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.

Discussion board tool = interaction + collaboration + course satisfaction
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BENEFITS of DISCUSSIONS

Online discussions provide some unique benefits. Because students can take time to ponder before posting ideas, you may see more thoughtful conversations play out. You can observe as students demonstrate their grasp of the material and correct misconceptions. You can extend your office hours by reaching students more often during the week so learning is continuous.

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 users can review at a later point.
- A graded activity that demonstrates understanding or application of course material.
ACCESS the DISCUSSION BOARD

You can access the discussion board in several ways. You can add a customized link to the course menu and to a course area. When you provide a link to the discussion board in a course area, students can access the tool alongside other course content.

Access the discussion board in the following ways:

- On the course menu, create a tool link to the discussion board.
- On the course menu, click the default Tools link. On the Tools page, select Discussion Board.
- On the Control Panel, expand the Course Tools section and select Discussion Board.
- Access a link you add to a course area, such as in a content area.
TOUR the DISCUSSION BOARD

The Discussion Board page contains a list of all the forums you created for your course. On the action bar, create forums and use the search function to search for discussion board content.

To sort a column, click the column heading. For example, if you sort the Forum column, the items appear in alphabetical or reverse alphabetical order.

To view the posts, click the forum title. Forum titles in bold type contain unread posts.

For each forum, view the total number of posts, the number of unread posts, and the number of users who have participated in the forum. For one-click access to the forum's unread messages, click the link in the Unread Posts column.

WATCH Interacting in Discussions
LEARN the LINGO

Forum
An area where participants discuss a topic or a group of related topics. Within each forum, participants can create multiple threads.

Thread
In a forum, each post and the replies to it.

Post first setting
A setting you can apply to a forum so users have to “post first” before they can read their classmates’ posts. This setting helps promote originality, creativity, and a variety of ideas.

Published thread
A thread is available to all users.

Hidden thread
You can hide a thread from immediate view, but still allow users the option of reading the thread. Unneeded content is hidden from view, helping users find relevant content. Users cannot reply to or edit hidden threads. When you do not want a thread hidden, change the status to Publish.

Locked thread
Allow users to read a thread, but not edit or add to it. Locking a thread allows you to assign grades without users changing posts. You must unlock a locked thread to select another status, such as Publish.

Rate posts
You can use the discussion board for peer review. Users review posts and can assign a rating of one to five stars. Rating posts allows users to focus on messages considered especially informative or useful.

Subscribe
Students can receive email alerts for new posts or replies. You can allow students to receive email alerts to an entire forum or to specific threads within a forum.

Moderate
To help control the discussion board content that is presented to your students, you can assign a responsible user the role of moderator. A moderator reviews posts and determines whether to add them to the discussion board for all users to read.
Jenny teaches introductory composition courses at her university. She uses the discussion board in her face-to-face and online courses. The discussion board environment helps some of her students contribute more often than they do in person. Most students appreciate the asynchronous nature of online discussions that allows them time to fully develop their thoughts and learn from their classmates' responses.

In the Beginning

Jenny begins each term with a variety of low-pressure, non-graded discussion posts that allow students to gain confidence using the tool. These postings are mandatory but fun, and help her students get to know each other. She encourages students to rate posts they find interesting. She feels if they begin experimenting with rating now, their ratings will have more validity during the grading process later.

Jenny posts etiquette guidelines for how she expects her students to participate in the discussion board. She expects the same decorum in her online courses as in her face-to-face to courses.

The Warm-up

Before requiring responses for graded discussion posts, Jenny first adds a few discussion questions designed to stimulate conversation on a controversial topic. She allows students to post anonymously, and edit and delete their published posts to encourage participation. She reminds students that the etiquette guidelines and mutual respect will be strictly enforced. She makes sure she replies to student posts often, offering feedback and positive comments. She wants to help her students feel that this is a safe and secure environment where they can express themselves freely.

Grading Discussions

Later in the term, she incorporates several graded discussion posts into her course. Because her courses focus on writing, she starts out by lowering the level of concern and then slowly raising it. Students are first graded on basic grammar, punctuation, and their explanations and defense of their ideas. As the term progresses, she increases requirements gradually, adding correct paragraph structure, factual support for statements, and flow. This enables students to adapt to the workload.

She allows students to subscribe to the graded forums, so they know when someone replies to their posts or new content is available.
Jenny provides rubrics so her students know what is expected of them. All graded discussion due dates appear automatically on the course calendar, are included in the discussion instructions, and in the syllabus. She creates all of her forums and graded threads at the beginning of the term, but makes most of them unavailable so that she does not overwhelm her students. She can easily make a forum available when she wants students to post.

**Post First Setting**

Toward the end of the term, Jenny requires students to post to a forum before they can read other students’ contributions. This setting ensures that students are posting original, creative thoughts that aren’t influenced by what others think. Jenny finds that forums with this setting seem to generate the most replies to new threads.

She uses the blogs and journals tools for her most substantial writing assignments, but the discussions tool is well suited for fostering community and peer learning among her students.
CREATE a FORUM

The Facts

You can create forums and threads to organize discussions into units or topics relevant to your course.

**Forum settings** allow you to use the discussion board in different ways. For example, to control a forum, you create all threads, and moderate and grade the posts. For a student-led discussion, allow students to create new threads with the option of posting anonymously.

When creating a forum, you determine whether or not to **grade** students' posts in forums or threads and how many posts are required before they go into needs grading status.

Do It

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 click **Discussion Board**.

2. On the **Discussion Board** page, click **Create Forum** on the action bar.

3. On the **Create Forum** page, type a **Name** and provide instructions or a description in the **Description** text box.

4. Select the appropriate settings, such as selecting **Yes** to make the forum available to users.

5. Click **Submit**.

Help

- **About a Discussion Forum**
- **Create Forums**
- **List View and Tree View**
- **Set Up Discussions**
## CREATE a THREAD

### The Facts

A thread includes the **initial post** and all replies to it. When you create a forum, you can allow or not allow members to start threads.

Instructors and students create threads in the same way. If you enabled grading, you can also set the thread to be graded.

**Forum descriptions display** when users create a thread and when they encounter a thread with the post first setting. Forum descriptions are often used as prompts for discussion, so they are visible where users are posting.

### Do It

1. Access a forum.
2. On the action bar, click **Create Thread**.
3. On the **Create Thread** page, type a **Subject** and provide instructions or a question in the **Message** text box.
4. Click **Save Draft** or **Submit** to create the thread.

### Help

- **About a Discussion Thread**
- **Create Threads**
## SAVE a THREAD

### The Facts

The **Save Draft function** is available if you need to return to your post at a later time. This function saves your comments and files on the page.

You can make edits, add or delete files, and use the functions in the content editor.

### Do It

1. After creating a thread, click **Save Draft** instead of **Submit** to save the thread for editing later.

2. To return to the draft thread, access the forum and change to **List View**, if needed.

3. On the action bar, point to **Display** to access the drop-down list.

4. Click **Drafts Only**. Users can only view their own drafts.

5. The forum page displays only those threads that have the status selected from the **Display** drop-down list.

6. Make your changes.

7. Click **Submit** to publish the post so other users can view it.

### Help

- [Change a Thread’s Status](#)
- [Change Which Threads Appear](#)
- [List View and Tree View](#)
A carefully worded discussion question is perhaps the most important factor in using discussions to satisfy your learning objectives. The quality of the first post in a thread influences the thought level of subsequent postings.

**Using Bloom’s Taxonomy**

You can use Bloom’s Taxonomy to determine what type of question to develop, as well as how to word it.

Using verbs associated with a specific level challenges students to learn at that level. For example, if you want students to synthesize information, include words, such as plan, design, formulate, choose, and create in your question.

![Bloom's Taxonomy](image)

**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 must have personal meaning and insight constructed by the student.

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

You can develop guiding questions and use them in a number of ways:

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

Example: Essential Question

How would you design the perfect online instructor?

Example: 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.

To learn more, see the Bloom's Taxonomy Infographic.
TRY IT

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. Decide if you want students to "post first"—create a thread before viewing their classmates' posts -OR- be allowed to edit, but not delete their own posts. You cannot select post first and editing/deleting in combination.
- Within the forum, create several threads for specific subjects.

**Save a thread**
- Create a thread, but save it as a draft. Use the orientation bar to return to the forum. Access your draft post and publish it so others can view it.
REPLY to POSTS

Quick Steps

The Facts

In the discussion board, **threads grow as users respond** to the initial and subsequent posts. Replies build on one another to construct a conversation. As the number of posts grows, students can rate, filter, sort, and collect posts.

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

Do It

1. On the thread page, you can view the text of the post and information, such as the author and posted date. All replies appear on the same page with the parent post.

2. For the first post, click **Reply**.

3. The page expands below the post you are responding to, allowing you to view the post and access the content editor.

4. If needed, edit the **Subject**. Provide your reply in the **Message** box.

5. Alternatively, following the **Message** box, attach a file.

6. Click **Save Draft** to store a draft of the post or click **Submit** to publish your reply.

7. On the thread page, your reply appears at the end of the list.

Help

- **Reply to Posts**
- **Rate Posts**
BEST PRACTICE

To help students understand your expectations, **establish discussion etiquette** immediately. You can model proper online interaction and reinforce appropriate behavior with public recognition.

In addition, you can provide specific guidelines, such as:

- Use **descriptive subject lines** to make threads easy to follow and scan.
- **Keep posts short** and use uncomplicated language. Your audience is reading onscreen and may have several messages to read. Also, English may not be the first language of all participants.
- **Include something new** in your reply. For example, include more than "I do not agree" or "Good point."
- **Back up your statements** when you agree or disagree with others.
- Use professional language, including **proper grammar**, in academic-related posts. No slang, emoticons, or chat acronyms allowed.
- **Use attachments or links** to websites for long, detailed information.
- **Stay on topic.** If you want to introduce a new tangent, find a suitable forum or start a new thread if it is allowed.
- Be **respectful** of other people's opinions and remember the golden rule—to treat others, as you want to be treated.
- For graded forums and threads, tell students specifically what you expect both in terms of **quantity and quality** of posts, and consider sharing some exemplary posts. You can also use rubrics to help students understand your objectives. By compiling your grading criteria in a rubric, you can provide students with clear performance standards and grade consistently.
**Quick Steps**

**The Facts**

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—two arrows pointing up and down.

**Do It**

**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.
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**.

**Help**

**Delete Forums and Threads**
ASSIGN FORUM ROLES

Quick Steps

The Facts

In a forum, each user has a role and can only have one role per forum. By default, you have the role of manager and students have the role of participant. 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.

When viewing threads, a badge appears next to a forum manager or moderator’s name. Point to the badge to see the user’s course role and forum role. If your school has custom roles, they are displayed. Role highlighting is available only in the discussion board.

Do It

1. Access a forum’s contextual menu and click Manage.
2. On the Manage Forum Users page, a list of users appears. Access a user’s contextual menu.
3. Select a new forum role. The new role appears in the Forum Role column for the user.
4. Click OK to return to the discussion board. Alternatively, click the forum title on the orientation bar to return to the forum.

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.

Help

About Forum Roles

About Moderating
SEARCH DISCUSSIONS

Quick Steps

The Facts
In the discussion board, you can search for specific text, such as a phrase, word, or part of a word. The results appear on a search results page.

Do It
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.
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.
7. On the Search Results page, you can read and print the results.

Help
Search Discussions
Filter and Sort Posts
COLLECT DISCUSSIONS

Quick Steps

The Facts

On a thread page, you can read all the posts made to the initial post. If many posts appear, you can reduce the list using the collect function. After collecting posts, 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. After collecting posts, filter and sort the messages to further organize them.

Do It

1. Access a forum and select a thread.
2. On the thread's page, select the check boxes of the posts to collect. If a post has replies and you want them to appear on a collection page, select the check boxes for those messages.
3. On the action bar, point to the Message Actions drop-down list and select Collect.
4. On the Collection page, you can read and print the results.

Help

Collect Posts
Filter and Sort Posts
Tag Posts
A discussion forum has been available for two weeks with few contributions. What changes can I make to the forum to encourage participation?

Three changes you can make:

- If the topic is potentially controversial, allow anonymous posts. Anonymity may also help at the beginning of a course when students are still becoming comfortable with discussions.
- If you are not grading threads, allow students to create new threads. This flexibility may encourage students to post their ideas and questions.
- Especially in graded forums or threads, students appreciate the option of being able to edit their contributions. You can allow them to edit or delete their published posts.

By the end of the semester, my 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.

What are the benefits of assigning a moderator?

- A moderator can ensure that posts 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.
A moderator can minimize the number of posts with little valuable content.

**TRY IT**

For this activity, use your Practice Course and access the discussion board.

**View and reply**

- Access the Pluto Controversy forum and open the Pluto Opinion thread to view the available features.
  - Point to the upper-right corner of the page to view the functions that appear.
  - Note that Cathy Chu's post has a badge. Point to it to view her role.
  - Point to the title of Linda Herrera's post and click the Collapse function.
  - Point to a post to view the functions that appear below the post.
  - Scroll slowly down the page and notice the Mark as Read indicator. The icon is blue when the post is unread and transparent when it has been read. Posts are marked as read as you scroll down the page, after a slight delay. Only posts that are viewed on-screen and expanded are marked as read. Posts are not automatically marked read by quickly scrolling down the page. You can manually change the status of a message by clicking the Mark as Read icon.

- Access a post and reply. Experiment with the functions in the content editor. View your post.

**Manage 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.
Search, collect, and tag

- You remember an interesting post about which telescope one of your students used. On the main discussion board page, search for posts that include the word *telescope*.

- On the **Search Results** page, explore the functions for filtering and sorting.

- Return to the list of forums. Access the **Unit 2: Astrophotography/Imaging** forum. Select the check boxes for three or four threads and collect them.

- On the **Collection** page, add a tag to help organize the threads. Return to the forum to view the **Tags** column and the **Tags** drop-down list on the action bar.
Many instructors assign participation grades in the traditional classroom, and you can measure participation online as well. One way is to use graded discussions to measure how often students contribute and the quality of their posts. In addition, assigning grades gives students incentive to participate.

**You grade from the tool** where you can view a collection of the student’s posts. The grades you assign show immediately in the Grade Center.

In the following table, we detail the four steps in the discussion grading process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CREATE</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATE</td>
<td>Students participate in the discussion. As the discussion progresses, you can participate and provide feedback by replying to, rating, and moderating posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADE</td>
<td>Review student posts and assign a numeric grade. After grading, you can lock threads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIEW GRADE</td>
<td>The grades are saved in the discussion board and added to the Grade Center. Students can view their grades in My Grades. You can determine whether or not students can view their own grades and feedback in My Grades by editing the column information in the Grade Center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Best Practice: Grading Reflective Writing**
**GRADE DISCUSSION FORUMS**

### The Facts
You can assign discussion grades to **evaluate participants on performance throughout a forum**. When you create or edit a forum, you can enable forum grading options.

You can create rubrics and refer to them while grading forums, but you must create and associate the rubrics in advance.

### Do It
1. Access the gradable discussion forum.

   ![Forum: Unit 2: Astrophotography](image)

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 student's posts made to the graded forum appears.

4. In the content frame, evaluate the currently selected user's posts.

5. In the grading sidebar, type a grade. If you associated a rubric for this forum, expand and complete the rubric.

6. Optionally, type **Feedback** for the user and notes for yourself.

7. Click **Submit** to add the grade, feedback, and grading notes to the Grade Center. The grade appears on the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page.

### Help
- **Forum Grading**
- **Needs Grading Page**
- **Rubrics**
GRADE DISCUSSION THREADS

The Facts

You can assign discussion grades to **evaluate participants on performance in each thread**.

You can create rubrics and refer to them while grading threads, but you must create and associate the rubrics in advance.

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

Do It

After accessing the user's threads to grade, follow the steps outlined in the previous section for forum grading.

1. Access the discussion forum containing a 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 student’s posts made to the graded thread appears.

Help

**Thread Grading**

**List View and Tree View**

**Rubrics**

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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?
GOING FURTHER

To continue learning about the discussion board and ways you can use it, visit these Blackboard Help topics.

View Discussion Statistics
Group Discussions
Manage Discussions
Best Practice: Interactive Tools in Action

Bibliography