



Discussion Activities

What is a Topic?

The **Discussions** tool is a communication tool in WebCT where students, teaching assistants, designers and instructors can post messages in a public forum. Discussions are divided into different categories and topics, which allow you to create discussion areas based on particular content areas. Everyone in your course can access public topics, while private topics are available only to the participants that you choose. Some examples of topics include assignments, journals, labs, and readings. Each user can view messages within topics according to particular subjects—called "threaded discussions."

How Can You Use This?

- You can send a single message to all students and have it available throughout the semester on an electronic bulletin board.
- You and your students can respond to posted messages so that others can also read the messages and responses. This tends to increase the quality of posted messages.
- You and your students can follow a discussion from multiple students via the *threaded discussion view*. Here you can easily identify who responds to whom in the discussion.

IMPORTANT: Click the **Teach** tab before you create, send, view and reply to messages in your WebCT courses—this is the place instructors communicate with students, teaching assistants and other designers and instructors in the course.

Discussions Settings

Follow these steps to view or edit the **Discussions** tool settings.



1. Click the **Teach** tab.
2. Click **Manage Course** from the **Instructor Tools** area.
3. Click **Settings**; and then click **Discussions**.
4. Make your changes to the **Discussions** tool settings and click **Save Values** to save your changes. Otherwise click **Cancel** to not save your changes.

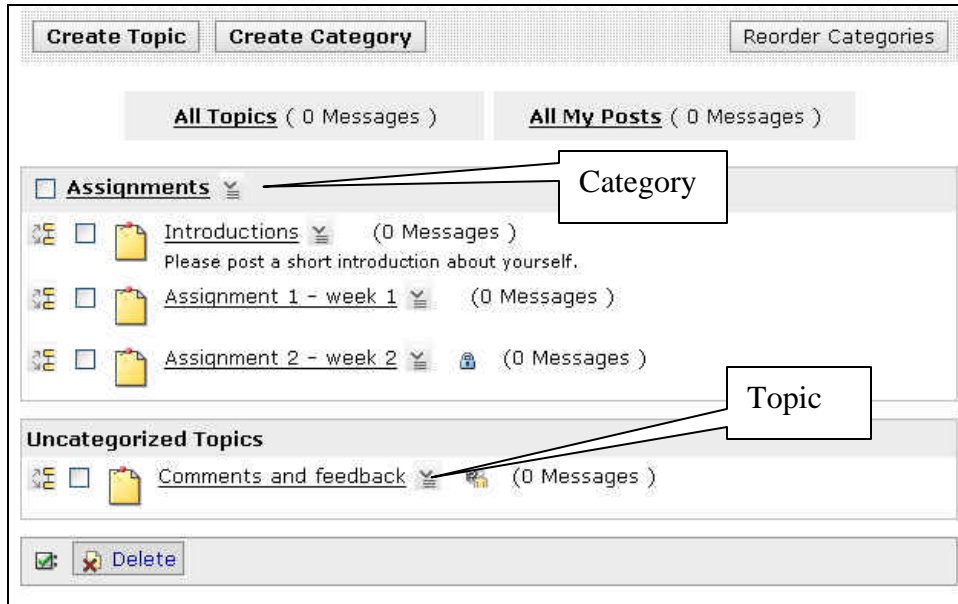
Discussions Tools	
Title	Value
Enable Discussions tool *	<input checked="" type="radio"/> true / <input type="radio"/> false
Maximum number of topics per section (" -1" represents unlimited) *	<input type="text" value="-1"/>
Allow Teaching Assistants to delete messages *	<input checked="" type="radio"/> true / <input type="radio"/> false
Allow Teaching Assistants to delete topics and messages inside *	<input checked="" type="radio"/> true / <input type="radio"/> false
Allow Teaching Assistants to grade topics *	<input checked="" type="radio"/> true / <input type="radio"/> false
Allow Students to edit their own posts (default value) *	<input checked="" type="radio"/> true / <input type="radio"/> false






* Required fields

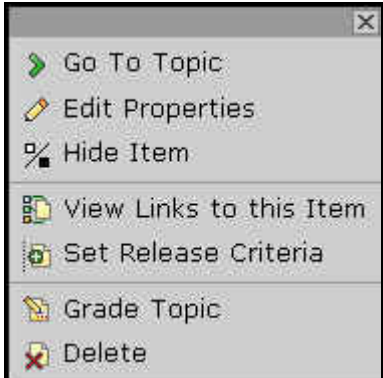
Discussions Tools settings	
Enable Discussions tool	Adds the Discussions tool to your course if the value is set to true.
Maximum number of topics per section	As a designer, this allows you to control the maximum number of topics per section.
Allow teaching assistants to delete messages	Allows teaching assistants to delete individual messages posted to topics.
Allow teaching assistants to delete topics and messages inside	Allows teaching assistants to delete discussion categories, discussion topics, and all of the messages in the topics. Categories are used to group topics. Topics are used to group messages.
Allow teaching assistants to grade topics	Allows teaching assistants to enter grades for students who have posted messages to a topic that is marked as a gradable topic.
Allow students to edit their own posts	Allows students to edit their own messages posted to topics.

Accessing Messages

You can access **Discussion** postings from the **Teach** tab via the **Discussions** button  **Discussions** or icon  on the **Course Tools** menu. When you enter the **Discussions** tool, the main screen appears as shown in the following example.



Key to Sample Discussions Page – Teach tab	
Category	Displays the category name. For example, the sample category <i>Assignments</i> is shown in the previous example. You can order your categories by clicking Reorder Categories .
Uncategorized Topics	If you do not place your topics in a category, they are placed in the <i>Uncategorized Topics</i> category. This category name only appears after you create your first category.
Topic description	Allows you to display a description or set of instructions beneath the topic. For example, the sample topic <i>Introductions</i> has a description.
 <input type="checkbox"/>	To move or reorder a topic, select the check box next to the topics you want to move, and then click the move icon  next to the topic where you want to insert the chosen topic. Select one of the options from the pop-up menu.
	This topic is locked—users can read messages, but not post messages.
	Messages posted to this topic are anonymous.
<input type="checkbox"/>  Delete	Allows you to select the check box for one or more categories and topics, and then delete them and all messages within them.

 <p>The screenshot shows a context menu titled "ActionLinks menu" with the following options: "Go To Topic" (green arrow icon), "Edit Properties" (pencil icon), "Hide Item" (eye with slash icon), "View Links to this Item" (document with arrows icon), "Set Release Criteria" (document with lock icon), "Grade Topic" (clipboard with checkmark icon), and "Delete" (trash can icon).</p>	<p>The ActionLinks button next to each topic allows you to perform various actions on a topic. The menu options change based upon the settings for the topic. For example, <i>Grade Topic</i> only appears if the topic is marked as gradable.</p>
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Creating Categories

You can use categories to organize your discussion topics into related groups or themes.

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, click **Create Category**.
3. Type the name of your new category in the box. Optionally, you may type a description of the category to aid students in understanding the nature of the category.
4. Click **Save**. The new category is now added to your main **Discussions** page.

Creating Topics

You can use discussion topics as a way to communicate with the entire class, as a work area for student groups, or as a way to facilitate and organize discussions in your course.

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, click **Create Topic**.
3. Type the name of your new topic. Optionally, you may type a description of the topic to aid students in understanding the nature of the topic and whether or not you want the topic to be hidden (not shown) from students at this time.



The screenshot shows the "Create Discussion Topic" form with the following fields and options:

- Title:** A text input field with an asterisk indicating it is required.
- Description:** A large text area for entering the topic description.
- HTML Creator:** Radio buttons for "On" and "Off", with "Off" selected.
- Use HTML:** A checkbox that is currently unchecked.
- Item Visibility:** Radio buttons for "Show Item" (selected) and "Hide Item".

- In the **Topic Gradability** section, select the check box if you want your new topic to be gradable (a column is automatically added to the **Grade Book**).
 - If checked, the topic name is placed in the **Grade Book column title**.
 - Select either numeric grade (and enter a maximum score value) or alphanumeric grade.

Topic Gradability
 Topic is gradable (a column is automatically created for this topic in Grade Book)
Grade Book column title:
 Numeric grade: Out of
 Alphanumeric grade

- In the **Topic Settings** section, select the check boxes according to your preferences for editable posts, locked and anonymous. *Note: You can only set a topic to contain anonymous postings when you create a new topic. However, you can change a topic later to contain editable posts and/or be locked.*


Topic Settings
 Editable posts (allow Students to edit their messages in this topic after posting them)
 Locked (topic is in read-only mode)
 Anonymous (author names are not displayed)

- In the **More Options** section, select whether or not you want to place your new topic in a category, specify a category for the new topic, or create a new category and place your topic in that new category. *Note: You CANNOT move a topic to a category at a later date—it MUST be done when you create the topic.*

More Options (Expand this area to see more options.)
Category: Topics can be organized into categories.
 Do not place topic in category
 Specify an existing category:
 Create a category: Name:
Description:

- Click **Save**. The new topic is now added to your main **Discussions** page.


Reordering Categories

1. From the main **Discussions** page, click **Reorder Categories**.
2. Select the check box next to one or more categories that you want to move.
3. Click the **Move** button  to display the menu options.




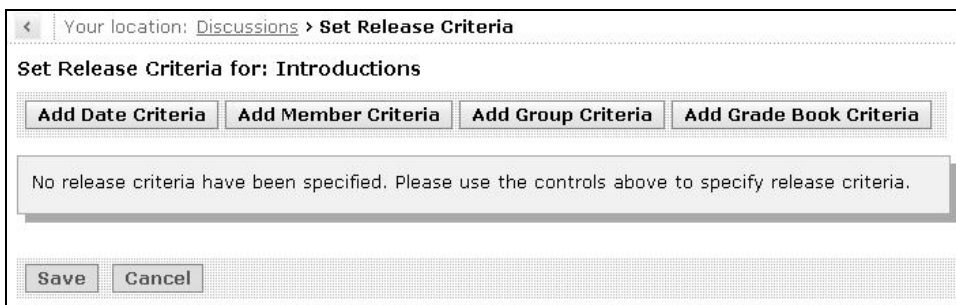
4. Select an option from the **Move** menu. The categories are reordered.

Reordering Topics

1. From the main **Discussions** page, select the check box next to one or more topics that you want to move.
2. Click the move button  to display the menu options.
3. Select an option from the **Move** menu. The topics are reordered.

Selectively Releasing Topics

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. Click the **ActionLinks** button  next to the topic you want to release to a limited number of students or to a group, and then select **Set Release Criteria**.
3. Follow the steps in the **Selective Release** section of *WebCT: The Basics* to add criteria by date, member, group or grade book.



4. Click **Save** to save your new release criteria for this topic.

Editing Topic Properties

In your course, you can change topic properties to reflect current information, or to announce changes in the discussions. For example, you may want group members to select the name of their discussion topic after they use it. In this case, you can rename their topic to reflect their choice.

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, click the **ActionLinks** button next to the topic name you want to edit.
3. Select **Edit Properties**.
4. Make the necessary changes to your topic properties. The following example shows which properties you can edit.

Edit Topic Properties

*Title:

Description: HTML Creator: On / Off

Use HTML

Item Visibility: Show Item
 Hide Item

Topic Gradability

Topic is gradable (a column is automatically created for this topic in Grade Book)
Grade Book column title:

Numeric grade: Out of
 Alphanumeric grade

Topic Settings

Editable posts (allow Students to edit their messages in this topic after posting them)
 Locked (topic is in read-only mode)

5. Click **Save** to save your changes.

Creating Messages

1. From the **Discussions** page, click the name of a topic.
2. Click **Create Message**.
3. Type your subject and message in the spaces provided. Optionally, you may add attachments to your message—see ***Adding Attachments*** in the ***Mail Activities*** section.
4. Click **Post**. The message is posted and the discussion topic page is updated with your most recent posting.

Creating Draft Messages

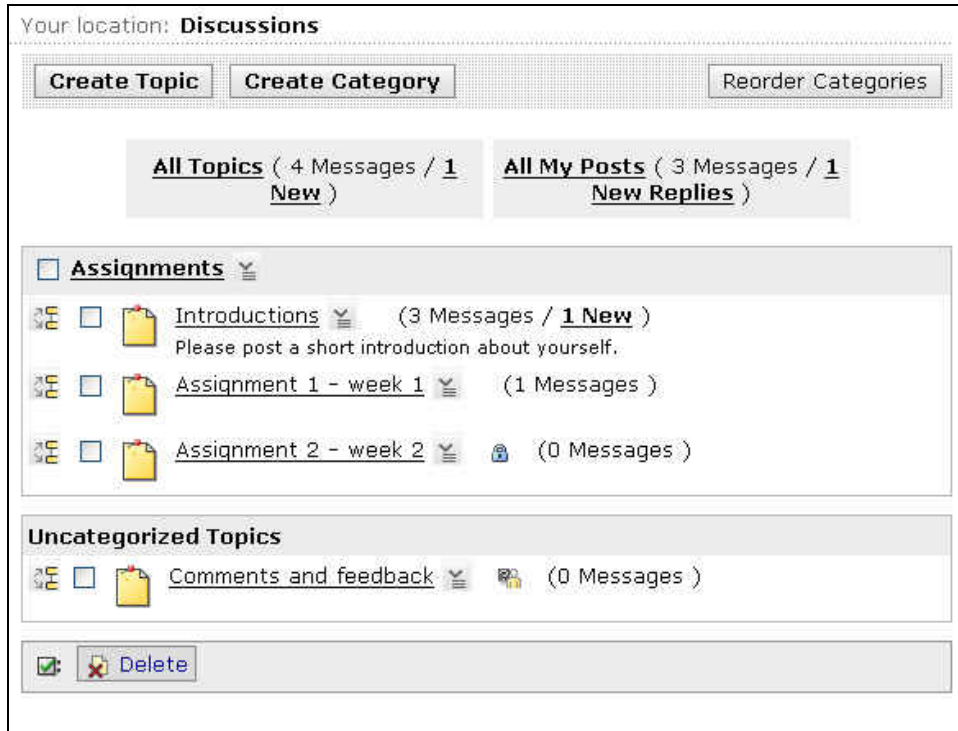
1. After creating a new message, click **Save as Draft** instead of **Post**. This will NOT post the message to the discussion topic, but rather save the message in the drafts folder. This allows you to type some thoughts now, and then edit and post your message later.
2. Later, when you are ready to post the message:
 - a) Click the **Teach** tab, and then click the **Discussions** button or icon.
 - b) Click the name of the topic where you saved your draft message.
 - c) Click **View Drafts** from the topic page.
 - d) Click the subject of the message to display the message.
 - e) Edit your message as appropriate and click **Post Now**.

Reading Messages

There are several ways to read messages in the **Discussions** tool. The three main ways are from: the main **Discussions** page, an individual topic page, and a link on a Folder or Learning Module.

The Main Discussions Page

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. From the main **Discussions** page you have a few options in which to view messages. The following sample image and accompanying table illustrate these options.



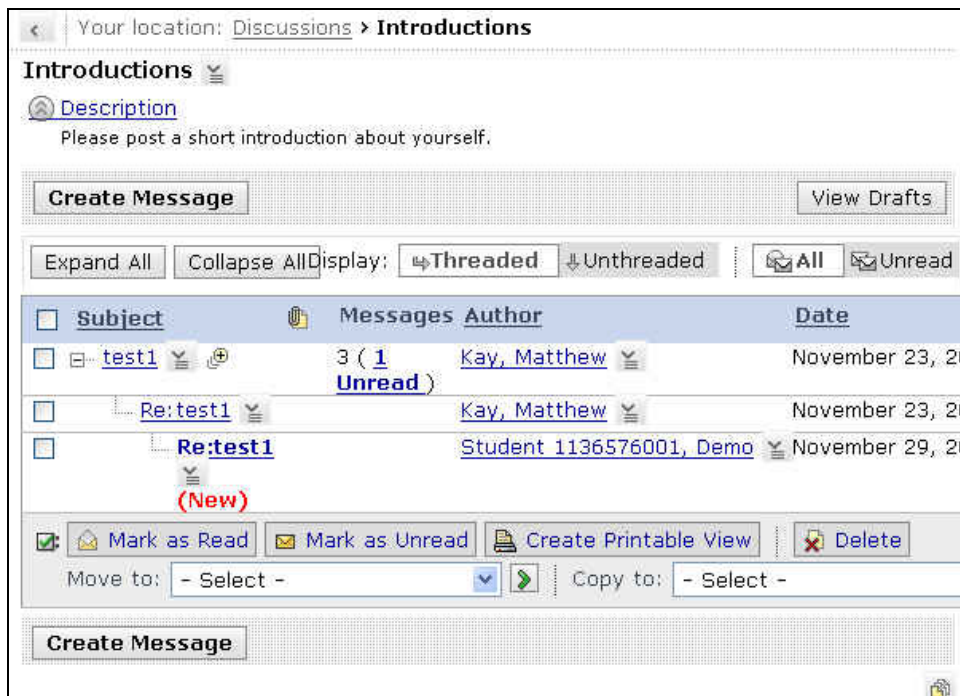
Link or Icon	Meaning
All Topics	View all messages in all topics.
New (next to All Topics)	View only the new messages posted from all topics.
All My Posts	View all of your messages in all topics.
New Replies (next to All My Posts)	View only the new replies you posted for all topics.
Name of topic	Show messages within a specific topic.
New (next to a topic name)	View only the new messages posted for that specific topic.

3. If you selected **New** or **New Replies** from the main **Discussions** page, then after reading the messages, you can close the message window. Otherwise, the page displays a summary of messages. This new page has options similar to an individual topic page, which is explained in the next section.

An Individual Topic Page

Discussion messages can be viewed as either *threaded* (grouped by the same subject) or *unthreaded* (listed by message number).

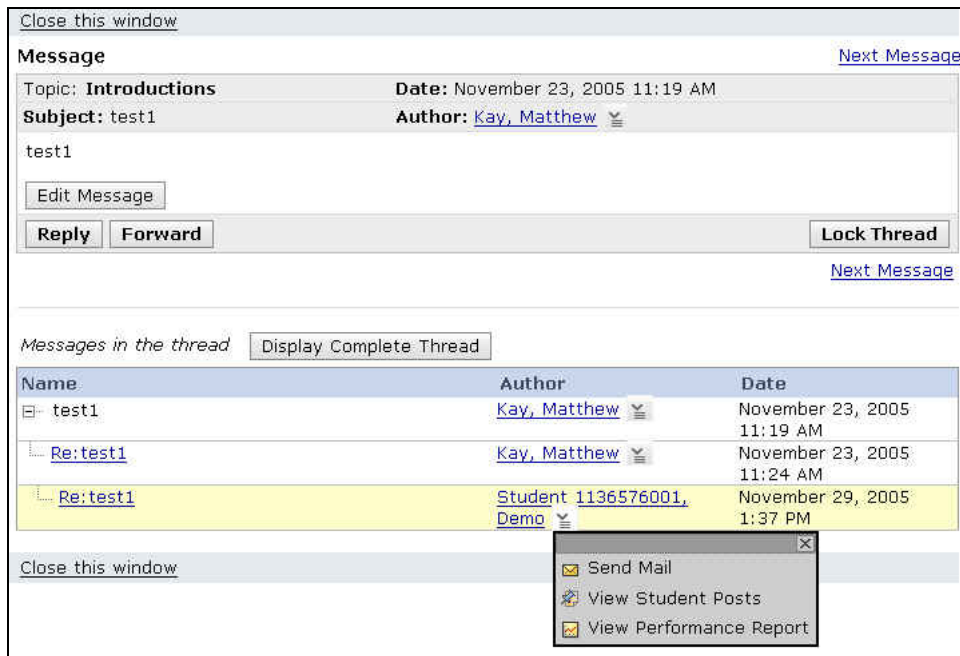
1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. After selecting a topic from the main **Discussions** page, you have a few options in which to view messages. The following example and table illustrate these options.



Link, Icon or Button	Meaning
View Drafts	Show all draft messages in this topic.
Threaded	Group messages by the same initial subject message. This is the default.
Unthreaded	List messages by date and time posted.
All	Show all messages.
Unread	Show only the <i>unread</i> messages.
Subject name	View an individual message.
	View all messages for that specific thread (subject).
Check box next to subject	Select each message you want to view, and then click Create Printable View .
Create Printable View	View the messages with the check boxes selected (checked).

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- Click a subject to display the message. The message is displayed in a new window. The following example and table illustrate the options available when you are reading a message.

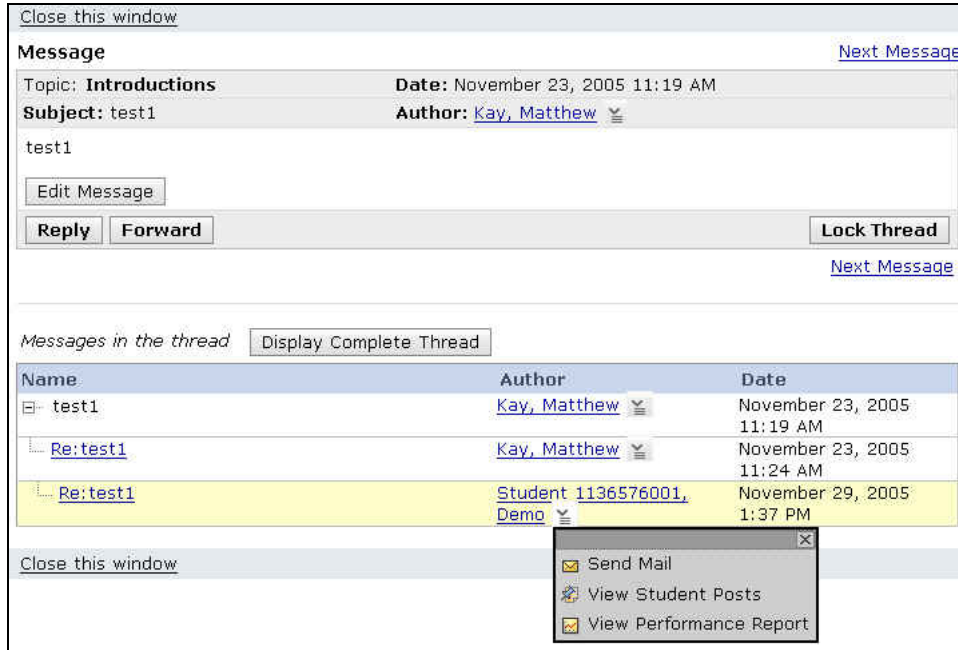


Link, Icon or Button	Meaning
Previous Message	View the previous message in the thread (not shown in the example).
Next Message	View the next message in the thread.
ActionLinks next to Author in lower threaded area	Select View Student Posts to view all messages posted by this student in this topic only.

- After reading the messages, you can close the message window.

Replying to Messages

1. View a message by following the steps in the previous section. The message is displayed in a new window.



2. There are several ways for you to reply to a message.
 - **Edit Message** – If the setting to allow editing of messages is set to *true*, this allows you to edit your message.
 - **Reply** – To post a reply message to the topic.
 - **Forward** – To send the message to another person in the course.
 - **Lock Thread** – If you are viewing the first message posted in a thread, you can lock the entire thread so no one can **Reply** or **Forward** messages in the thread.
 - **ActionLinks** next to Author at top (not shown) > **Send Mail** – To send a personal mail message to the author of the posting you are viewing.
 - **ActionLinks** next to Author in lower threaded area > **Send Mail** – To send a personal mail message to this person.
3. If you selected **Forward**, click **Browse for Recipients** and select one or more people to receive your message. Click **Save** to save your list of recipients.
4. Type your reply in the **Message** window.
5. Click **Post** to post your discussion message or **Send** to send your mail message.

Threaded Discussions

Discussion messages can be shown on the screen as either *threaded* (grouped by the same initial subject message) or *unthreaded* (listed by date and time posted). The following is an example of messages displayed as threaded.

The screenshot shows a web interface for a discussion forum. At the top, it indicates the location: [Discussions](#) > **Introductions**. Below this is a section titled "Introductions" with a "Description" link and the instruction: "Please post a short introduction about yourself." There are two buttons: "Create Message" and "View Drafts".

Below the buttons, there are controls for "Expand All", "Collapse All", and a "Display:" menu set to "Threaded". There are also "All" and "Unread" filters. The main content is a table of messages:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject	Messages	Author	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	test1	3 (1 Unread)	Kay, Matthew	November 23, 20
<input type="checkbox"/>	Re:test1		Kay, Matthew	November 23, 20
<input type="checkbox"/>	Re:test1		Student 1136576001, Demo	November 29, 20

Below the table, there are action buttons: "Mark as Read", "Mark as Unread", "Create Printable View", and "Delete". There are also "Move to:" and "Copy to:" dropdown menus. At the bottom, there is another "Create Message" button.

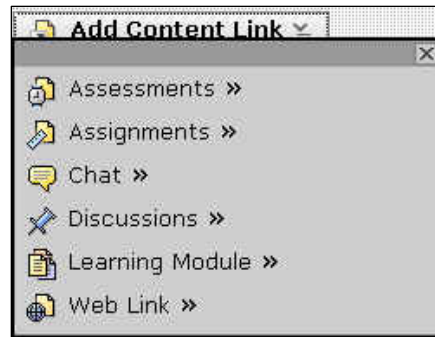
Creating Links to Discussion Topics

You can easily add a link to a discussion category or an individual discussion topic to any **Folder** or **Learning Module** from either the:

- **Folder** or **Learning Module**
- **Discussions** tool.

From a Folder or Content Module

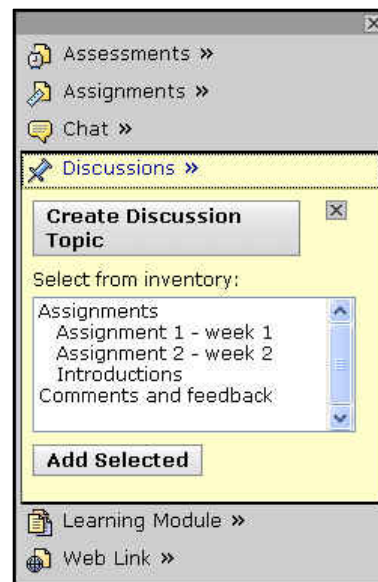
1. Click the **Build** tab, and navigate to the **Folder** or **Learning Module** where you want to add a link.
2. Click **Add Content Link**.
3. Select **Discussions** from the menu.



4. From the expanded menu, select the category or discussion topic. You can select more than one item by clicking **CTRL+click** (**CMD+click** on a Mac) for each item.

*Note: If you need to create a new room, click **Create Discussion Topic**. You can then follow the steps in the previous section of this document, titled 'Creating Topics'.*

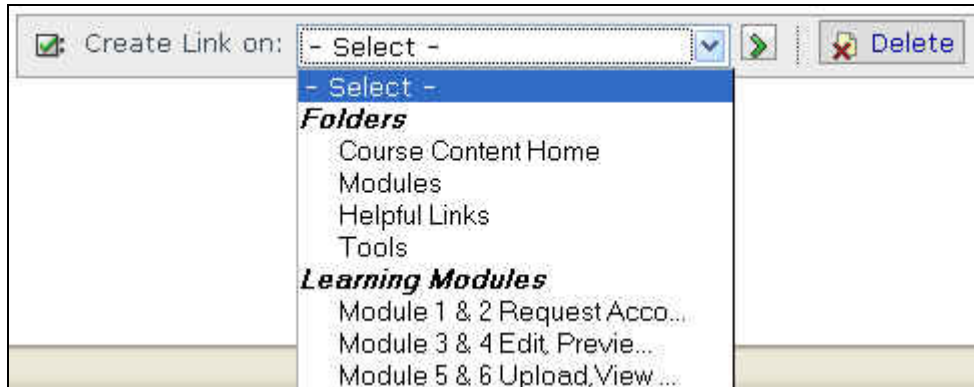
5. Click **Add Selected**.






From the Discussions Tool

1. Click the **Build** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, select the check box next to a category or topic. You can mark more than one category or topic.
3. Select a folder or learning module from the **Create Link on** list.




4. Click **Go**  next to the list. A message at the top of the page confirms the categories and/or topics that were added to that **Folder** or **Learning Module**.



Deleting Categories and Topics

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon from the **Course Tools** menu.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, click the **ActionLinks** button next to the name of the category or topic to remove, and then select **Delete**.
3. When the warning message appears, click **OK** to delete the category or topic.

Deleting Messages

1. Click the **Teach** tab, and then the **Discussions** button or icon from the **Course Tools** menu.
2. From the main **Discussions** page, click a topic name.
3. Select the check box next to the messages you want to delete.
4. Click **Delete**  below the list of messages.
5. When the warning message appears, click **OK** to delete the messages

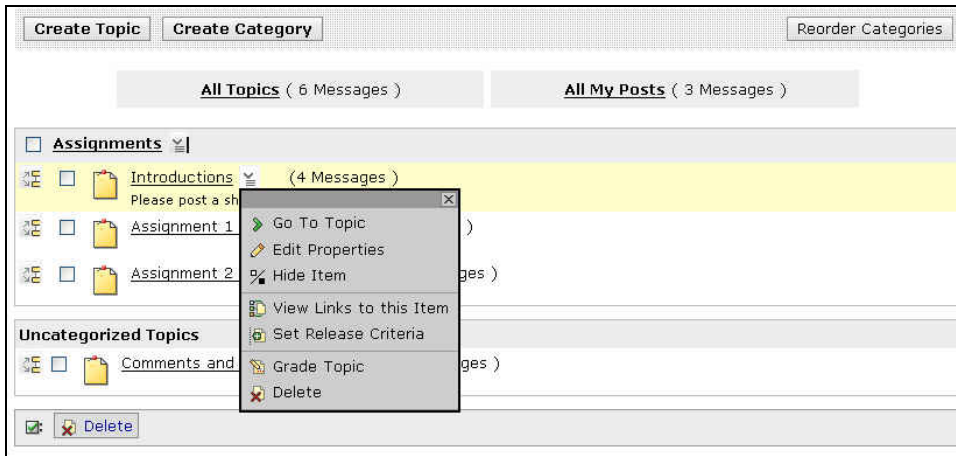


Grading Topic Messages

You can easily enter grades for a discussion topic that is marked as gradable from wherever you have a link to the discussion topic, which can be from a:

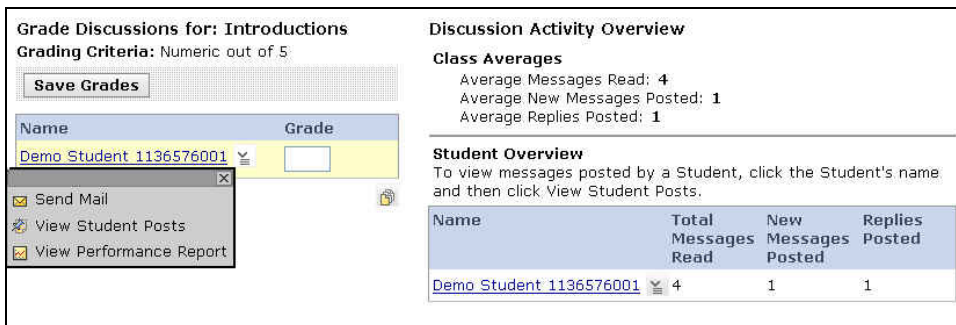
- **Folder** or **Learning Module**
- **Discussions** tool
- **Discussions** topic

1. Click the **Teach** tab.
2. Navigate to the **Folder** or **Learning Module** where you have a link to the discussion topic, or click the **Discussions** button or icon from the **Course Tools** menu, or navigate to a discussion topic.
3. Click the **ActionLinks** button next to the name of the topic, and select **Grade Topic**.



4. If you wish to update grades already posted, skip to step 7.

To enter new grades: Click the **ActionLinks** menu next to the name of the student you wish to grade and select **View Student Posts**.



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- The messages posted by the student in this topic are displayed on the right side of the screen. You can now review the posts and enter a numeric value in the grade box for that student.

Grade Discussions for: Introductions
Grading Criteria: Numeric out of 5

[Save Grades](#)

Name	Grade
Demo Student 1136576001	<input type="text"/>

Student Discussion Posts

[Print](#) [Save as File](#)

Author: [Demo Student 1136576001](#)

Topic: **Introductions**
New Messages Posted : 1 (Class Average 1)
Replies Posted : 1 (Class Average 1)
Messages Read : 4 (Class Average 4)

Subject: Re: test1 **Date:** November 29, 2005 1:37 PM
That you for the information. It will help me complete the assignment.
[View Complete Thread](#)

Subject: sample introduction **Date:** November 30, 2005 11:24 AM
I am a marvelous student in your class!
[View Complete Thread](#)

[Print](#) [Save as File](#)

- Click **Save Grades** to save the new grades. If you are finished grading this topic, you can skip the remaining steps.
- To update existing grades for this topic: Click the grade value in the Grade column for the student you want to grade.


Grade Discussions for: Introductions
Grading Criteria: Numeric out of 5

[Save Grades](#)

Name	Grade
J. Smith	5.0
Demo Student 1136576001	5.0

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8. Enter a new grade value in the **Change To** box and any comment you wish regarding the reason for this change.
9. Click **Save** to save the new grade value and comment.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "https://online6.csus.edu - Member Ma...". The main content area is titled "Edit Value for: Introductions" and shows the following information:

- Member: Demo Student 1136576001
- Two radio buttons: "Revert to Original: 1" (unselected) and "Change To:" (selected).
- A text input field next to "Change To:" containing the number "5".
- A "Comment:" label above a large empty text area.
- Three buttons: "Save", "Cancel", and "View Audit History".

The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Done" on the left and "online6.csus.edu" on the right.