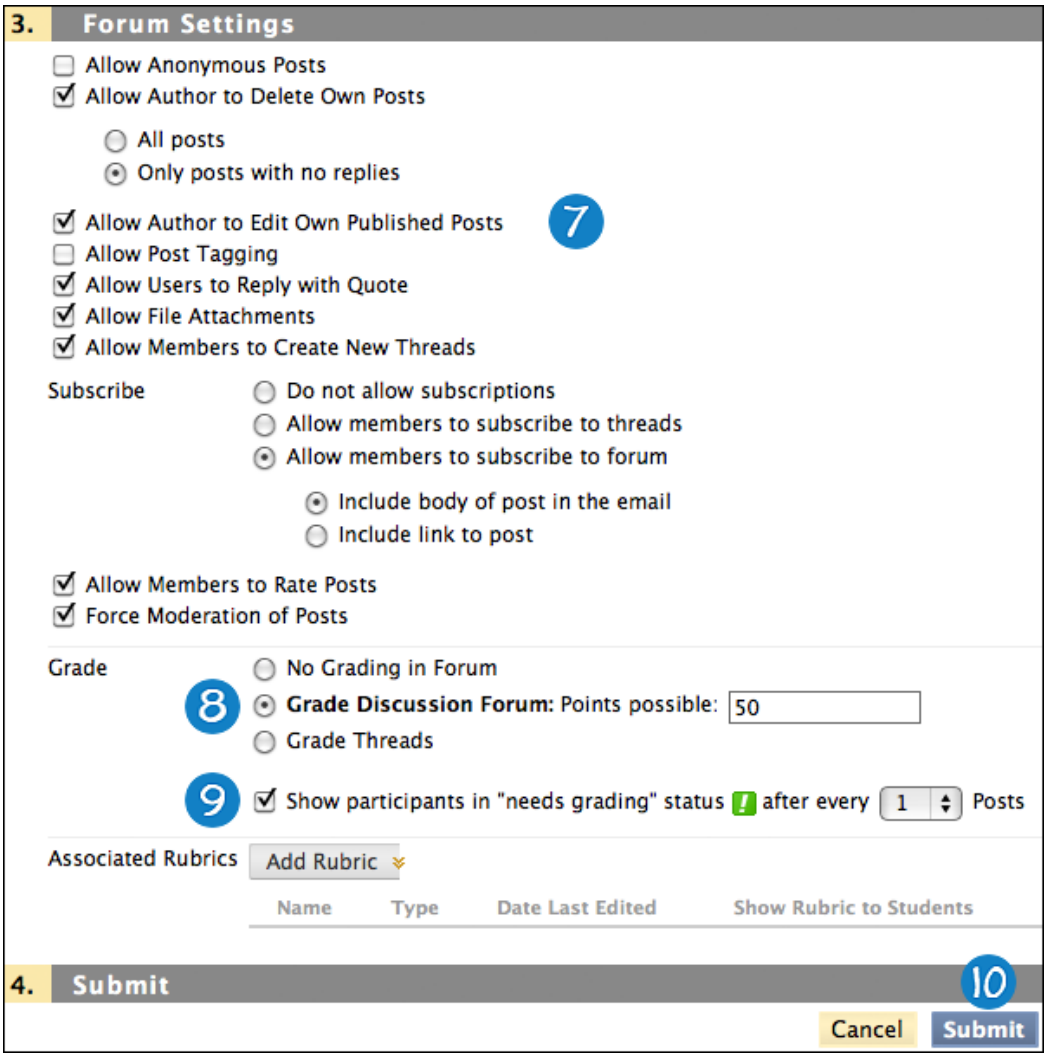
3. On the **Create Forum** page, type a **Name**. Users click this name to access the forum.
4. Optionally, type instructions or a description in the **Description** box. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder. Attachments uploaded using the Text Editor can be launched in a new window and can include alternate text to describe the attachment. The **Description** appears below the forum name on the **Discussion Board** page.
5. In the **Forum Availability** section, select **Yes** to make the forum available to users.

   Tip: You can create forums ahead of time and set the availability to **No** until the discussion is ready to start.
6. For **Enter Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set forums to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times or type dates and times in the boxes. Display restrictions do not affect the forum availability, only when it appears.



7. Select the **Forum Settings** based on your pedagogical requirements. For example, if you are grading posts and want to retain the posts as they were at the time of grading, do NOT select **Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts**. To learn more about how you can use forum settings to meet your requirements, see the "Suggestions for Settings" list at the end of this topic.
8. Select a grading option:
    - **No Grading in the Forum**
    - **Grade Discussion Forum**: Select to grade overall participation in the forum. Type the **Points possible**. A column is created automatically in the Grade Center.

- **Grade Threads**: Select to grade individual threads in the forum. If threads are graded, members cannot create new threads or respond anonymously. As you create threads, you decide whether to grade the thread and provide the **Points possible**. A column for each graded thread is created automatically in the Grade Center.



9. If you chose to grade the forum or threads, you can determine when posts go into needs grading status. Select the check box for **Show participants in needs grading status** and select the number of posts from the drop-down list. Applying this setting displays the **Needs Grading** icon ( ) in the Grade Center and places the posts in the queue on the **Needs Grading** page after the specified number of posts are made by each user. If you select a grading option and do NOT select the check box, the **Needs Grading** icon does not appear in the Grade Center and posts do not appear on the **Needs Grading** page.

Note: If you choose three posts from the drop-down list and a user submits two, the **In Progress** icon ( ) appears in the Grade Center cell and the Discussion Board until the specified number of posts is met.

10. Click **Submit**. The new forum appears at the bottom of the list.

You can create and associate one or more rubrics for grading discussion posts. To learn more, see the *Using Rubrics* manual. The grading process is explained in the "Grading Discussions" section of this workshop.

Suggestions for Settings

The following list describes the settings you can select for various types of forum requirements.

- If you want to create effective social forums, select the **Allow Anonymous Posts** and **No Grading in Forum** options. Allowing students to post anonymously is important at the beginning of a course when they are still becoming comfortable with discussions. If quality is a concern, assign a Moderator to review each post before it is made public. To learn about moderating the Discussion Board, see the "Moderating Discussions" section of this workshop.
- If you want to create forums where students have control of the discussion, allow them to edit, delete, and rate posts. Also, you can allow students to create new threads and direct the discussion.
- If you want to have a tightly controlled forum, select the **Force Moderation of Posts** and **Grade Discussion Forum** or **Grade Threads** options.
- When you want your students to focus on the existing threads, do not select **Allow Members to Create New Threads**.
- If you allow authors to edit their published posts, consider locking the thread when you are ready to grade. Students cannot change locked posts after they are graded.
- You cannot select some settings in combination. For example, if you are grading forums or threads, anonymous posts are not allowed. Also, if thread grading is enabled, members cannot create new threads.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C answers a question about encouraging discussion participation. Dr. C is our Blackboard Learn expert.

Your question	**Dr. C's reply**
What can I do to encourage participation?	You can encourage participation by selecting the following options when creating a forum: • **Allow Author to Delete and Edit Own Published Posts**: Especially in graded forums or threads, students appreciate the option of being able to edit their contributions. • **Allow Anonymous Posts**: This is especially important at the beginning of the course when students are still becoming comfortable with discussions. If quality is a concern, assign a Moderator to review each post before it is made public.

Creating Threads

Once in a forum, you can start new threads to begin a conversation. A thread includes the initial post and any replies to it. When creating a forum, you have the option of allowing or not allowing members to start threads. Generally, the purpose of the forum dictates whether or not members can start threads. A moderated, graded forum used to evaluate student performance is usually tightly controlled, and members cannot create threads. Other forums are designed for members to share opinions and thoughts on tangential or unrelated topics. In this case, it is safe to allow members to create threads and spark discussions.

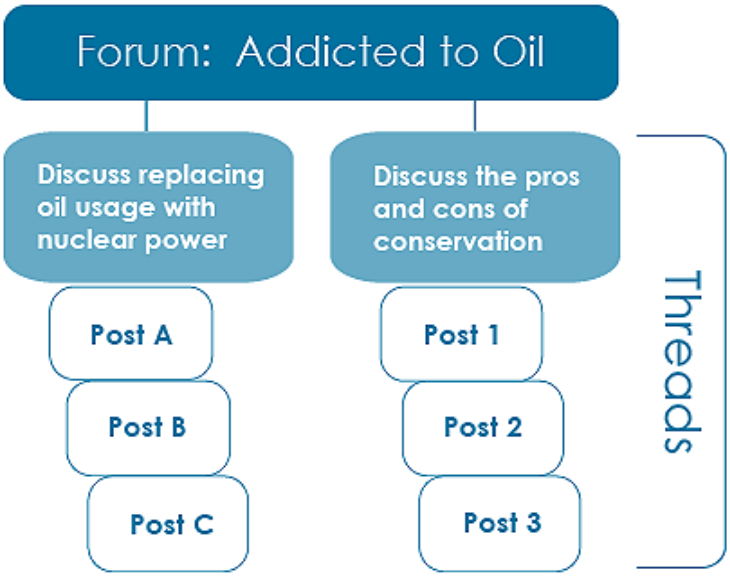
You can change the status of existing threads and determine which threads appear in a forum to help organize your view.

Note: Instructors and students create threads in the same way. If you enabled thread grading, you decide which threads will be graded as you create or edit them. Grading and rating discussion posts is not available with a Basic License.

Suggestions for Organizing Discussions

Example

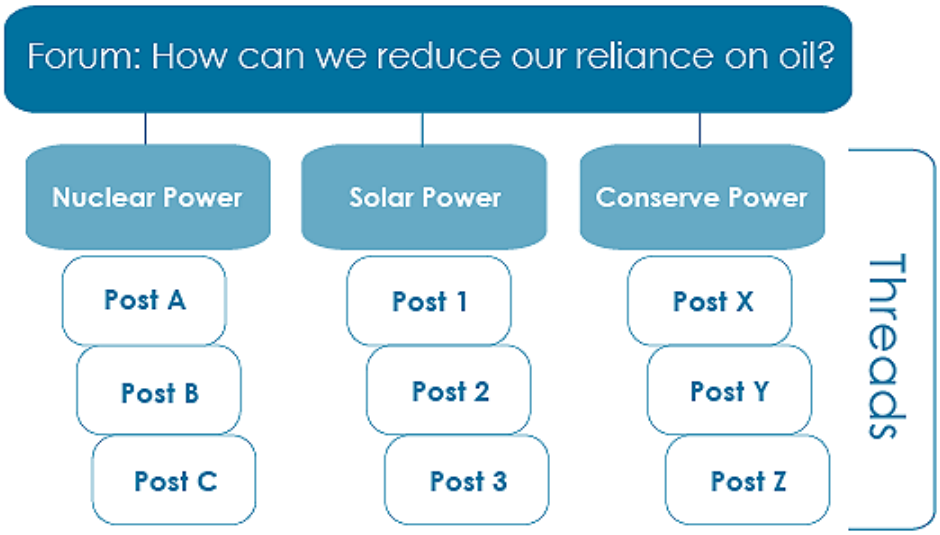
You create a forum that addresses a broad subject, such as "Addicted to Oil." Next, create two threads containing the specific issues to be discussed, such as replacing oil usage with nuclear power, and the pros and cons of conservation. To ensure students post only to existing threads, consider disallowing thread creation in the forum settings.



Example

You create a forum and ask a question or provide the instructions or details in the description, such as "How can we reduce our reliance on oil?" Then, students create threads for each solution to the problem of oil addiction. All members post to existing threads to comment on given answers or create new threads to present new solutions. In the forum settings, ensure you have selected the **Allow Members to Create New Threads** option.

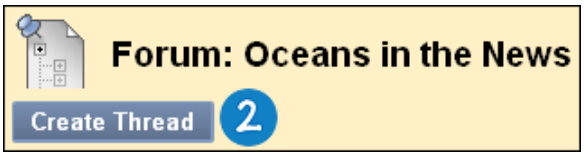
Note: If thread grading is enabled, members cannot create new threads.



QUICK STEPS: Creating Threads

In the following example, a graded thread is created.

1. Access a Discussion Board forum.
2. On the Action Bar, click **Create Thread**.



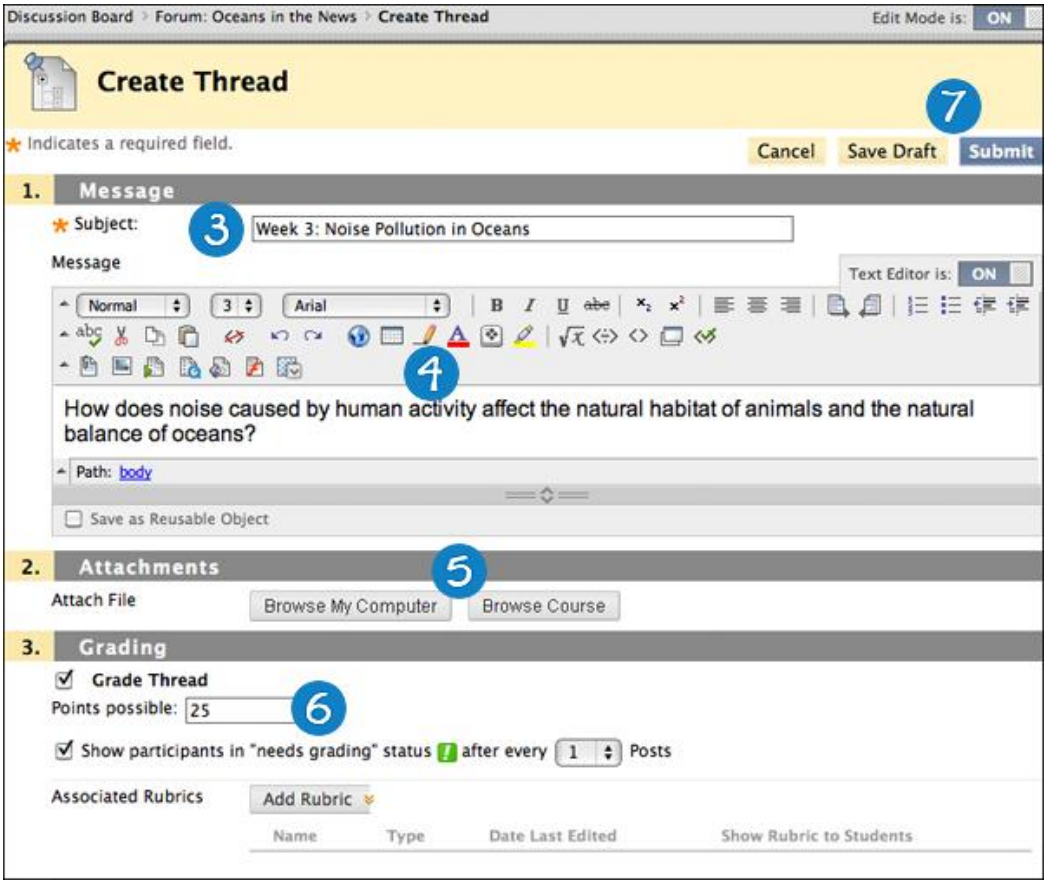
3. On the **Create Thread** page, type a **Subject**.
4. Type instructions, a description, or a question in the **Message** box. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder. Attachments uploaded using the Text Editor can be launched in a new window and can include alternate text to describe the attachment.
5. Alternatively, in the **Attachments** section, attach a file using one of the following options:
    - To upload a file from your computer, click **Browse My Computer**.
    - To upload a file from the course's storage repository:
        - If Course Files is the course's storage repository, click **Browse Course**.

          -OR-
        - If your school licenses content management, click **Browse Content Collection**.

          Note: Files uploaded by students are not saved in the course repository.
6. If you chose to grade threads when you created the forum, you decide on a thread-by-thread basis whether to grade a thread. In the **Grading** section, select the **Grade Thread** check box and type **Points possible**. You can determine when posts go into needs grading status by selecting the check box for **Show participants in needs grading status** and selecting the number of posts from the drop-down list. Applying this setting displays the **Needs Grading** icon ( ) in the Grade Center and places the posts in the queue on the **Needs Grading** page after the specified number of posts are made by each user. If you do NOT select the check box, the **Needs Grading** icon does not appear in the Grade Center and posts do not appear on the **Needs Grading** page.

Note: If you choose three posts from the drop-down list and a user submits two, the **In Progress** icon ( ) appears in the Grade Center cell and the Discussion Board until the specified number of posts is met.

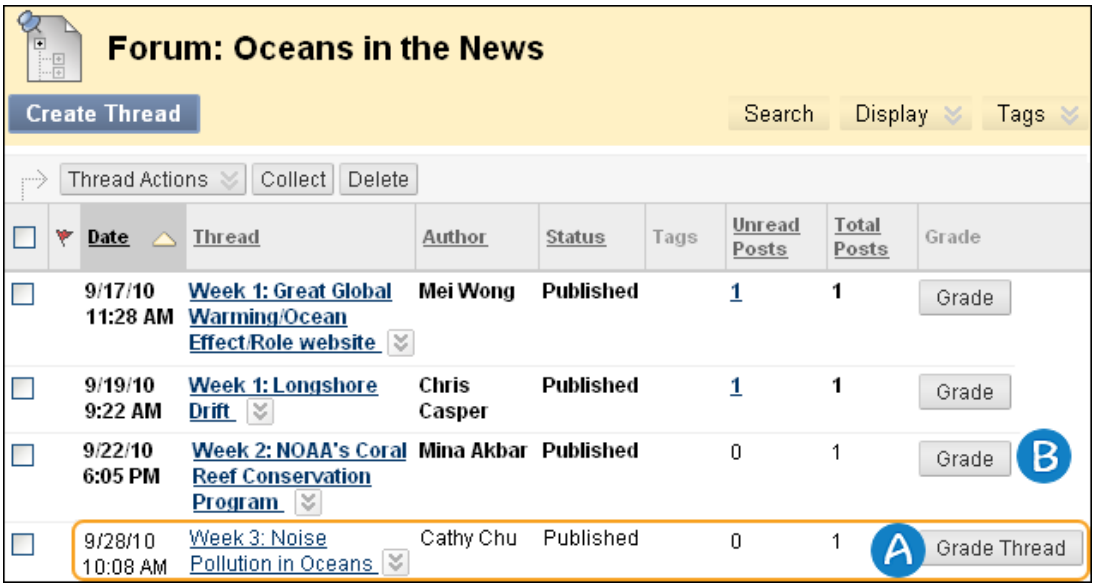
7. Click **Save Draft** to store a draft of the post or click **Submit** to create the thread.



You can create and associate one or more rubrics for grading discussion posts. To learn more, see the *Using Rubrics* manual. The grading process is explained in the "Grading Discussions" section of this workshop.

Result

The newly created thread appears in the forum. If you enabled grading, two functions appear in the **Grade** column.



A. Click **Grade Thread** to evaluate the posts.

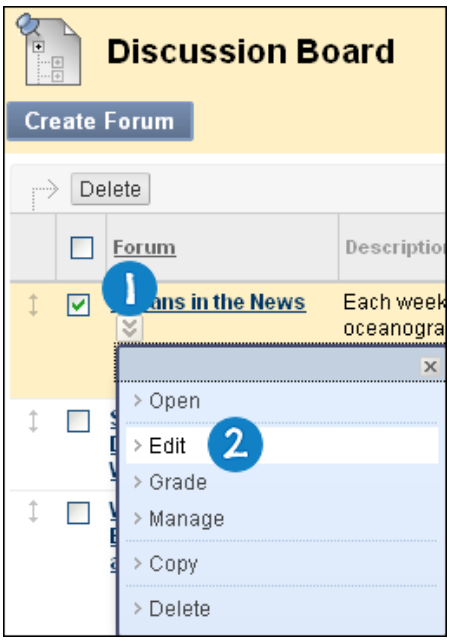
B. Click **Grade** to enable grading for a thread and assign a value.

Allowing Email Alerts for New Discussion Posts

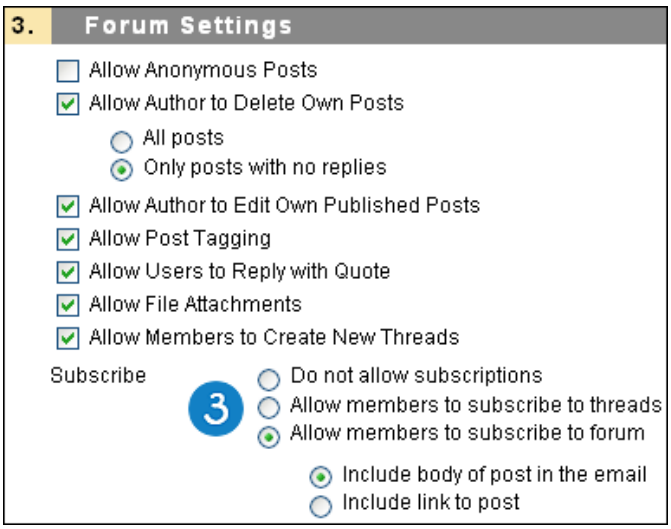
When you enable email subscription, students can receive email alerts for new posts or replies. You can allow students to subscribe to an entire forum or to specific threads within a forum. You select the options for subscriptions to forums or threads when the forum is created or when the forum settings are edited.

QUICK STEPS: Allowing Email Subscriptions

1. Access the Discussion Board and click a forum's Action Link ( ) to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Edit**.



3. On the **Edit Forum** page, in the **Forum Settings** section, select the **Subscribe** options:
    - **Allow members to subscribe to threads** allows users to select specific threads within the forum.
    - **Allow members to subscribe to forum** allows subscription to all threads within the forum.
    - **Include body of post in the email** displays the message text and a link to reply to the message in the email notification.
    - **Include link to post** displays a link to the message in the email notification.
4. Click **Submit**.


3.
Forum Settings
Allow Anonymous Posts
Allow Author to Delete Own Posts
All posts
Only posts with no replies
Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts
Allow Post Tagging
Allow Users to Reply with Quote
Allow File Attachments
Allow Members to Create New Threads
Subscribe
3
Do not allow subscriptions
Allow members to subscribe to threads
Allow members to subscribe to forum
Include body of post in the email
Include link to post

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Create discussion forums for the following scenarios:

Scenario 1

- Create a forum titled **Introductions** where students can share details about themselves—where they are from, their field of study, their favorite movie, and so on.
- Instruct students to create their own threads with their names as the titles. Encourage students to post replies.

Scenario 2

- Create a forum for discussing current issues in your subject area. Decide whether you want to grade by forum or by thread, and select forum settings accordingly. Allow students to edit, but not delete, their own posts.
- Within the forum, create several threads for specific subjects.

Adding a Forum to a Course Area

You can incorporate discussion forums into course areas to immerse the user in the learning experience. For example, you can add a link to the entire Discussion Board or a specific discussion forum in any Content Area, Learning Module, Lesson Plan, or folder.

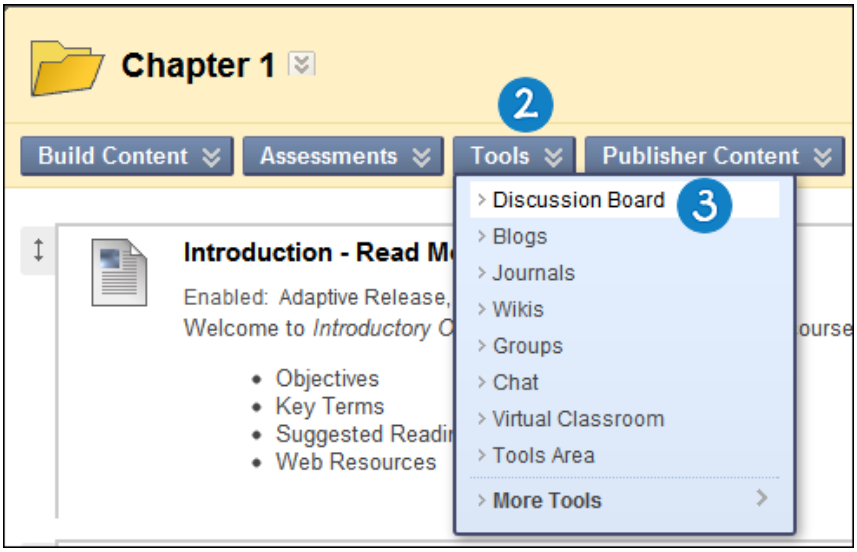
Example

In a Content Area, you can add a forum link following lecture notes to gather questions on the material presented -OR- after an assignment to gather students' perceptions on how they did. You can add Adaptive Release or date availability restrictions to limit students' access. Then, they must access content in a specified order, such as reading a lecture file before adding posts to the Discussion Board.

Note: You need to create forums before you can link to them in your course.

QUICK STEPS: Add a Discussion Forum to a Course Area

1. Access the Content Area, Learning Module, Lesson Plan, or folder where you want to link to the Discussion Board or forum. Ensure **Edit Mode** is **ON**.
2. On the Action Bar, point to **Tools** to access the drop-down list.
3. Select **Discussion Board**.



4. On the **Create Link: Discussion Board** page, select the **Link to Discussion Board Page** option to link to the Discussion Board itself.

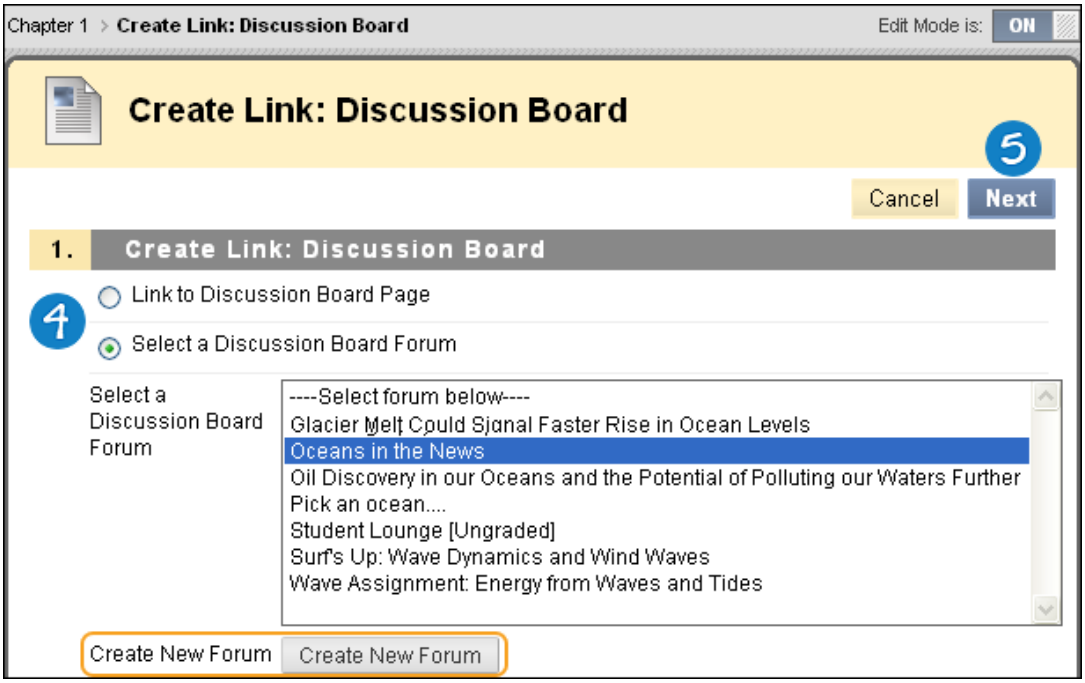
   -OR-

   Select the **Select a Discussion Board Forum** option and select a forum from the list.

   -OR-

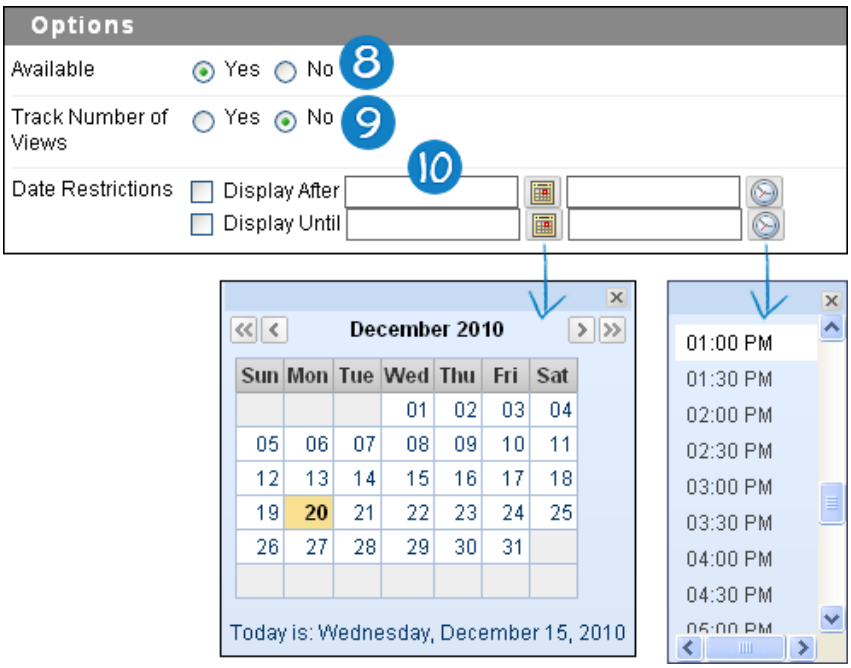
   Click **Create New Forum** to add a link to a forum you create at this time. You select all forum settings at the time of creation. The newly created forum appears in the list of forums to choose from when adding the link in your course.

5. Click **Next**.

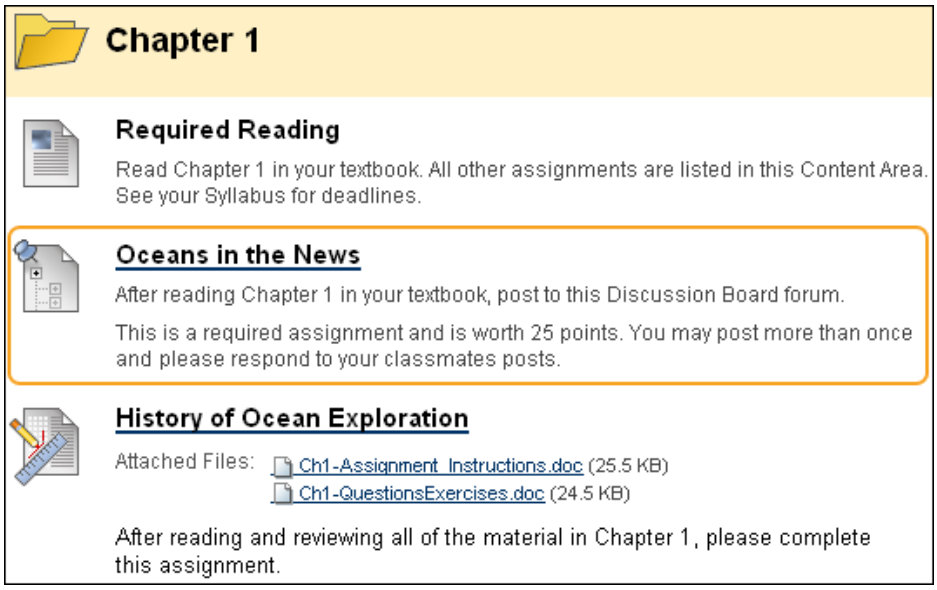


6. On the next **Create Link: Discussion Board** page, type a **Link Name**. The name cannot exceed 50 characters. Students click the name to access the Discussion Board or forum.
7. Optionally, type instructions or a description in the **Text** box. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.
8. Select **Yes** for the **Available** option.

9. For the **Track Number of Views** option, select **Yes** or **No**. If you enable tracking, the number of times the link is viewed, when it is viewed, and by whom is recorded.
10. For **Date Restrictions**, you can set the link to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-**up Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the availability of the Discussion Board or forum content, only when it appears.



11. Click **Submit**.



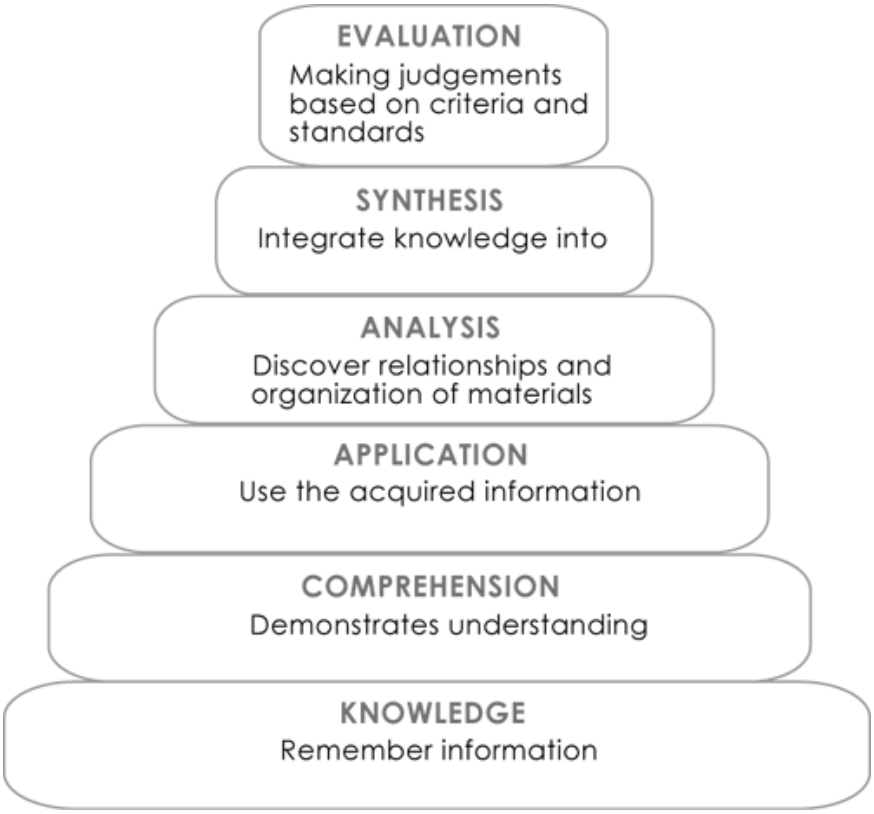
Student view of a forum link in a Content Area

Best Practice: Crafting Effective Questions

As research indicates, the quality of the first post in a thread influences the thought level of subsequent postings.[2] A carefully worded discussion question is perhaps the most important factor in using discussions to satisfy your learning objectives.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy can be useful in determining what type of question to develop, as well as how to word it. In this classification system, the least complex level, information recall, resides at the bottom of the pyramid as a knowledge base. At the top, evaluation, synthesis, and analysis require the most complex and abstract thinking. Discussions, along with creative assignments and group work, are for higher order thinking.



[2] Meyer, K. A. "The Ebb and Flow of Online Discussions: What Bloom Can Tell Us About Our Students' Conversations." JALN 9.1(2005) Web. 2 Feb. 2006.

Essential and Guiding Questions

Essential and guiding questions may also draw out higher order thinking.

- Essential questions require skills, such as analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating. Answers to essential questions cannot be readily found on the Internet and copied; they must have personal meaning and insight constructed by the student.[3]
- Guiding questions help students answer the essential question. These questions are subcategories of the main topic and may tap into lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Ideas for Guiding Questions

Guiding questions can be developed and used in a number of ways:

- Students can work in small groups to develop their own guiding questions to help them answer the essential question.
- The instructor can start with guiding questions and lead up to the essential question through the course of the discussion.
- The instructor can include them with the initial post to help students get started.
- The instructor can interject guiding questions when a lull occurs.

Example

Essential Question: How would you design the perfect online instructor?

Guiding Questions:

- What assumptions do you hold about teaching effectiveness?
- How would you assess an instructor's performance?
- Identify a list of traits that describe the qualification of perfect. Think about your own experiences as a student.
- List traits you would avoid in designing the perfect instructor.

[3] McKenzie, J. "Framing Essential Questions." Technology Connection 6.1 (1996). Web. 19 Jan. 2006.

4.0 Moderating Discussions

In this section, we will examine the art and science of moderating discussions to maintain discussion activity throughout the term. Without vigilance on the your part, even discussions starting out with ample excitement can dwindle as the term progresses.

The **art of moderating** involves finding the right balance between guiding the conversation and standing back to allow students to discover new ideas.

The **science of moderating** involves using the Discussion Board functions to keep students focused on relevant discussions and to determine a student's level of access.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Describe techniques for moderating discussions.
- List steps to developing successful online discussions.
- Describe the forum roles and assign users to roles.
- Use the Moderation Queue to monitor discussion posts and distribute the workload.
- Describe thread status options and identify situations when it is appropriate to change the status.

The Art of Moderating

As an online instructor, your role is to facilitate the conversation and exchange of ideas on the Discussion Board. You need to ensure that students feel comfortable to share, while also monitoring responses and keeping everyone focused and on track. At the same time, you want to be careful not to dominate or impede the flow of the discussion.

Here are some suggestions for finding the right balance between guiding the conversation and leading it:

- Ask probing questions that lead to other perspectives or ask for clarification.
- Do not respond to every student post or rush to fill silences. If given the opportunity, students will contribute rather than depend on you for answers. However, engage students when lulls occur.
- Redirect tangents to the appropriate topic.
- Reinforce authors whose posts meet expectations.
- Acknowledge efforts by those taking brave steps outside of their comfort zones.
- Reply privately when dealing with individual issues or online behavior.

Four Steps to Developing Successful Online Discussions

The following table lists four steps and examples for developing successful online discussions.

Steps	Examples
Define participation requirements	Students need to be aware of your expectations. Create a forum where students can read about etiquette and grading rubrics.
Craft an effective question	Avoid phrasing the question so it can be answered with a yes or no. Instead, phrase the question so it provokes thought and research. Use the Mashups feature to include images, videos, and slide presentations. Students can also include Mashups in their replies.
Encourage new ideas	If discussion postings contain too much agreement and not enough questioning of ideas, try assigning students with the last names A–M to support one side and N–Z to support the other.
Moderate	Establish your presence by asking for clarification, resources, or input from silent participants.

Assigning Forum Roles

In a forum, each user has a forum role and can only have one role per forum. By default, instructors have the role of Manager and students have the role of Participant.

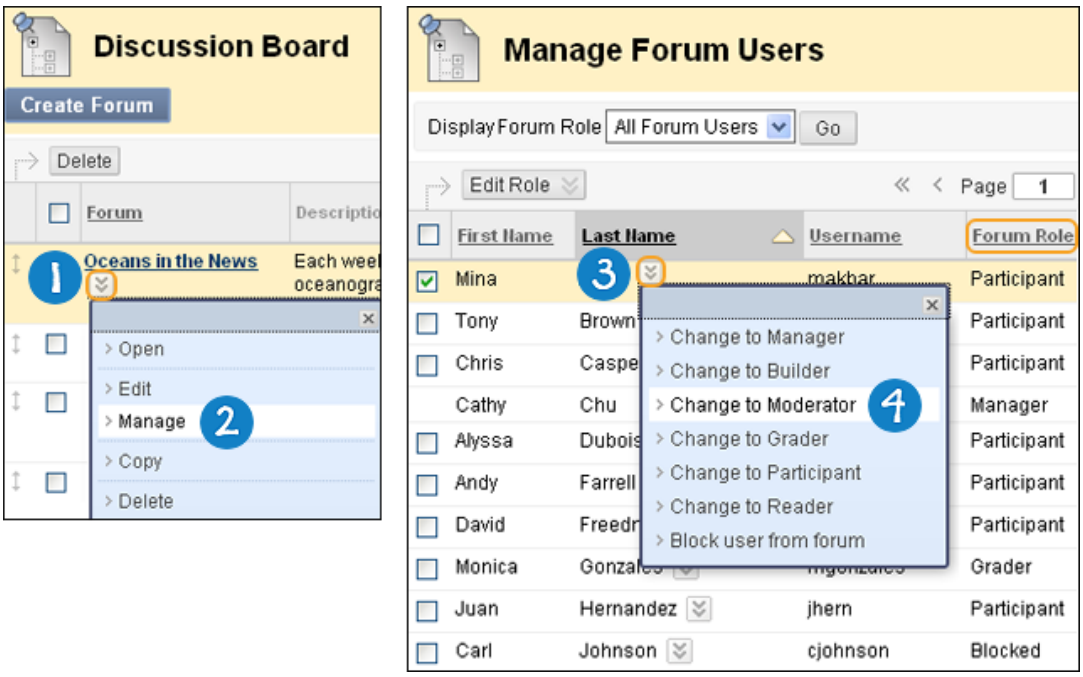
Note: The Blackboard administrator at your school determines which course roles are available.

You can assign forum roles to limit access to a forum or to help with forum administration. When you are logged in as an instructor, you cannot change your own forum role.

QUICK STEPS: Assigning Forum Roles

1. Click a forum's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Manage**.
3. On the **Manage Forum Users** page, a list of users appears. Click a user's Action Link to access the contextual menu.

   Tip: If you want to show only one role at a time, make a selection in the **Display Forum Role** drop-down list on the Action Bar and click **Go**.
4. Select a new forum role. The new role appears in the **Forum Role** column for the user.
5. Click **OK** to return to the Discussion Board. Alternatively, click the forum title in the breadcrumbs to return to the forum.



Tip: To change multiple roles at one time, select the users' check boxes and, point to **Edit Role** on the Action Bar to access the drop-down list. Select the check box in the header row to select all users.

To limit a user's access to a forum, assign the **Reader** or **Block user from forum** role. The roles and their permissions are listed in the following table.

Role	Permissions
Participant	• Participants can read and reply to posts. • Users with a course role of Student are granted this role by default.
Reader	• Readers can read the contents of a forum, but cannot post responses or add threads.
Blocked (Block user from forum)	• Blocked users cannot access the forum.

To assist with forum administration, assign users any of the roles listed in the following table.

Role	Permissions
Moderator	• Moderators can delete, edit, and lock all posts in any forum, even if the forum does not use the Moderation Queue. • If a Moderation Queue is used, the Moderator approves or rejects posts in the queue before they are made available to all users. • Users with a course role of Instructor or Course Builder are granted this forum role by default.
Grader	• Graders can read, reply to, and grade posts. The Grader role has some access to the Grade Center. Graders cannot view their own work. • Users with a course role of Grader are granted this forum role by default.
Manager	• Manager have full control over the forum and can change the forum settings, moderate posts, and assign roles and grades. • Users with a course role of Instructor or Teaching Assistant are granted this role by default.
Builder	• Course Builders can edit, copy, and delete forums, but not grade or manage forums. Inside a forum, the Builder can perform the same actions on posts as an instructor, with the exception of grading threads. • Course Builders can create new threads in a forum. • Course Builders can enable grading for a thread and type a value. • Users with a course role of Course Builder are granted this forum role by default.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses the Moderator role.

Your question	**Dr. C's reply**
What are the benefits of assigning a moderator?	A moderator can benefit discussion activities in the following ways: • A moderator can ensure that postings are high quality and adhere to established etiquette guidelines. • A moderator can give students private feedback on their posts, ask for clarification, correct any confusion, or redirect a student's focus.
Who can I use as the moderator?	An instructor or a teaching assistant can be the moderator. Or, save time and get students involved by assigning the moderator role to a student. For example, ask students to sign up to moderate a topic of their choice, or use the moderation role as an extra credit opportunity.

Moderating Posts

Occasionally, students may introduce material to the Discussion Board that is inappropriate for the class discussion. Depending on the maturity and the sensitivity of the students in your course, it can be important to review student posts before sharing them with the rest of the class.

In a discussion forum, you can assign a user the role of Moderator. A moderator reviews posts before they are added to a thread and appear in the Discussion Board. The moderator can be you or another responsible participant.

When a moderated forum is created, all posts to the forum are added to a Moderation Queue. A moderator reviews each post and does one of following:

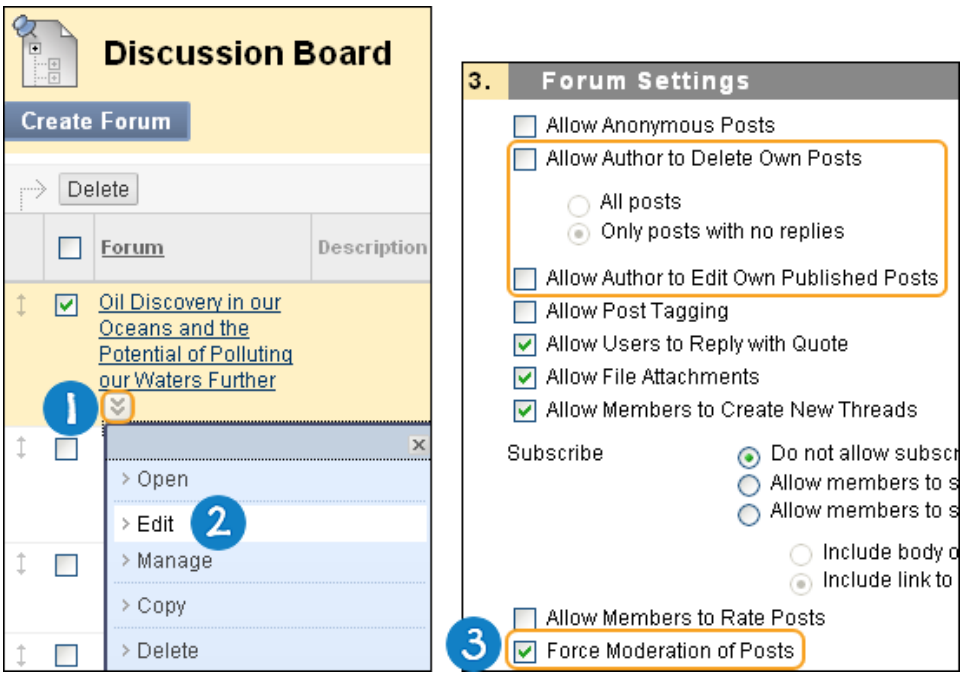
- Publishes the post.
- Returns the post to the sender without a message.
- Returns the post to the sender with a message.

You choose to moderate a forum when creating it or by editing an existing forum. Only posts added **after** enabling the forum moderation are available for review in the Moderation Queue. If a moderator is not assigned, the Manager role must take responsibility for approving posts in a moderated forum.

Tip: When choosing a moderated forum, do not allow students to edit or delete posts. You want to ensure that users view the posts that were approved.

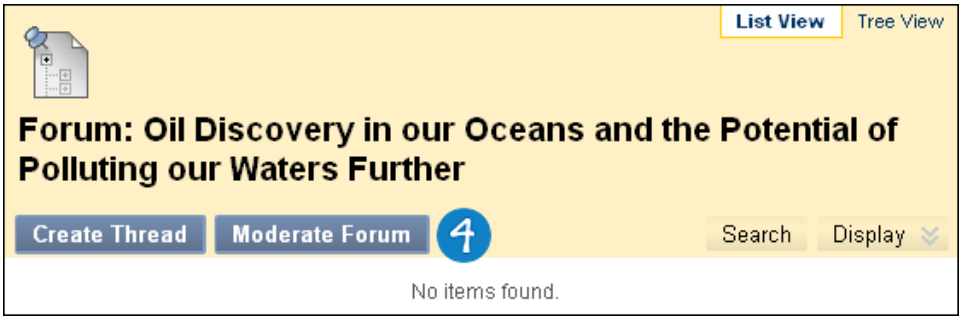
QUICK STEPS: Moderating Posts

1. Click a forum's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Edit**.
3. On the **Edit Forum** page, in the **Forum Settings** section, select the **Force Moderation of Posts** check box and click **Submit**.

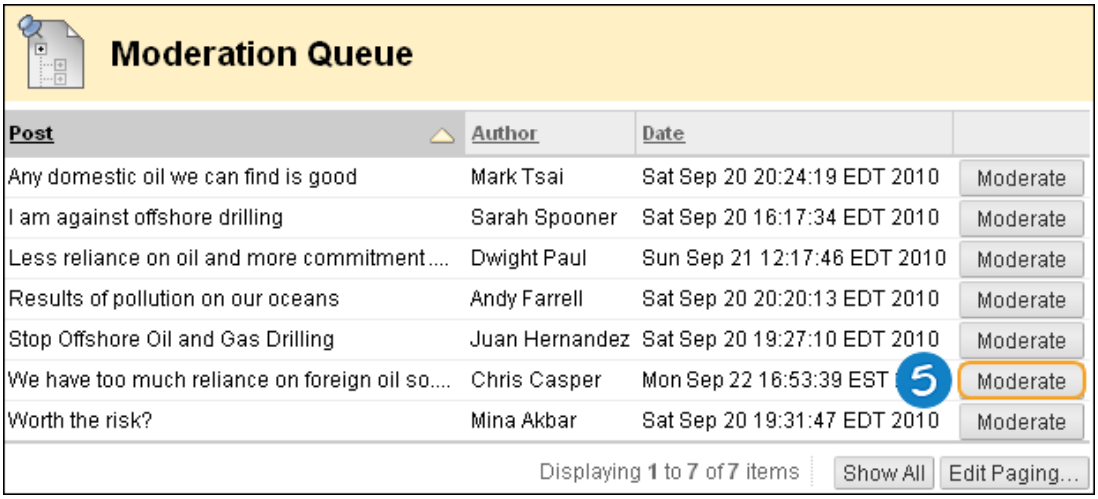


4. After posts are submitted, access the forum. In the moderator view, no posts appear because the messages are awaiting approval. On the Action Bar, click **Moderate Forum**.

   Note: The **Moderate Forum** function appears only to those users who have a forum role of Manager or Moderator. In the student view, the author can see the post in **Tree View** with a reminder it is in the Moderation Queue.

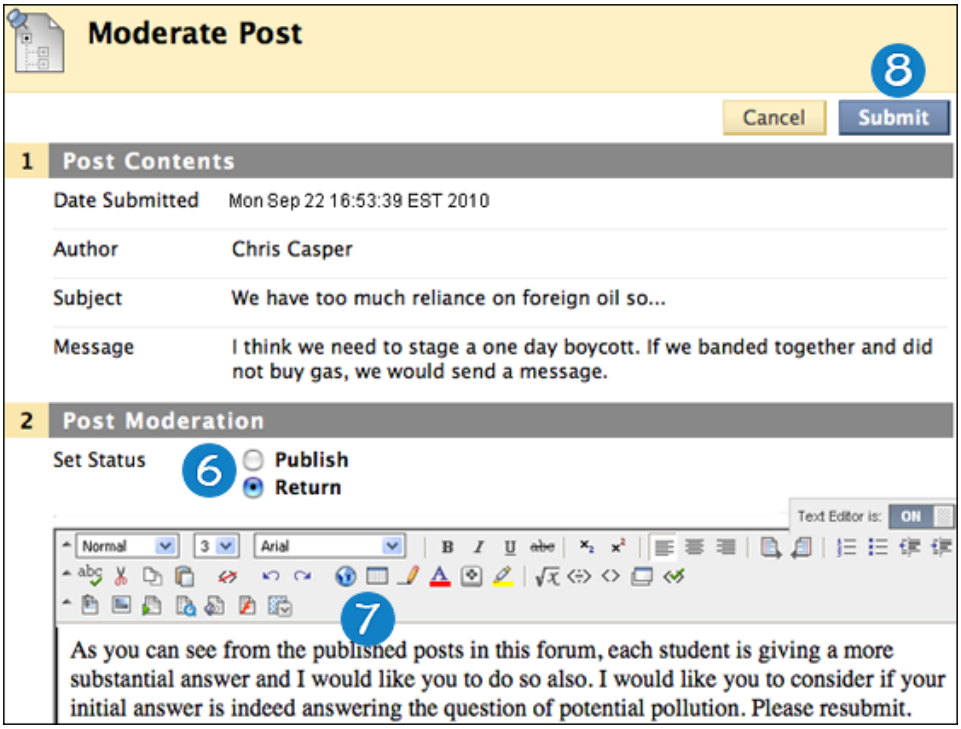


5. On the **Moderation Queue** page, the posts appear in alphabetical order by title. Click the column title or caret to sort by post title, author, or date. To review a post, click **Moderate**.



6. On the **Moderate Posts** page, read the post and select the **Publish** or **Return** option. Published messages are immediately posted to the thread.
7. Optionally, type feedback in the text box. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text, link to files in Course Files or the Content Collection, and include external links, multimedia, and Mashups.

   Note: Though feedback is optional, this is an opportunity to provide guidance, ask questions, redirect a student's focus, and explain why a post was returned.
8. Click **Submit**.



Result

Returned posts no longer appear in the Moderation Queue. Students see their returned posts in the forum. When returned posts are opened, students see an explanation, if feedback was included, and they can create new threads as needed.

Changing Thread Status

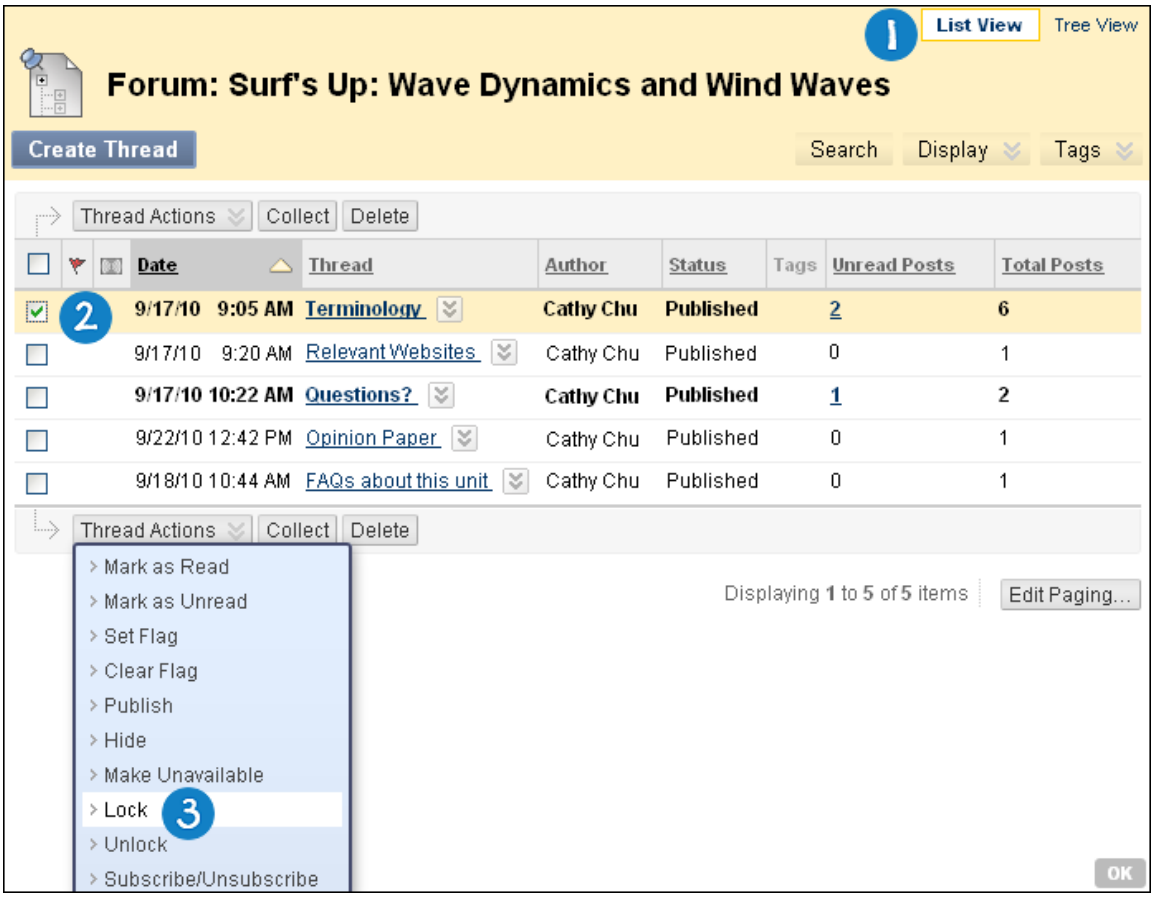
You can change the status of a thread to keep students focused on relevant discussions and to help organize a forum containing many threads. When a thread is created and submitted, it is assigned the **Published** status.

The following table describes which thread status to select to accomplish various goals.

Status	Goal for Thread
Publish	Make thread available to all users.
Hide	Hide the thread from immediate view, but still allow users the option of reading the threads. Unneeded content is hidden from view, helping users find relevant content. Users cannot reply to or edit hidden threads, even if editing has been enabled for the thread. Users can view hidden threads using the **Display** drop-down list on the Action Bar.
Make Unavailable	Hide thread from view of all users except forum Managers.
Lock	Allow users to read the thread, but not edit or add to it. Locking a thread allows grades to be assigned without users updating or changing posts.
Unlock	Unlock a locked thread to select another status.

QUICK STEPS: Changing Thread Status

1. Access a forum and change to **List View**, if needed.
2. Select the check box next to each thread requiring a change of status. You can select multiple threads or select the check box in the header to select all threads.
3. In the **Thread Actions** drop-down list, select a new status for the selected thread or threads. Alternatively, click a thread's Action Link to access the contextual menu and select a thread status.



Result

The status for each thread appears in the **Status** column. If you save a draft of a thread to edit in the future, **Draft** appears in the **Status** column. You must select **Show All** or **Drafts Only** from the **Display** drop-down list on the Action Bar to access your drafts.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course and access the Discussion Board.

Moderate Discussions

- Because of some inappropriate postings in the previous unit, you do not want **Chris Casper** to post to the **Unit 3** forum. Change his privileges so he can only read postings in the forum.
- Lock a thread in the **Unit 2** forum so students cannot add posts.
- For the **Unit 4** forum, delegate some of the workload by assigning the **Moderator** role to **Sarah Spooner** before students begin posting.

5.0 Managing Discussions

In this section, techniques are presented for managing the Discussion Board and the content within forums and threads. For example, to keep students focused as the term progresses, edit forum settings or organize forums and threads to attract attention once again.

Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Change forum availability.
- Edit descriptive information for forums.
- Edit forum settings as the discussion progresses.
- Copy discussion forums.
- Organize forums and threads.
- Add tags to threads.

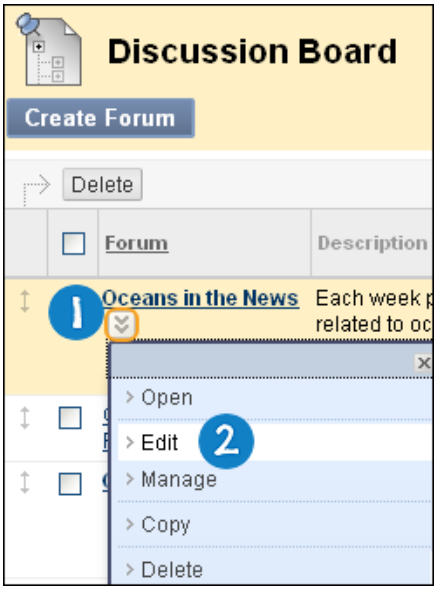
Editing Forums

As the discussion progresses, you can solve some discussion issues by editing forum settings. For example, if students are posting to the wrong topic, fine-tune the forum name or description to clarify the forum's purpose.

Tip: You can create all forums at the beginning of the term and make them unavailable. When a forum is needed, edit the forum to make it available.

QUICK STEPS: Editing Forums

1. Click a forum's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Edit**.



3. On the **Edit Forum** page, change the forum's name, description, availability, and settings.
4. Click **Submit**.

Copying Forums

You can copy discussion forums and add them to the current Discussion Board or to a Group Discussion Board in the same course. Copying does not delete the content from the original location in a course. You have the option to copy a forum, the settings, and the posts or to copy just a forum's settings.

Note: To copy Discussion Board forums to another course, use the Course Copy utility.

Example: Copy the entire forum

If two distinct topics emerge during a discussion, you can create separate forums for these topics. Copy the forum and delete the off-topic posts from each forum.

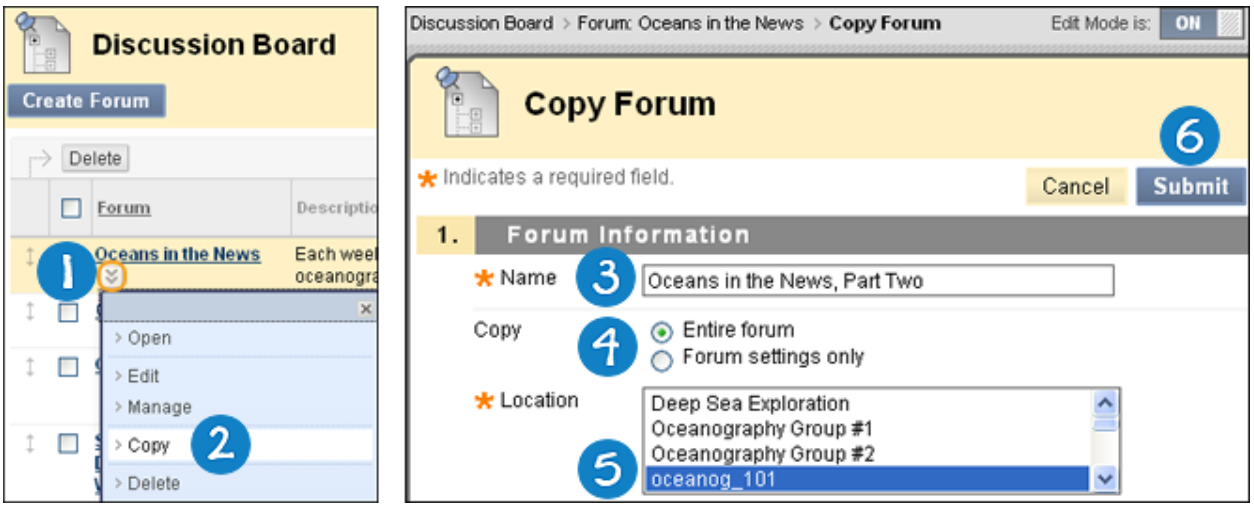
When content is copied, all threads and replies appear in the new location, along with any file attachments.

Example: Copy forum settings only

You can base a new forum on the settings from another forum. If you want students to submit a second research paper, copy the settings of the first research paper's forum. The forum is added with no threads.

QUICK STEPS: Copying Forums

1. Click a forum's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Copy**.
3. On the **Copy Forum** page, type a **Name**.
4. Select the option to copy: **Entire forum** or **Forum settings only**.
5. In the **Location** box, select a Discussion Board to copy to. To select the course's Discussion Board, select the Course ID.
6. Click **Submit**. On the **Discussion Board** page, the copied forum is added to the bottom of the list.



Note: Discussion forums copied to a Group Discussion Board only include messages authored by the group's members.

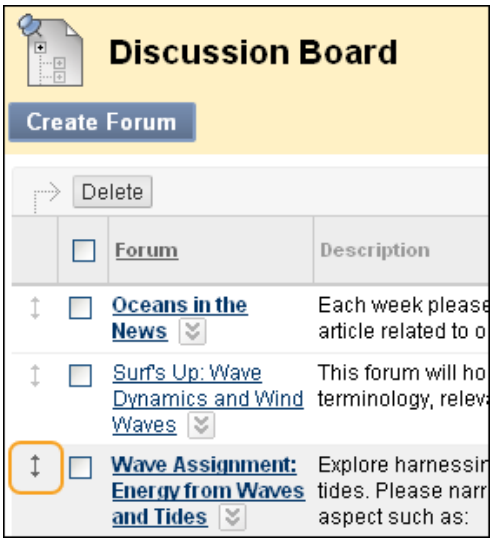
Organizing Forums and Threads

You can help students focus on the most relevant content by reorganizing your Discussion Board. When you create a forum, it is added to the bottom of the list. You can move the current forum to the top or delete forums that are no longer relevant.

Reorder forums using the drag-and-drop function—a double-tipped arrow or handle—to move them into place. Alternatively, reorder forums using the Keyboard Accessible Reordering tool on the Action Bar.

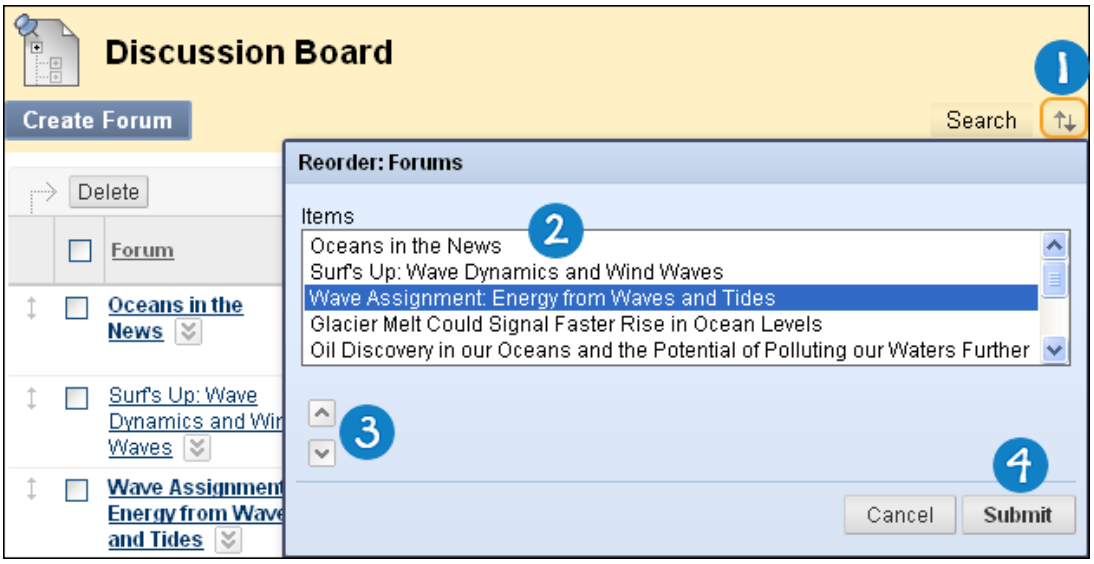
Drag-and-Drop Function

1. Access the Discussion Board and press the arrows next to a forum you want to move. The item is highlighted.
2. Drag the forum into a new location in the list.
3. Release the forum to place it in its new location.



Keyboard Accessible Reordering Tool

1. On the Action Bar, click the Keyboard Accessible Reordering icon represented by two arrows.
2. In the **Reorder** box, select a forum title.
3. Below the **Reorder** box, use the up and down arrows to adjust the order.
4. Click **Submit**. A pop-up box states: **Items have been reordered**.
5. Click **OK**.



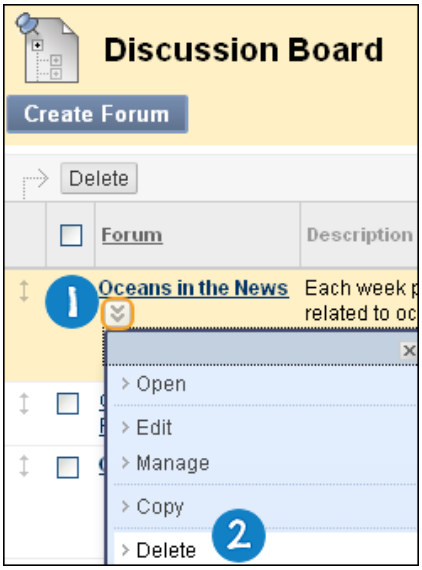
Deleting Forums and Threads

You can delete forums and threads that are no longer used. For example, delete an ungraded forum that was used to discuss a completed assignment. For a less permanent solution, you can make a forum unavailable.

When deleting graded discussion content, you determine if the Grade Center column and scores are also deleted.

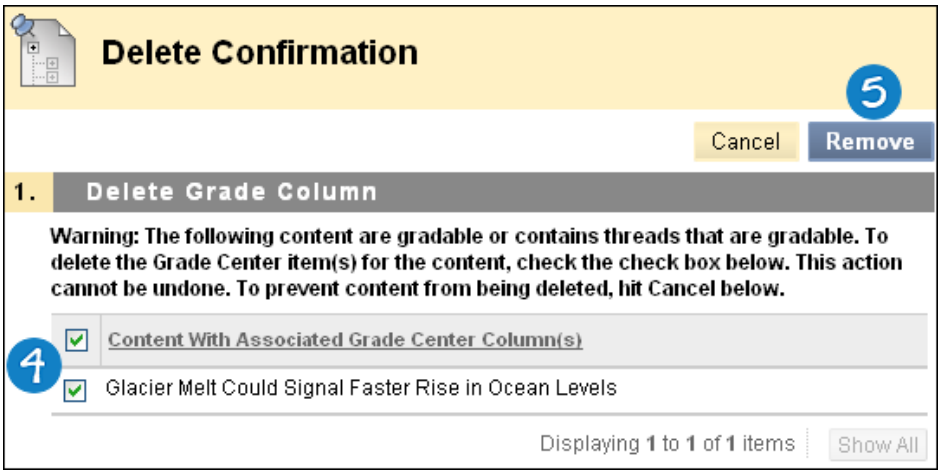
QUICK STEPS: Deleting Forums and Threads

1. Click a forum or thread's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Delete** to permanently delete a forum or thread's content.

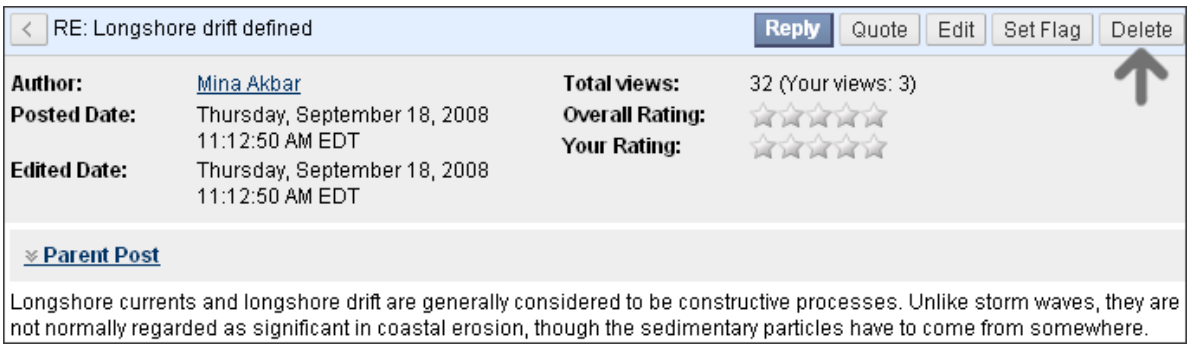


3. Click **OK** in the pop-up window.
4. On the **Delete Confirmation** page, you have two options:
    - **Do not select check boxes**: The graded forum or thread is deleted, but the Grade Center column and scores you assigned are retained. For example, you graded all students' posts and want to keep the Grade Center column for the final grade calculations. If you delete the forum or thread, yet retain the Grade Center column, you can delete that column from the Grade Center at any time.
    - **Select the check boxes**: The Grade Center column and the forum or thread are deleted. For example, if you do not want to include the grade column for the discussion posts in the final grade, you can safely delete both.

5. Click **Remove** to confirm the deletion. This action is final.



On the **Thread Detail** page, you can delete individual messages when viewing a post within a thread.



Tagging Threads

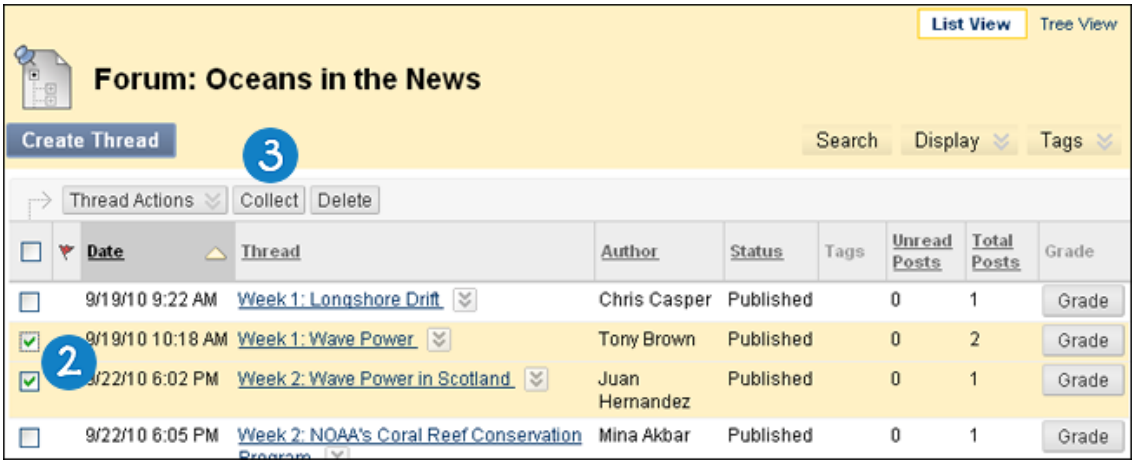
Tags are text labels that act like bookmarks. You can tag posts to group similar messages together. For example, if the subject of "scientific notation" is discussed often, tag each of the posts on this topic. Students can read, filter, and search messages using these tags, but they cannot create tags.

Note: In a forum's settings, you must enable **Allow Post Tagging** so you can create tags.

Tip: For faster Discussion Board loading, disable tagging during the times forum usage is heavy. When you enable tagging again, all tags are restored.

QUICK STEPS: Tagging Threads

1. Access the forum containing the threads to tag.
2. In **List View**, select the check boxes for the thread or threads to tag. You can select all the threads in a forum by selecting the check box in the header row.
3. On the Action Bar, click **Collect**.



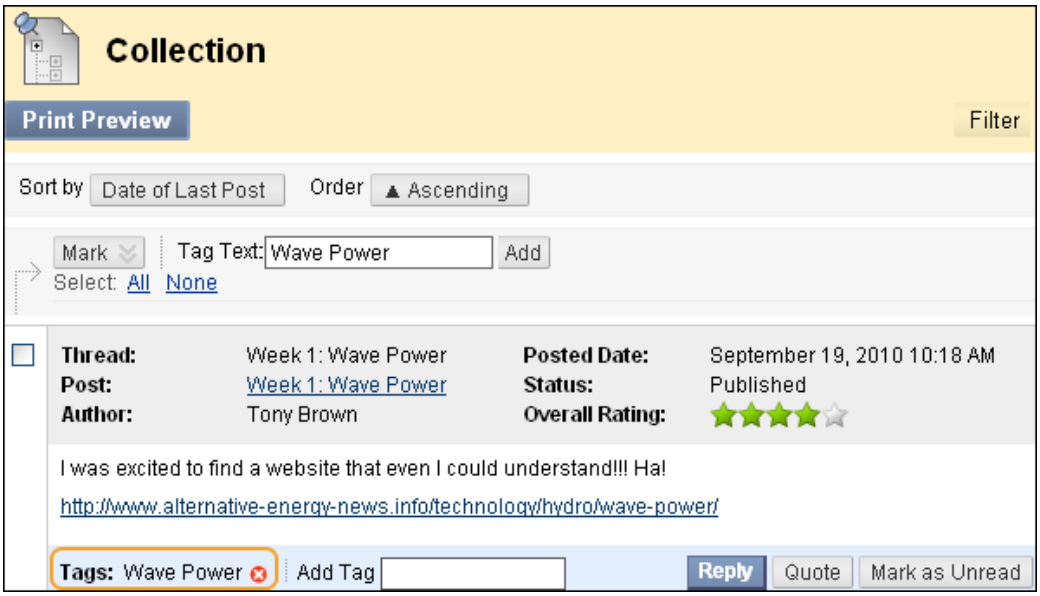
4. On the **Collection** page, you can filter and sort your results.
5. Type a tag name in the **Tag Text** box.
6. Select the check boxes of the messages to assign the tag name to. To select all the messages, click **Select: All** above the list.
7. Click **Add** next to the **Tag Text** box.

Collection
Print Preview
Filter
4
Sort by
Date of Last Post
Order
▲ Ascending
Mark
Tag Text:
Wave Power
5
Add
7
Select: All None
6
Thread:
Week 1: Wave Power
Posted Date:
September 19, 2010 10:18 AM
Post:
Week 1: Wave Power
Status:
Published
Author:
Tony Brown
Overall Rating:
I was excited to find a website that even I could understand!!! Ha!
http://www.alternative-energy-news.info/technology/hydro/wave-power/
Tags: None
Add
Reply
Quote
Mark as Unread
Thread:
Week 2: Wave Power in Scotland
Posted Date:
September 22, 2010 6:02 PM
Post:
Week 2: Wave Power in Scotland
Status:
Published
Overall Rating:
Author:
Juan Hernandez
http://www.alternative-energy-news.info/wave-power-scotland/
Tags: None
Add
Reply
Quote
Mark as Unread

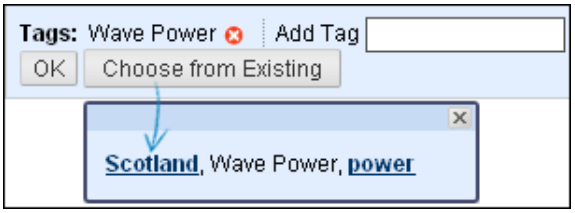
Result

On the Collection Page

On the **Collection** page, the tag you provided appears below each message you selected. If you provide multiple tags, all appear. You can include more tags following the same steps. To delete a tag, click the red **X** next to it.

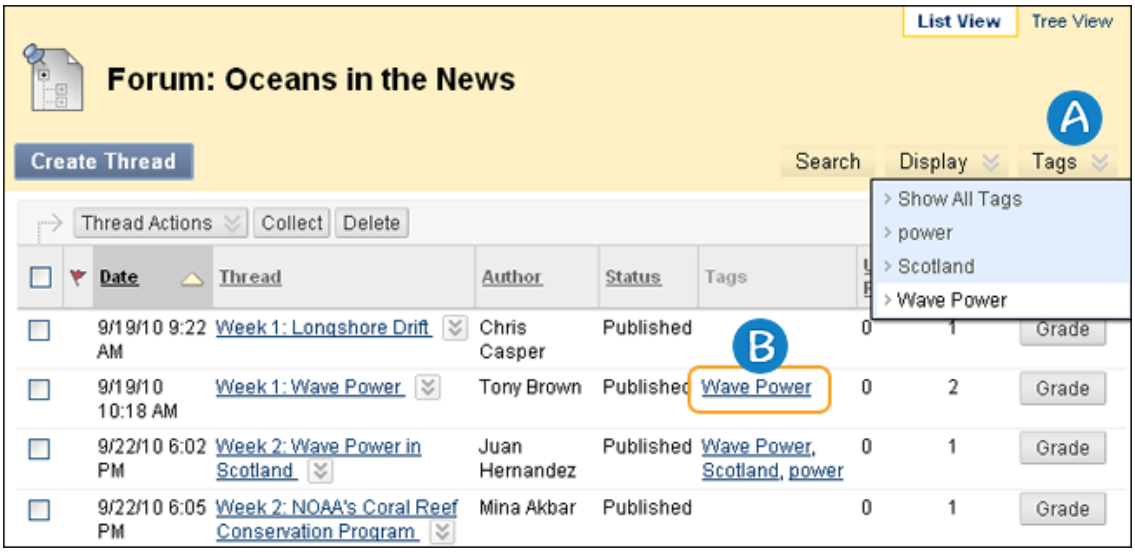


Alternatively, add a tag to an individual message. Below the message, type the tag in the **Add Tag** box. Click **OK** or click **Choose from Existing** to choose a tag from a list of tags.



On the Forum Page

On the forum page, all tags appear in the **Tags** column. The column is only visible in **List View**.



A. On the Action Bar, click **Tags** to access the drop-down list and select a tag or **Show All Tags**. Once a selection is made, only those messages appear on the forum page.

B. To sort messages by tag, click a tag in the **Tags** column. The messages with that tag appear on a **Collection** page.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C answers questions about successfully managing your Discussion Board.

Your question	**Dr. C's reply**
A discussion forum has been available for two weeks with few contributions. What changes can I make to the forum to encourage participation?	Here are two changes you can make: • If the topic is potentially controversial, allow anonymous posts. • If threads are not graded, allow students to create new threads. This flexibility may encourage students to post their ideas and questions.
By the end of the semester, the Discussion Board contains dozens of forums. What can I do to provide better organization and flow?	To keep your Discussion Board organized: • Change the order of the forums, placing the most current forums at the top of the list. • Delete ungraded forums that were not used or contain few postings.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course and access the Discussion Board.

Managing discussions

- Reorder the forums on the Discussion Board.
- Access the **NASA Funding** forum and view the posts. This forum has been inactive for several weeks. Edit the forum settings to encourage participation.
- Access the **Pluto Controversy** forum and view the posts in the **Pluto Opinion** thread. Search for posts that are incomplete, inappropriate, or have been added to the wrong forum. Delete posts as needed.

6.0 Grading Discussions

In a face-to-face classroom setting, students are expected to participate in class discussions and that participation is part of the equation when assessing performance. Assessing this participation can be ambiguous. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate a student who is active, but does not advance the discussion, from a student who speaks less frequently, but with greater impact.

Student interactions with the Discussion Board create a permanent record of participation. Instructors need to have reasonable expectations about what can be accomplished in an online discussion. Due to its asynchronous nature, more time may be needed for well-articulated points to emerge in the online environment. In addition to providing a practical number of course discussion opportunities, students need timely and constructive responses regarding the quality of their contributions. Evaluation not only lets them know how they performed, but shapes the improvement of future interactions.

You can assign discussion grades within a forum or thread and evaluate students on their participation, on the quality of their posts, or a combination of the two. You can create rubrics and use them while grading forums and threads. To learn about the Rubrics tool, see the *Using Rubrics* manual.

You can also grade discussion posts from the **Needs Grading** page. To learn more, see the manual for this feature.

Note: Grading discussion posts is not available with a Basic License.

Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the grading process.
- Grade discussion forums and threads.
- Disable grading.
- Change and delete grades.
- Use the Email tool when assigning grades.
- Define discussion grading criteria.

The Grading Process

The discussion grading process consists of four main steps.

Instructor activity

Student activity

1	**CREATE** When you create a graded forum or thread, a column is created automatically in the Grade Center. The name of the forum or thread is used as the column title. You can edit the title in the Grade Center.
2	**PARTICIPATE** Students participate in the discussion. As the discussion progresses, you can participate and provide feedback by replying to, rating, and moderating posts.
3	**GRADE** Review student posts and type a numeric grade. You can lock threads after they are graded.
4	**VIEW GRADES** The grades are saved in the Discussion Board and added to the Grade Center. Students can view their grades on their **My Grades** pages.

Assigning Forum Grades

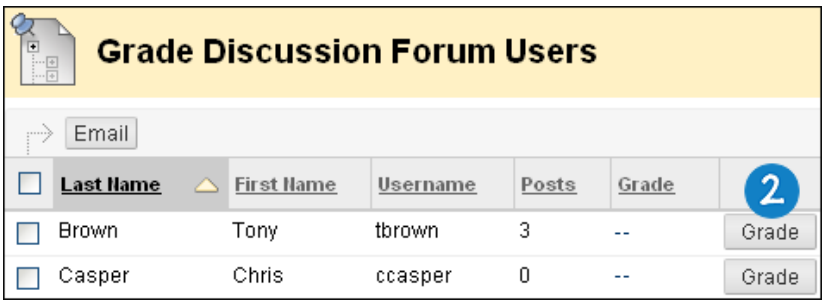
You can assign discussion grades to evaluate participants on performance throughout a forum. When a forum is created or edited, you can enable forum grading options and a Grade Center column is created automatically.

Only users with a role of Manager or Grader can assign grades for posts. A Grader cannot view his or her own work.

QUICK STEPS: Assigning Forum Grades

1. Access the discussion forum where forum grading is enabled and click **Grade Forum** on the Action Bar.

2. On the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page, click **Grade** in a user's row with a number in the **Posts** column.



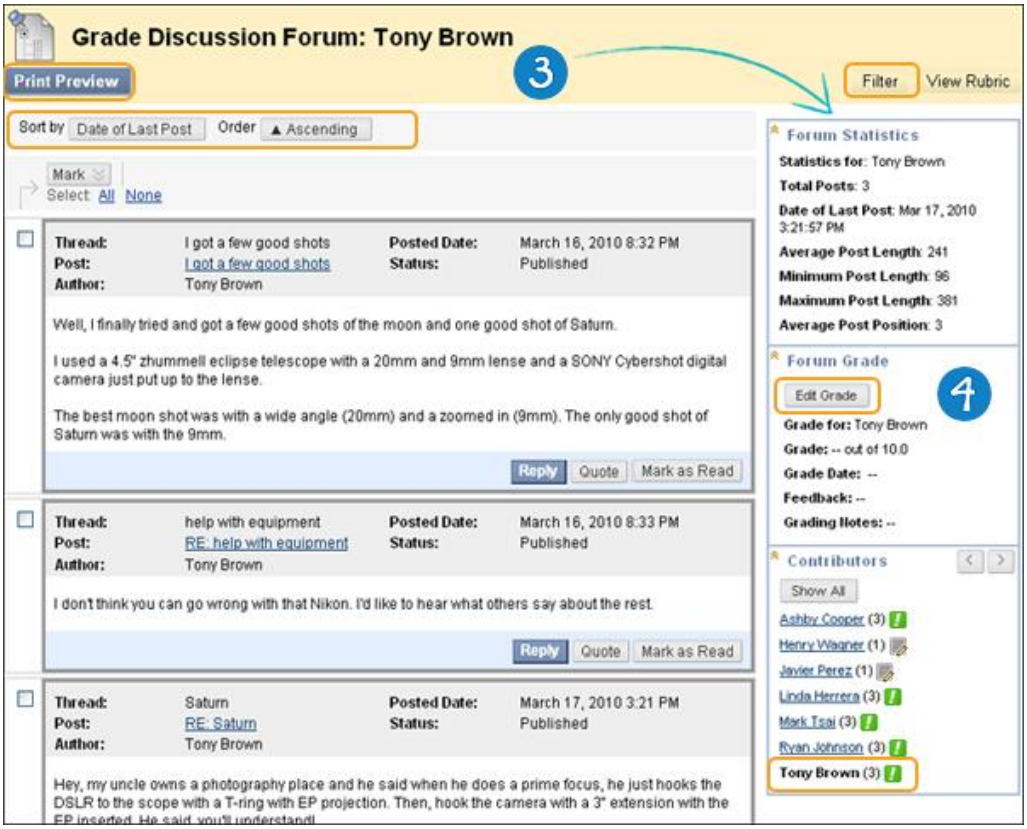
3. On the **Grade Discussion Forum** page, a collection of the user's posts made to the graded forum appears. Since you can base a forum grade on multiple threads, all messages posted by the student are included for review. On the Action Bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists.

The side panel contains three sections:

- **Forum Statistics**: Includes information about the user's posts, such as **Date of Last Post**, **Average Post Length**, and **Average Post Position**.
- **Forum Grade**: Includes **Grade**, **Feedback**, and **Grading Notes**.
- **Contributors**: Users who have submitted one or more posts appear with exclamation marks—the **Needs Grading** icon ( ). In this section, use the **Previous User** and **Next User** arrows in this section to navigate among users to grade -OR- click a user's name in the list. Click **Show All** to view all users in your course. Users who have not posted to the graded forum are included in this list. Click **Show with Posts Only** to return to the list of users who have posts to grade.

  Note: The **In Progress** icon ( ) appears next to a user's name until the specified number of posts is met for needs grading status. For example, if you choose three posts from the drop-down list and a user submits two, the **In Progress** icon appears.

4. In the content frame, evaluate the currently selected user's posts. To assign a grade, click **Edit Grade** in the **Forum Grade** section.



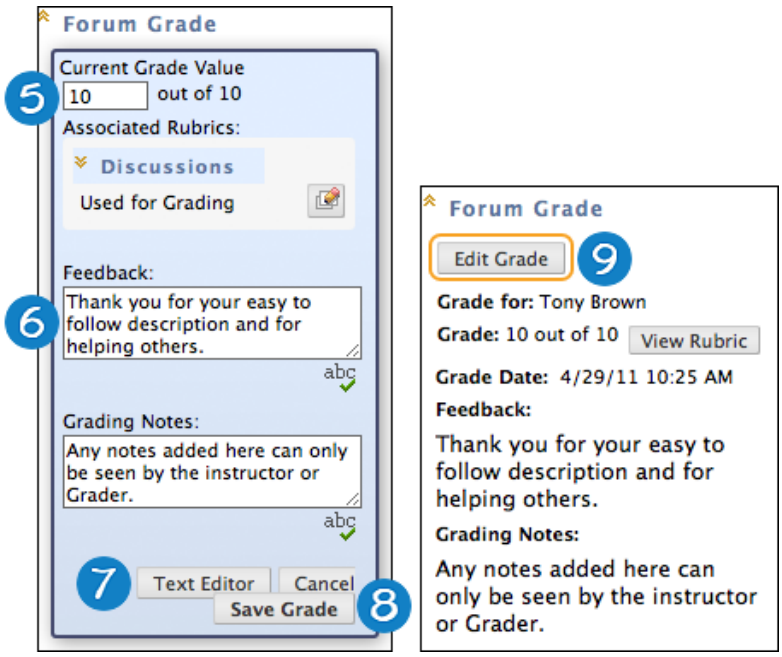
Note: To collapse or expand a side panel section, click the double arrows icon next to the section title.

5. Type a numeric value in the **Current Grade Value** box. Assigning a score here removes any Grade Center override that may exist for this user for this forum grade.

   Note: If you associated a rubric with the forum, you can access and use it for grading.

6. Optionally, type **Feedback** for the user and **Grading Notes** that appear to the forum Manager or Grader only. Optionally, use the **Spell Check** function at the bottom of each text box.
7. Optionally, click **Text Editor** to access the Text Editor in a pop-up window. Use the functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups to your feedback or notes.
8. Click **Save Grade**. The information appears in the **Forum Grade** section and in the Grade Center.
9. Click **Edit Grade** to make changes at any time. The changes appear in the **Forum Grade** section and in the Grade Center column. The changes are

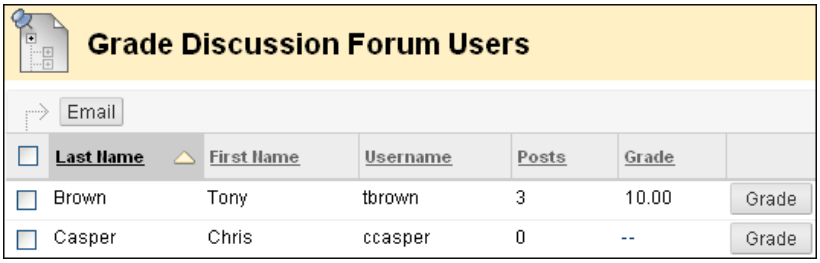
recorded in the Grade Center on the user's **Grade Details** page and on the **Grade History** tab.



10. When grading is complete, click **OK** to return to the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page or use the breadcrumbs to return to the Discussion Board.

Result

Grades appear in the **Grade** column on the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page and in the Grade Center.



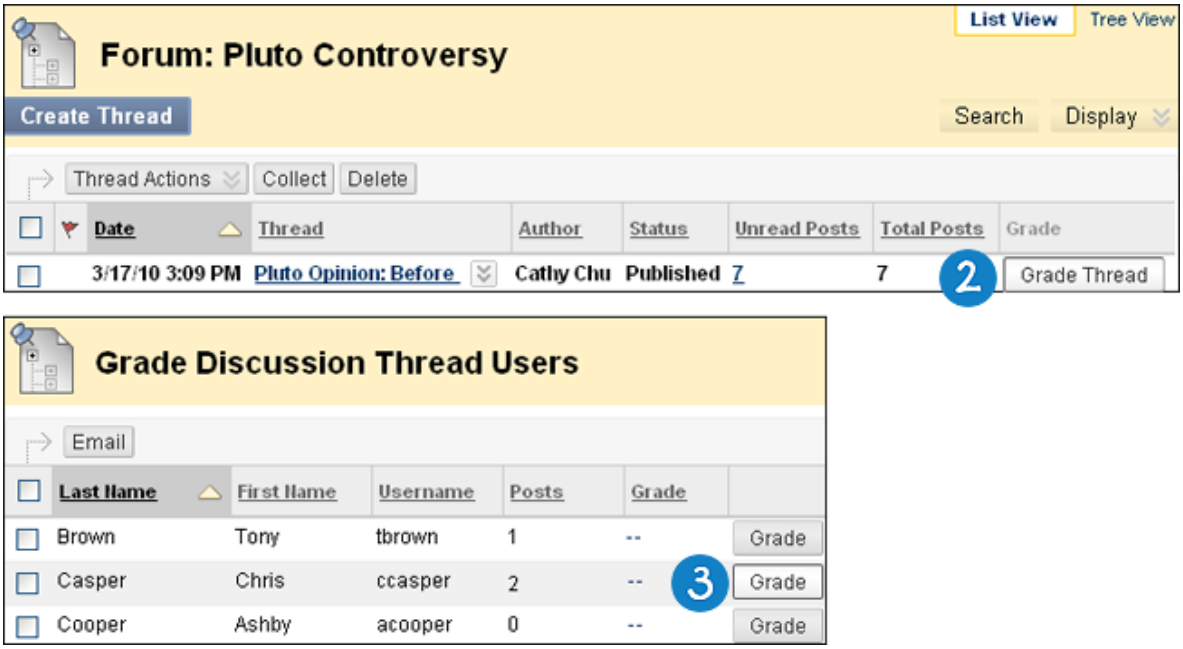
Assigning Thread Grades

If **Grade Threads** was enabled during forum creation, you can assign grades for threads within that forum.

Reminder: Students cannot create new threads in a forum where threads are graded.

QUICK STEPS: Assigning Thread Grades

1. Access the discussion forum containing the thread you want to grade.
2. On the thread listing page, in **List View**, click **Grade Thread** in the thread's row.
3. On the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page, click **Grade** in a user's row with a number in the **Posts** column.



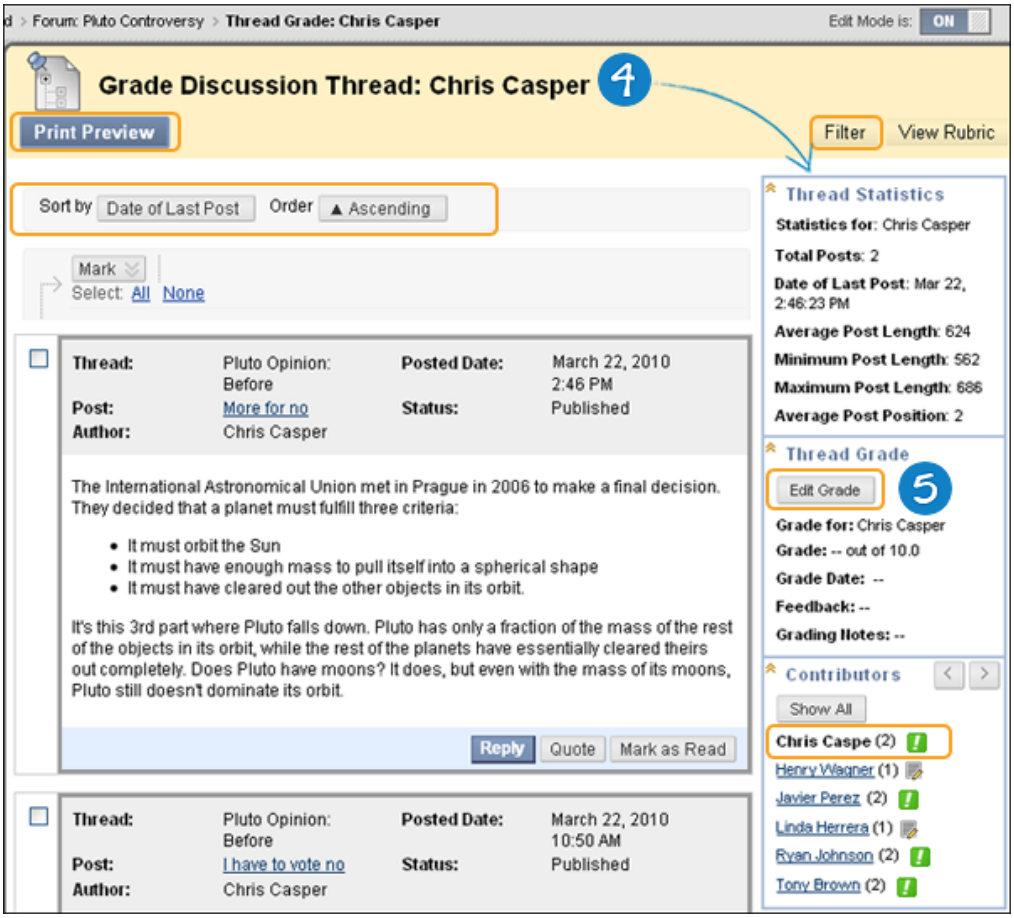
4. On the **Grade Discussion Thread** page, a collection of the user's posts made to the graded thread appears. Since you can base a thread grade on multiple messages, all messages posted by the student are included for review. On the Action Bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists.

The side panel contains three sections:

- **Thread Statistics**: Includes information about the user's posts, such as **Date of Last Post**, **Average Post Length**, and **Average Post Position**.
- **Thread Grade**: Includes **Grade**, **Grade Date**, **Feedback**, and **Grading Notes**.
- **Contributors**: Users who have submitted one or more posts appear with exclamation marks—the **Needs Grading** icon ( ). In this section, use the **Previous User** and **Next User** arrows in this section to navigate among users to grade -OR- click a user's name in the list. Click **Show All** to view all users in your course. Users who have not posted to the graded thread are included in this list. Click **Show with Posts Only** to return to the list of users who have posts to grade.

  Note: The **In Progress** icon ( ) appears next to a user's name until the specified number of posts is met for needs grading status. For example, if you choose two posts from the drop-down list and a user submits one, the **In Progress** icon appears.

5. In the content frame, evaluate the currently selected user's posts. To assign a grade, click **Edit Grade** in the **Thread Grade** section.



Note: To collapse or expand a side panel section, click the double arrows icon next to the section title.

6. Type a numeric value in the **Current Grade Value** box. Assigning a score here removes any Grade Center override that may exist for this user for this thread grade.

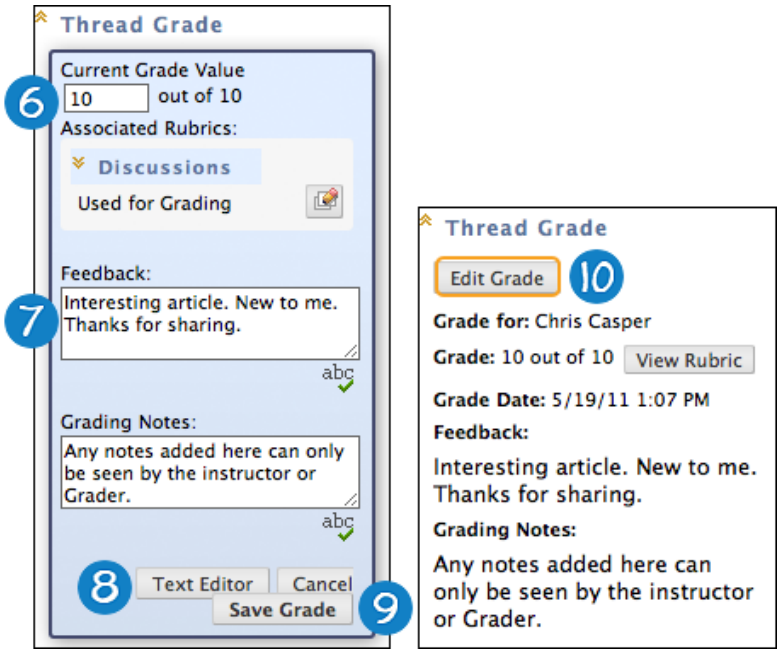
   Note: If you associated a rubric with the thread, you can access it while grading.

7. Optionally, type **Feedback** for the user and **Grading Notes** that appear to the forum Manager or Grader only. Optionally, use the **Spell Check** function at the bottom of each text box.

8. Optionally, click **Text Editor** to access the Text Editor in a pop-up window. Use the functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups to your feedback or notes.

9. Click **Save Grade**. The information appears in the **Thread Grade** section and in the Grade Center.

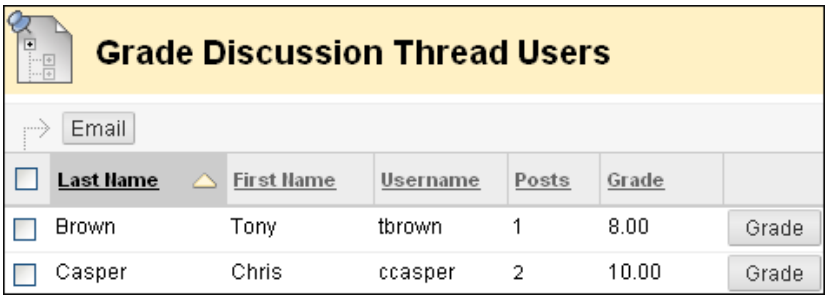
10. Click **Edit Grade** to make changes at any time. The changes appear in the **Thread Grade** section and in the Grade Center column. The changes are recorded in the Grade Center on the user's **Grade Details** page and on the **Grade History** tab.



11. When grading is complete, click **OK** to return to the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page or use the breadcrumbs to return to the Discussion Board.

Result

Grades appear in the **Grade** column on the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page and in the Grade Center.



Disabling Grading

You can disable grading for graded forums and threads, even if grades exist.

QUICK STEPS: Disabling Grading

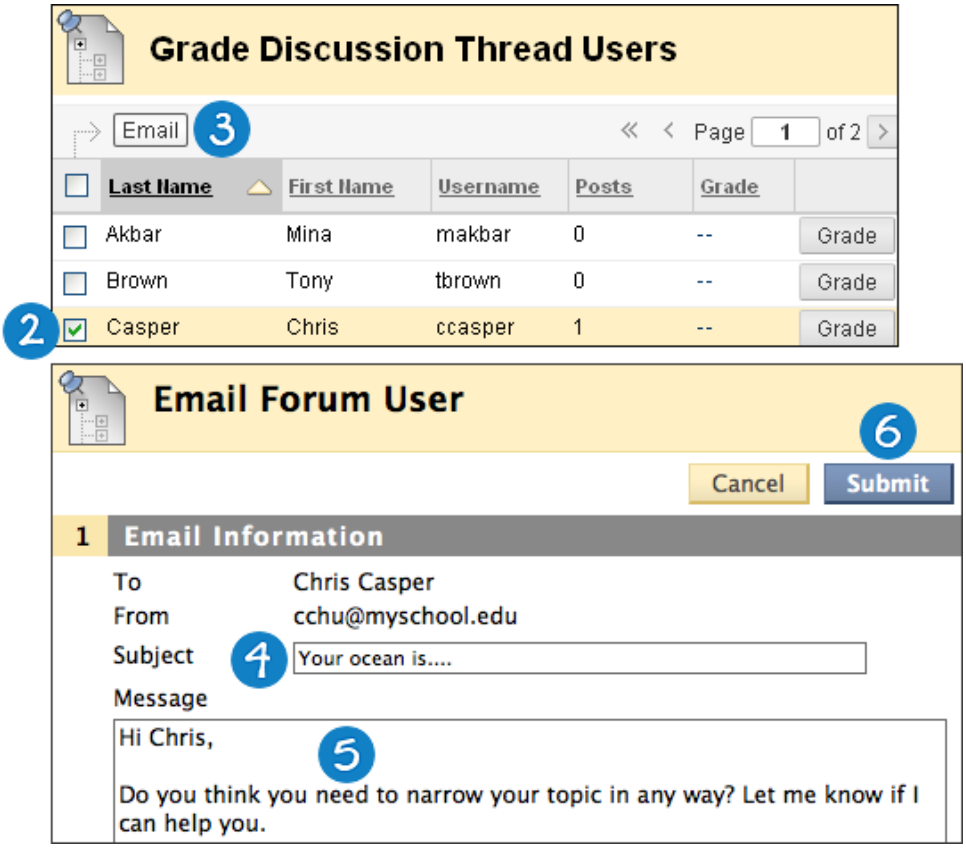
1. Access the Discussion Board and click a forum's Action Link to access the contextual menu.
2. Select **Edit**.
3. On the **Edit Forum** page, in the **Forum Settings** section, change the grading option to **No Grading in Forum**.
4. Click **Submit**. If grades are assigned for the forum or its threads, a warning message appears indicating that changing the setting will delete all existing grades. This action is final.
5. Click **OK** to continue or click **Cancel** to preserve the Grade Center items.

Emailing Students When Assigning Grades

While assigning grades, you can use the Email tool in the Discussion Board to quickly contact students. For example, send a student a question prior to assigning a grade or send feedback after assigning a grade.

QUICK STEPS: Emailing Students When Assigning Grades

1. Navigate to the forum or thread to assign a grade.
2. On the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page or the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page, select one or multiple users' check boxes or select the check box in the header row to select all the users you want to email.
3. On the Action Bar, click **Email**.
4. On the **Email Forum User** page, edit the **Subject**, if needed.
5. Type a question or feedback in the **Message** box.
6. Click **Submit**.



Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course and access the Discussion Board.

Grade Discussions

- In the **Unit 2: Astrophotography/Imaging** forum, review and assign a grade for **Ryan Johnson's** postings.
- In the **Unit 3: Mass Objects** forum, assign a grade to **Ryan Johnson** for his posting to the **Discovery of Trans-Neptunian Object** thread.
- In the **Pluto Controversy** forum, select the **Pluto Opinion** thread and change the grade assigned to **Linda Herrera**. Send her an email explaining the grade change.

Best Practice: Define Grading Criteria

When grading discussions, it is important to have reasonable expectations about what can be accomplished. Due to the asynchronous nature of an online discussion, it may take more time for well-articulated points to emerge than in a face-to-face classroom.

Tell students specifically what is expected, both in terms of quantity and quality of postings, and consider sharing some exemplary postings.

When evaluating student postings, keep the following questions in mind:

Did student participation in the discussion meet the objectives you set?

- Did students participate regularly?
- Did students reply to postings?
- Did students post new threads?
- Did students use the rating feature?

Did the quality of the contributions meet the objectives you set?

- Were replies or postings on topic?
- Did they add value to the discussion?
- Did they introduce new ideas?
- How did peers rate their postings?

Consider compiling your grading criteria into a rubric. By using a rubric to grade discussions, clear performance requirements are provided to students and consistent grading criteria to graders. To learn more about the Rubrics tool, see the *Using Rubrics* manual.

7.0 Workshop Wrap Up

This section provides the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned by focusing your attention on the key concepts presented in the workshop. Also, the next page includes a worksheet for brainstorming some ideas about the use of discussions in your online course.

In this workshop, you learned how to do the following:

- Navigate the Discussion Board as a student and an instructor.
- Create forums and threads, and change the status of threads.
- Reply to and rate posts.
- Collect and tag posts.
- Assign forum roles.
- Moderate posts.
- Edit, copy, and organize forums.
- Assign forum and thread grades.
- Email students during the grading process.
- Add forums to course areas.
- Set etiquette guidelines.
- Craft effective questions.
- Define grading criteria.

Spotlight on Your Course

Do you have some ideas on how you will use discussions in your course? Use the following worksheet to record ideas.

Creation

- What types of forums will you create?
- Will you allow students to create new threads within forums?
- Will you get students involved in feedback and quality control by allowing them to rate posts?
- Will you allow anonymous posting?

Grading

- Will you grade forums or threads?
- Will you set grading requirements for posting quality or quantity?

Organization

- How many discussion forums will you make available at one time?
- How will you use the availability and status options?
- How will you order the forums on the Discussion Board?

Moderation

- How involved will you be in discussions?
- What methods will you use to provide feedback and instructions to participants?
- Will you involve students as moderators?