

Working with the Discussion Forum

The Discussion Forum is one of several communication tools inside CoursePlus. It is used for everything from general course conversations to assignments where students must write a post that replies to a prompt before reading and replying to their peers' posts. The Discussion Forum is organized by Categories and Category Groups that hold Topics. The Topics are where the actual discussion happens; they are related posts, or threads of conversation.

Topics are always started with a single Post and associated with (or organized within) a Category. A Category may or may not be organized within a Category Group. A Post must be always associated with a Topic; a single Post can either start a Topic or be a reply to an existing Post under a Topic. In other words, a Post can start the discussion on a topic of conversation or continue it.

Faculty can set up Categories and Category Groups with special permissions and limitations such as limiting access by Course Groups, mandating "post before viewing", making a Category read-only, etc. Some of these settings are also available at the Topic level. These settings determine how a student can view and interact with a Category and its Topics.

This document serves to get you started in using the Discussion Forum in your course.

Contents

Understanding "Discussion Forum Home" vs. "My Discussion Forum"	2
Discussion Forum Navigation Links	3
View/Subscribe Options	3
Search	3
Bookmarks	3
Navigating the Discussion Forum Home	3
Expand and Collapse Categories	4
Icons	4
Navigate from Topic Titles to Discussion Threads (Posts)	5
Add a Topic to a Category	5
Hide/Show Read Topics	5
Navigating My Discussion Forum	5
Left-side Navigation Pane	5
Expand and Collapse Categories	6
Hide/Show Read Topics	6
Topics	6
Add a Topic to a Category	6
Subscribing to a Topic	7
Reading a Topic's Discussion Thread (Posts and Replies)	7
Posts	8
Creating a New Post in Reply to a Topic	8
Replying to a Specific Post (<i>Other than the Original</i>)	9
Editing an Existing Post	10

Understanding “Discussion Forum Home” vs. “My Discussion Forum”

The “Discussion Forum Home” page is the default start page when accessing the Discussion Forum tool, including using the drop-down Communication navigation menu. All the forum’s Topics, Categories, and Category Groups are listed on this page. The Discussion Forum Home page provides an overview of all the activities in the Discussion Forum because it displays all the current Topics nested under their associated Categories and Category Groups. As part of this overview, you also see the name of the student or faculty team member who started each topic with its Original Post and the name of the person who last posted inside the topic. In addition, you see helpful [icons](#) that indicate restrictions on a Category or Topic as well as a special flag when there’s a new post in a Topic. You do *not* see the actual text of the posts – the conversation – on the Discussion Forum Home page.

The “My Discussion Forum” page has a more concise view of the Discussion Forum activities. This is the default view when you click on any Topic name to [read its posts](#) (messages). It’s also the default view after you [post or edit a new message](#) in a Topic or [reply to an existing post](#). All the Categories and Category Groups are listed on this page in its left-side navigation pane, but you will not see the icons that indicate the restrictions on a Category or Topic. **Unlike the “Discussion Forum Home” page, the “My Discussion Forum” page always displays the thread of posts, or the conversation, within a Topic.** These threads are shown one Topic at a time.

You can switch between the “Discussion Forum Home” and “My Discussion Forum” views by using the links on either page.

VISIBLE FEATURE	DISCUSSION FORUM HOME	MY DISCUSSION FORUM
Category Group Name	Yes (in blue banner across page)	Yes (in gray banner of left-side navigation pane)
Category Name	Yes	Yes
Topic Title*You may have to expand a Category to see its Topics	Yes	Yes
Originator of Each Topic (author of Topic’s initial post)	Yes	No
Author of Last Post in Each Topic	Yes	No
Category and Topic Settings Icons	Yes	No
“New” Post Indicator (label)	Yes	Yes
Thread of Posts Within a Topic	No	Yes
Text of Posts/Discussion	No	Yes

Discussion Forum Navigation Links

These navigation links appear for both the “Discussion Forum Home” and the “My Discussion Forum” view at the top of these pages.



View/Subscribe Options

Click “View/Subscribe Options” to personalize your Discussion Forum experience. Your personal options for viewing the Discussion Forum in a specific Course Site include:

- Your personal default Discussion Forum landing page (“My Discussion Forum” or “Discussion Forum Home”) when navigating to the Discussion Forum on that Course site.
- Whether or not to show or hide the messages you’ve already read within a Topic.
- Whether or not to show or hide the Topics you’ve already read within a Category.

Your options for subscribing to the Discussion Forum in a specific Course Site include:


- If subscribed to a Category or Topic, whether to be notified (via email) daily or
- Whether to receive an email each time a post is added.

It is on this View/Subscribe page that you can subscribe to one or more Categories by checking the box in front of the available Category names. To [subscribe to a Topic](#), you will need to view the Topic’s thread in My Discussion Forum.

Search

Click on the “Search” link to search across the course’s entire Discussion Forum by keyword or importance. You can also filter this search by author and date.

Bookmarks

When you bookmark one or more posts (by clicking on the star icon  in the header banner of any post), a list of your bookmarked messages with their full text will show on this page. Note that the messages are listed here by their Category and Topic but *not* by their thread. To see a message in context, click on the associated link to “Go To Message”. This will navigate you to the post inside “My Discussion Forum” where you can see the full thread of the message in context.

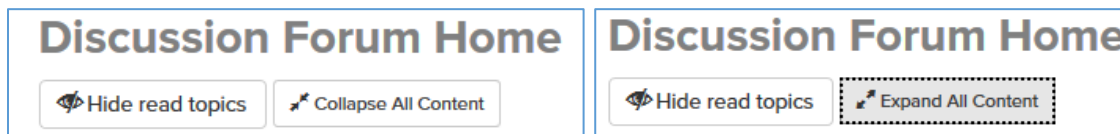
Navigating the Discussion Forum Home

The Discussion Forum Home lists all the Category Groups, Categories, and Topic Titles. The text of individual posts (messages) are not shown in this view. **The names of Category Groups, if included, are text-only and appear in a blue banner that runs across the page. The Category names are also displayed, sometimes nested under a Category Group, and are text-only. The names of existing**


Topics are nested under their Categories. The text of the Topic names are the hyperlinks that will [take you to their Discussion Threads](#).

Expand and Collapse Categories








To view all the Topic Titles in the entire Discussion Forum, click the button labeled “Expand All Content” toward the top of the page. If you don’t see this text, look for and click the button labeled “Collapse All Content” directly under the page title. After you collapse all, you should then see the option to expand all.



Icons

If you see a Topic Title or Category tagged with the **NEW**  icon, this indicates there are new posts in that Topic or Category.

If you see other icons in a Topic or Category row, these indicate the special settings, including permissions, for the corresponding item. **Move your cursor over an icon to see the help text for a full description of the matching setting.** The icons and their meanings are as follows:

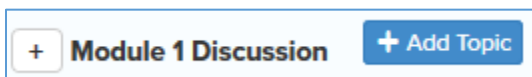
ICON	Meaning
	This Category is or will become (after a certain date) read-only for students. Only faculty, TA, and staff can read and post in these categories when they are read-only.
	This Category or Topic is locked from all students. Only faculty, TA, and staff can read and post. Students cannot view these.
	This is a private Category. Only specified users can see this category; usually this is restricted by Course Groups.
	Only faculty, TAs, and staff can start new topics in this category.
	PBV = “Post Before Viewing”. You cannot see <i>any</i> Topics from faculty or classmates under a Category tagged with this icon until you make a Topic and post of your own. If a Topic is tagged with this icon, you can only see the <i>initial</i> post in the Topic until you make a post of your own.
	You can only edit or delete your post in this Topic or Category for 15 minutes after you add it.
	This Category is a graded item, linked to the Course gradebook.

Navigate from Topic Titles to Discussion Threads (Posts)

To view and read the posts within a Topic, or to see the full thread of the topic of discussion, click on a **Topic Title**. This brings you to the “My Discussion Forum” page, with that Topic expanded in its main pane. As soon as you click on a Topic title (from either the Discussion Forum Home or My Discussion Forum’s navigation pane), the Topic is considered “Read”; any associated “New” icon will disappear. This Topic goes back to being “New” and “Unread” as soon as there is another new post inside it.

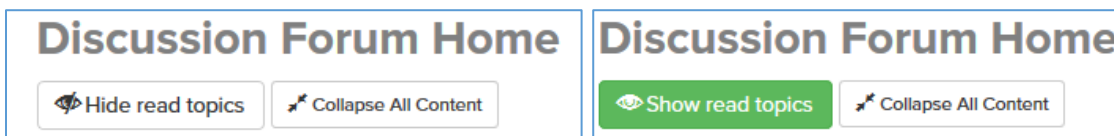
Add a Topic to a Category

If you have permission to add a new Topic to a Discussion Forum Category, you will see the Add Topic button next to the Category name. **Click the button labeled “+ Add Topic” to navigate to the [New Topic page](#).**



Hide/Show Read Topics

To **hide the Topic Titles for any Topic you’ve already navigated to (with no new posts since you last visited it)**, click the button labeled “Hide read topics” toward the top of the page. If you don’t see this text, look for and click the button labeled “Show read topics” directly under the page title. After you show read topics, you should then see the option to hide them again.



Navigating My Discussion Forum

The My Discussion Forum page lists all the Category Groups, Categories, and Topic Titles in its scrollable left-side navigation menu. In the main panel, the full text of the conversation, or thread of posts, are shown for a single Topic.

Left-side Navigation Pane

In the scrollable navigation pane, the Category Group names are always listed across gray banners. These Group names are text-only; i.e., they are NOT hyperlinks. Category Names – which may or may not be under a Group name – are also text-only and always listed. If there are Topics posted inside of a Category, there is a button labeled with a plus or minus sign next to the Category name. **If there is no button with a plus or minus sign next to a Category, then no Topic exists yet in that Category.** *In order to see posts associated with a Category, there must be a Topic inside it. If it’s not restricted, you can [add a Topic](#) to an otherwise empty Category.*

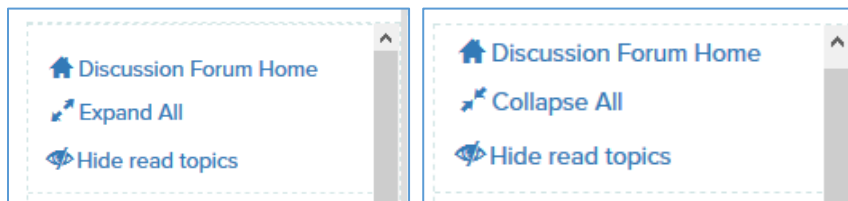
If the Category is expanded, the list of Topic Titles for that Category is displayed. **The text of each Topic Title is a hyperlink. Clicking on the linked title will display the posts for that Topic in the main panel.**



Expand and Collapse Categories

To reveal or hide the Topic Titles for an individual Category, expand or collapse the Category by clicking on the button labeled with a plus or minus sign next to the Category name.

To view all the Topic Titles in the left-side navigation pane, click the link labeled “Expand All” at the top of the navigation pane. If you don’t see this text, look for and click the button labeled “Collapse All”. When you click “Collapse All” the topic titles are hidden and you see a list of only Category Groups and Category names. After you collapse all, you should then see the option to expand all.



Hide/Show Read Topics

To hide the Topic Titles for any Topic you’ve already navigated to (with no new posts since you last visited it), click the link labeled “Hide read topics” at the top of the navigation pane. If you don’t see this text, look for and click the text reading “Show read topics”. After you show read topics, you should then see the option to hide them again.

Be aware that if you opt to hide topics that you’ve already read, you must show them again in order to navigate to these topics and read their posts again.

Topics

Add a Topic to a Category

On the My Discussion Forum page, Topics are always added by clicking on the button labeled “+ Add New Topic” toward the top of the page, above the left-side navigation pane. (You can also click the “+ Add Topic” button on the Discussion Forum Home page to add a Topic.)



Click on the “+ Add New Topic” button to navigate to the “New Topic” page. Here you must include the following:

- **Topic Title.** This is a simple text field.

- **Category.** This is a drop-down menu field where all the Discussion Forum Categories are listed. However, **you can only select a category for which you have permission to add a new Topic.** If a Category name is listed across a gray banner in the drop-down menu, then that category is set to “Only faculty, TAs, and staff can start new topics in this category.” If you try to select one of these Categories where you do not have permission to add a Topic, you will see a warning message and be forced to select a different category.

Next, enter text in the rich text editor; this text will serve as the “Original Post” in your new Topic. (If you do not enter text, the Original Post will still appear with no content except its heading, displaying you as the author and the time/date stamp.) This first post is your opportunity to start the conversation in the Topic’s thread. You can also attach a related file to your post. This file will be available for download when anyone views the topic.

Click “Create Topic” to finish adding it to your selected Category with your initial post.

Subscribing to a Topic

While you can subscribe to an entire Category on the [View/Subscribe](#) options screen, you can subscribe to one or more Topics in a Category by **clicking on the “Subscribe” link in a Topic’s heading banner**, as viewed in My Discussion Forum. When you click on this link, you will see a confirmation message. The link in the Topic’s heading changes to “Unsubscribe”.

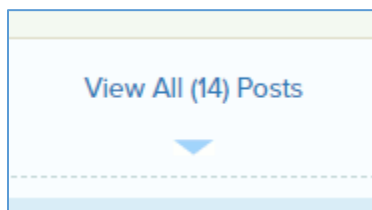
Clarification of assignments

Last viewed by the course instructional team on 09/30/2019 at 2:06 PM.

[Subscribe](#) [Save to PDF](#) [Save to Excel](#)

Reading a Topic’s Discussion Thread (Posts and Replies)

Click on any Topic Title in the left-side navigation pane (or [from the Discussion Forum Home page](#)) to view the initial post for that Topic. Depending on what you have already read and how many posts and replies there are in the topic, the conversation may be collapsed, and you may not see the entire thread. Instead, **you may see hyperlinked text over an arrow under the initial post with the prompt to “View All (#) Posts”.** If it is there, **click on this text to expand and see the entire conversation (all the posts and replies) inside that Topic.**



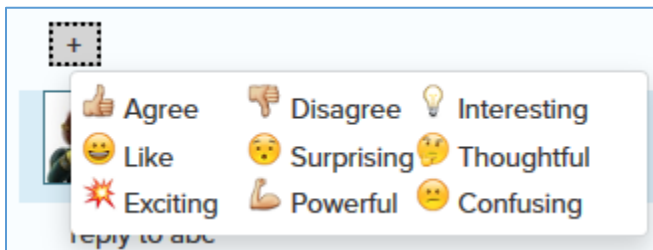
NOTE: If you always want to view every post and not ever have the collapsed view for the entire Discussion Forum, go to the [View/Subscribe](#) options and make sure to opt in to the option “Always show previously read messages in every topic.”

The heading for each post (the initial post and all replies) inside a Topic displays the author and the option to **Bookmark** that post. Additionally, for the posts that you have contributed, you may also see the option to [edit or delete the post](#). (These options depend on the settings for the Topic's Category, as determined by faculty. Remember that the settings for each Category can be determined by looking at its [icons in the Discussion Forum Home](#).)

Under the post's heading, you can read the text of that message and download any files that were attached.

The layout of the posts in a Topic indicate if they are in reply to the Topic (the Original Post) or in reply to a post inside that Topic. [Learn more about replying to posts inside a topic below](#). The Original Post has a small banner across it (above the author) that reads "Original Post". It also has a different color background than the posts that are replies.

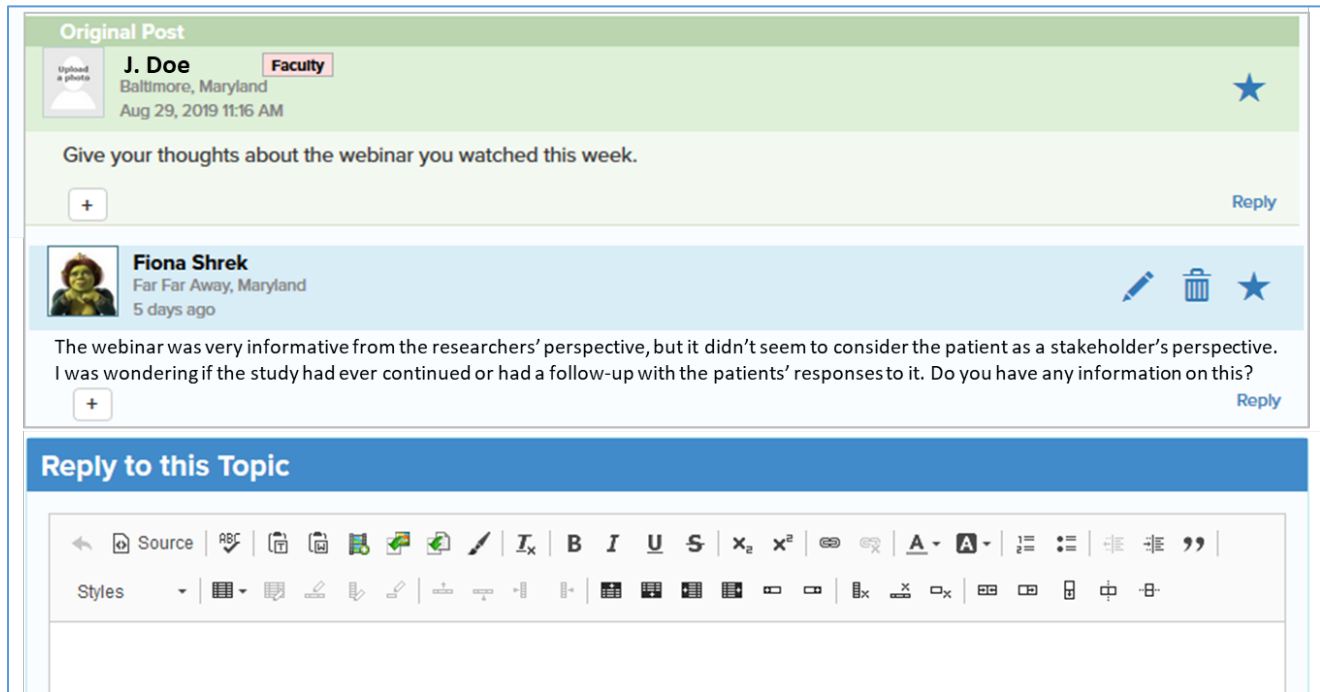
You can give a quick bit of feedback to any post by tagging it with an emoticon. Click on the button labeled with a plus sign at the bottom of an individual post to see the list of emoticons and select one.



Posts

Creating a New Post in Reply to a Topic

The Original Post (or initial post) in a Topic is made when the [Topic is first created](#). **Replying to an Original Post is the same as posting a Reply to the Topic**. To create a new post in reply to the Original Post, or reply to the Topic, you can click on the link to reply (see the image, below, with the labeled header of the Original Post) or scroll to the bottom of the entire Discussion Thread. **Enter your text for your direct reply to the Original Post under the header, "Reply to this Topic". Optionally attach a file to your new post before clicking "Reply"**.



The screenshot shows a forum interface. At the top is a green header for the "Original Post" by J. Doe, Faculty, from Baltimore, Maryland, dated Aug 29, 2019 11:16 AM. The post prompt is "Give your thoughts about the webinar you watched this week." Below this is a reply from Fiona Shrek, dated 5 days ago, with the text: "The webinar was very informative from the researchers' perspective, but it didn't seem to consider the patient as a stakeholder's perspective. I was wondering if the study had ever continued or had a follow-up with the patients' responses to it. Do you have any information on this?" The reply includes a rich text editor with various formatting options like bold, italic, underline, strikethrough, and text color.

Replying to a Specific Post (*Other than the Original*)

Replying to any post that is *not* the Original Post in a Topic continues the conversation in response to a specific reply to the initial post. In other words, if you want to respond to any post under a Topic that is not labeled with "Original Post", you will reply to that specific post. To create a new post in reply to *any post other than the Original*, you can click on the link to "Reply" inside that individual post. This opens a pop-up window which displays the text of the post you've selected for replying. **Enter your text to directly reply under the prompt, "Your reply:".** Optionally attach a file to your new post before clicking "Reply".



The screenshot shows a pop-up window titled "Reply directly to this post". It displays the text of the post being replied to: "On Oct 2, 2019 12:02 PM, Fiona Shrek wrote: The webinar was very informative from the researchers' perspective, but it didn't seem to consider the patient as a stakeholder's perspective. I was wondering if the study had ever continued or had a follow-up with the patients' responses to it. Do you have any information on this?". Below the text is a "Your reply:" prompt and a rich text editor for composing the response.

Editing an Existing Post

Depending on when you make your post and the Discussion Forum's Category Settings (determined by the Faculty Team), you may have the option to edit your post. **If you see a pencil icon in the heading banner with your name and the post's time/date stamp, you can edit or delete your post.** Simply click on the pencil icon to edit your post or the trashcan icon to delete your post.

If you opt to edit your post, a pop-up window displays the text of your post in its rich text editor. Edit your text and/or attach a new file before clicking the button to "Update Post".

If you opt to delete your post, you will be asked to confirm your choice before it is deleted.