Discussion Board

What is Discussion Board?

Discussion Board is a centralised location for all discussion forums. Discussion forums can appear anywhere in the course, but are all listed on the Discussion Board. Groups can have their own private Discussion Boards with multiple forums.

Discussion Board is used to set up forums that function as electronic discussion groups. Both instructors and the students in a discussion group can post messages that others can read. These messages can either begin a new topic or subtopic for discussion, or comment on someone else’s post on a topic. Postings are “threaded”, that is, replies to the first comment on a topic, and replies to replies are grouped together so that a viewer can see the relationships among the posts.

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Discussion Board terms

Forum
A topic for discussion.

Thread
The initial post and the entire series of replies to that post within a Discussion Board forum. Threads are a series of posts related to a similar topic.

Post
A Discussion Board entry posted to a thread or used to start a thread. Also used as a verb to refer to the act of submitting a post.
How do I create a new Forum?

1. Open your Blackboard Course.
2. Click on the Communication menu item.
3. Click on the Discussion Board link.

![Discussion Board Menu](image)

**Figure 1:** Discussion Board link under Communications menu item.

4. Click on the Forum icon to display the Add forum page.

![Forum Icon](image)

**Figure 2:** Forum icon.

5. Under Forum Information, type the:
   - **Name** of the Forum, e.g. Welcome
   - **Description** of what the Forum is about.
   - **Available** is set to yes, unless you want to hide it until a later date.

![Forum Information](image)

**Figure 3:** Forum Information.
6 Under Forum Settings, select the options you require, including a Grade if required. Note: Using the Allow anonymous posts option should be avoided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Allow anonymous posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Allow author to remove own posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ All posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Only posts with no replies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Allow author to modify own published posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Allow file attachments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Allow members to create new threads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Allow members to subscribe to threads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Allow members to rate posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Force moderation of posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade  □ No grading in forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Grade forum: Points possible 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Grade threads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Forum Settings available.

7 Under Submit, click on the Submit button when you have completed all the fields required to return to the Forum Screen.

8 At the Forum screen you can do a number of things.
   - **Display Order** column allows you to change the Display Order of your Forum when you have more than one Forum.
   - **Forum** column displays all of the Forums. Clicking on the Forum link will take you to the Forum Threads screen.
   - **Total Posts** column shows the number of Posts related to a specific Forum.
   - **Unread Posts** column shows the number of Posts that have not been read.
   - **Total Participants** shows how many different students have participated.
   - **Modify button** takes you to the Forum Information screen to make modifications.
   - **Manage button** takes you to a list of the Forum Users and allows you to change their roles.
     - Managers can create and modify forums.
     - Moderators can review messages before they are posted on the forum.
     - Graders can grade message threads.
     - Participants can initiate threads, post messages and reply to existing messages.
     - Readers can only read messages.
     - Blocked users cannot participate (read or write) in the Discussion Board.
   - **Remove button** allows you to remove a Forum.
   - **Copy button** allows you to copy the Forum to a different name and location.

Figure 5: Forum screen.
How do I create a new Thread?

Threads are a series of posts related to a similar topic. When creating a Forum, the Instructor has the option of allowing or not allowing users to start threads. If threads are graded, users cannot start threads. Other Forums are designed for users to share opinions and thoughts on tangential or unrelated topics. In this case, it is safe to allow users to create threads and spark discussions. Generally, the purpose of the Forum will dictate whether or not users can start threads.

1. Open your Blackboard Course and go to your Discussion Board.
2. Click on the required Forum link.
3. Click on the Thread icon in the action bar to display the Add Thread page.

![Image of Thread icon](image)

**Figure 6: Thread icon.**

4. Complete the Thread information.
   - Under ① Message add a **Subject** and a **Message**.

![Image of Message fields](image)

**Figure 7: Message fields.**

   - Under ② add any **Attachments** required.
   - Under ③ Submit, click on the **Submit** button or on the **Save** button to store a draft.

5. At the Forum screen, the Thread link will appear in the Thread column.

![Image of Thread link](image)

**Figure 8: Thread link in Thread column.**
How do I change Thread status?

Thread status can be changed. This can be used in cases where you pre-setup a thread, but do not want to publish it for the students to see it until a later date.

The Forum Manager can change the status of a thread to any one of the following:

- **Published**: A published thread is available to users.
- **Hidden**: Hidden threads do not display unless the user chooses. Hidden threads may not be modified. Hiding threads removes outdated threads and makes relevant content easier to find.
- **Unavailable**: Unavailable threads are only visible to Forum managers. Even then, Forum managers must choose to view these threads. Making threads unavailable means that other users cannot view the thread.

Figure 9: Select Threads to change and click on the Change Status to drop down list for options.

1. Select the required threads, by clicking on the box next to the threads that the status is needed to be changed on.
2. From the Change Status to: drop-down list, select the new status.
3. Click on the Go button.
4. Check the status column next to the selected threads shows the correct status.

How do I Lock a Thread?

Thread can be locked and unlocked. Locking a Thread allows Grades to be assigned without users updating or changing posts.

- **Lock**: Users may read the thread but not make any additions or modifications.
- **Unlock**: Unlocking a thread allows users to modify and add to the thread.

Figure 10: Lock and Unlock threads.

5. Select the required threads, by clicking on the box next to the threads that the status is needed to be changed on.
6. Click on the Lock icon and the Status column will display Locked.
How do I Collect Threads?

Thread can be collected onto one page where posts can be sorted, filtered, or printed. This option can be used to print to a .pdf file and retain the file for your records.

1. Select the required threads, by clicking on the box next to the threads.
2. Click on the Collect icon to display all the threads and posts relating to the thread.

Figure 11: Box next to Thread and Collect icon.

3. There are a number of options available on the collections screen.
   - **Print** offers a number of options including as on the screen, selected and individual frames and to print to a .pdf file that can be retained for your records.
   - **Filter** can be by **Author** and/or **Status**. This option allows you to see what an individual student has contributed.
   - **Sort by** can be by Author, Date, Subject or Thread.

Figure 12: Collection screen.

4. Click on OK when you have finished to return to the Thread screen.
How do I and my students add a Post?

Threads grow as users respond to the initial, and subsequent, posts. Replies build on one another to construct a conversation.

1. Open a Thread in a Forum.
2. Click on the box next to the post you want to reply to.
3. Click on the Reply button.

4. On the Reply to Post screen:
   - Under Message add a Subject and a Message.
   - Under add any Attachments required.
   - Under Submit, click on the Submit button or on the Save button to store a draft.

5. Your reply will appear under the original post on the Thread Detail screen.
How do I create Discussion Board Groups?

You can set up a number of different Groups in Discussion Board.

1. Open your Blackboard Course.
2. Click on the Control Panel menu item.
3. Click on Manage Groups under the User Management block.
4. From the Manage Groups page:
   - click Add Group to create a new group
   - click Modify to change the properties for a specific group.

The table below details the fields on this page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Group Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group name</td>
<td>Enter a Group name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Enter a description of the Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Group Discussion Board Function</td>
<td>Select this check box to indicate that this Group will have access to the Discussion Board functions. If this check box is not selected this Group will not have access to the Discussion Board functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Group Virtual Classroom Function</td>
<td>Select this check box to indicate that this Group will have access to the Virtual Classroom functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Group File Exchange Function</td>
<td>Select this check box to indicate that this Group will have access to the group file exchange function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Group Email Function</td>
<td>Select this check box to indicate that this Group will have access to the group email function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make group visible now</td>
<td>Click Yes to make the group available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do I Grade a Forum or Thread?

Student interactions with the Discussion Board are a permanent record of participation. You have the option to grade Students at the Forum level or at the Thread level. Grading options are enabled either when the Forum is created or by modifying the Forum.

How do I enable Grading for a Forum or Thread?

1. Go to the **Modify Forum** feature.
2. Under **Forum Settings**, **Grade** select the grading options you require.

   ![Figure 15: Forum and thread grade options.](image)

   - Select **Grade Forum** and enter a point value to evaluate participants on performance throughout the Forum.
   - Select **Grade Threads** to evaluate participants on performance in each thread. When the **Grade Threads** option is used, a **Points Possible** option appears each time a thread is started. Keep in mind that users cannot create new threads if **Grade Threads** is selected for the Forum.

   Note: If Grades have already been entered for the Forum or its threads, a warning message will appear that changing the setting will remove the associated Grade Center Items. Click **OK** to continue or click **Cancel** to preserve the Grade Center Items.

3. Check the **Grade Center** to see the Item is created and make any changes required under the **Modify Column** option.

   ![Figure 16: Grade Center item with Modify Column option.](image)

How do I Grade User Participation in a Forum?

1. Open the **Discussion Board** to display the list of Forums. A grade icon is displayed next to each Forum that may be graded.

   ![Figure 17: Grade icon in Grade column.](image)

2. Click the grade icon in the **Grade column** next to the **Forum item**. A list of students appears.
3. Click on the **Grade button** for a user. A collection of the user’s posts in the Forum will appear.
4. Evaluate the posts and enter a **Grade** in the Grade field at the top of the page.
5. Click on the **Submit button** to add the Grade to the Grade Center.
6. Click on **OK** to return to the Grade Forum Users page.
How do I Grade User Participation in a Thread?

1. Open the Forum where the threads that are to be graded are located.
2. Select the required thread.
3. Click on the Grade Thread icon next to the specific thread. This button will only appear to users with a forum role of Grader or Manager. A collection of the students posts in the Thread appears.
4. Evaluate the posts and enter a Grade in the Grade field at the top of the page.
5. Click on the Submit button to add the Grade to the Grade Center.
6. Click on OK to return to the Grade Thread Users page.

How do I Change Discussion Board Grades?

1. Navigate to the Grade page.
2. Click the Clear Grade button.
3. Enter a new Grade and click the Submit button.

How do I use Discussion Board Statistics?

The Performance Dashboard keeps track of user activity throughout the Course, including the Discussion Board. This information can quickly help identify students that are outside the normal range of participation. This information can be used to reward and assist students.

1. Click on Performance Dashboard in the Assessment block on the Control Panel. The number of Forums where a user has posted appears as a link in the Discussion Board column.
2. Click on the link to view details that include information on total posts, date of last post, length of post, grade, etc.
Discussion board guidelines

RMIT has developed guidelines for using online discussion boards or chat rooms. Participants have a range of responsibilities, whether they act as a moderator or ordinary participant.

Responsibilities of participants

As a public space it is expected that everyone using discussion forums do so as if they are in a classroom or engaging in public communication such as writing a letter for publication in a newspaper. Consider if what you want to say in an on-line posting is something you would say, using the same words, to someone’s face.

The online space is there to be used by people who:

- Understand the value of presenting their ideas respectfully
- Want to represent the views of others as accurately as possible
- Want to persuade by appealing to relevant evidence or using the conventions of logical argument
- Do so at all times with a sensitivity to the capacity of language to cause pain and distress, or to vilify and defame.

When using the Discussion Board feature within Blackboard, students are advised as follows:

- The use of the Discussion Board is governed by RMIT Electronic Communications
- Posts must not contain any abusive or unlawful content. Posts that are defamatory, abusive, threatening, discriminatory or otherwise unlawful are not permitted
- Participants should not contribute advertising materials, commercial product endorsements, or off-topic materials
- Participants must not contribute any material that breaches copyright
- Participants are in no way to impersonate other people, including other participants
- Posts are to remain constructive and respectful of others at all times.
- Participants may not post content that infringes or threatens the privacy of others.
- Participants should be aware that staff may monitor discussion forums and remove inappropriate posts
- Any post that a participant may consider as breaching reasonable comment should be raised with an appropriate staff member.

Responsibilities of the moderator

Like any other curriculum space an RMIT, Blackboard discussion forum is a space where RMIT teaching staff have a responsibility for ensuring that the purposes of the university are achieved. Teaching staff should take reasonable steps to ensure that the rule of law and the normal conventions of responsible and respectful discussion and interaction in discussion boards are observed.

As moderator of a discussion board or chat room you should support effective and positive use of Blackboard discussion forums and carry out the following:

- Ensure that participants have been informed of the Electronic communications policy
- Model good behaviour for students as to the style of interchange and discussion
- Encourage all those who post to the discussion forum to seek to demonstrate that they understand and abide by the conventions of respectful and robust public dialogue, debate and critique
- Inform discussion forum participants that libelous and defamatory statements, statements likely to affront legislation or relevant community standards of debate and dialogue, and statements that vilify or hurt others will not be permitted
- Where practical, monitor discussion forums from time to time, or make arrangements to have discussion forums monitored
• Investigate and act on complaints promptly
• Remove inappropriate posts that come to their attention speedily
• Remove any entries that may be in breach of sections of the RMIT Electronic Communications Policy, including any material that breaches copyright, or infringes on the privacy of others. These and other guidelines are outlined in the university’s Privacy policy and in the Electronic communications policy.

To help clarify the usage for students, you can add the following notice in your Blackboard site:

This Discussion Board is for you to discuss and share ideas and resources relating to the course with your fellow students. I will be routinely monitoring discussion and may respond to your postings from time to time. Please make sure that you treat all students’ contributions with respect. Posts that are defamatory, abusive, threatening, discriminatory or otherwise unlawful are not permitted.

As moderator, staff have the duty to remove any entries that come to their attention that may be in breach of sections of the RMIT Electronic Communications Policy, including any material that breaches copyright or infringes on the privacy of others. These and other guidelines are outlined in the University’s Privacy policy and in the RMIT Electronic Communications Policy (see Electronic communications policy.)