

Discussions Tool Guide

WHAT IS THE DISCUSSIONS TOOL?

The Discussions tool provides an area for collaboration and communication, allowing learners to post, read and reply to messages on different topics, share thoughts about course materials, ask questions, share files and work with peers or colleagues.

WHY USE THE DISCUSSIONS TOOL?

- Have you faced the challenge of building collaboration between learners separated by location?
- Have you wondered how to differentiate and involve learners who need time to absorb the material?
- Have you ever been concerned that group work is logistically difficult for learners?
- Would you like to enhance critical thinking?

Consider some of the advantages of moving some classroom discussions online. You can use the Discussions tool to:

- Encourage users to share thoughts on course material
- Set up forums for users to ask questions
- Pose a question for the class to debate
- Discuss the answers to an assignment
- Create forums for groups to work on group assignments

USER STORY

An organization has decided it would be advantageous for employees to ask questions and offer personal experience to supplement content presented for the benefit of others in a training course. The institution wants to control the collaboration taking place in an effort to prevent the risk of sensitive information from being unduly disclosed. The postings are moderated via the built-in approval system

allowing employee contributions to be reviewed prior to being made public.

CREATING A DISCUSSION FORUM AND TOPIC

Forums are used to organize your discussion topics into categories. You must have a forum created before creating topics. Topics are where learners post and read messages and they cannot exist outside of forums. To create a forum (and topic):

1. Select **New Forum**.
2. If you want to automatically create a topic in the forum with the same name, select the **Create a New Topic in this Forum with the Same Title** check box.
3. Additional options to consider include: approving messages before posted, visibility restrictions; locking; user must compose a message before participating in responses checkbox; anonymity, etc.

Please note that any options that you set at the forum level will automatically cascade down to any topics held within that forum.

AVAILABILITY AND RESTRICTIONS

You can create and attach release conditions if you want a forum or topic to be available to users only of a specific group/ section/ role, or only after they have fulfilled other specified tasks. Examples of release conditions include: completing a dropbox submission; scoring a certain amount on a quiz and viewing a specific content topic.

Group Restrictions are available if you select the **Restrict this Topic to the Following** Groups checkbox, and if you already have groups available. You can also set up group-specific discussions using the **Group and Section Restrictions** tab.

ASSESSMENT

You can evaluate users' individual messages and have the Learning Environment automatically calculate a topic score for each user, or you can assign a topic score directly to each user. If you choose to assess individual messages, you can specify how you want the system to calculate each user's overall topic score.

MANAGING DISCUSSIONS

On your course homepage, the **Updates Widget** lists the total number of unread messages for all discussion topics in your course. In the **Forums & Topics List** (found by clicking on the Discussions tool on your navbar), the number of unread messages appears beneath each topic. If you have the discussions list pane visible you can see topics with unread messages in bold.

You can also choose to subscribe to specific discussion forums, threads, or messages and receive an email notification when there is a new post.

VIEWING AND EXPORTING STATISTICS

Select the context menu for the forum or topic you want to access statistics for. Use this information to determine which topics are stimulating and which are not. Use statistics to follow the participation levels of different users, so you can send email reminders to users who have not been participating.

RESTORE OPTION

When a forum or topic is accidentally deleted, the restore area will allow you to undo this action. The restore area:

- Lists who deleted a forum or topic and when it was deleted.
- Allows any forum restored to include all topics under that forum at the same time.

- Enables all posts within a topic that is being restored to be kept when restoring a topic.

Simply select the **More Actions** menu and access the restore area to restore any deleted items.

RUBRICS

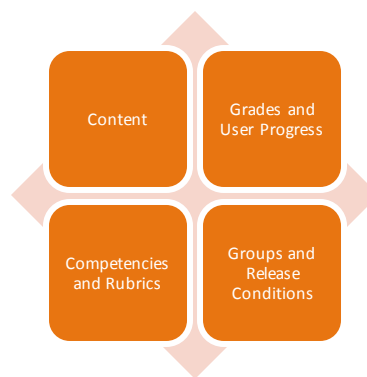
Rubrics associated with a discussion topic are visible to instructors and students. Users can examine the expectations for the discussion simultaneously as they engage in a discussion for the course. Instructors can make use of the rubric to evaluate learners and these evaluations can be seen by students in the User Progress tool.

INTERACTIONS WITH CONTENT

Discussion topics are seamlessly integrated within the Content tool, allowing learners to participate in discussions without ever having to leave Content. You are able to edit and modify the majority of a discussion topic's properties from the Content tool. See the Content Tool Guide for more information on adding activities.

WHAT TOOLS INTERACT WITH DISCUSSIONS?

Discussions interact with a variety of tools. These tools include:



WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Visit the Brightspace Community (<https://community.brightspace.com>) or D2L Resource Centre (<https://documentation.desire2learn.com>) for videos, documents and other resources.

About D2L

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