



Managing discussion categories, topics and threads

Quick guide for instructors

For Blackboard Vista 4.x

The Discussions tool in Blackboard Vista can be organised at three different levels:

- **Discussion categories**, which can be used to group related discussion topics; topics can also exist without being placed in a category.
- **Discussion topics**, which can be either – threaded discussion, blog or student journal; students can post messages relating to the topic.
- **Discussion entries and messages**, which can be threaded (in threaded discussion); threads are a series of replies to the same subject, grouped together so that students can follow the discussion. Otherwise postings/entries are in chronological order.


Managing discussion categories

You can create a category and then assign (i.e. move) previously created topics to that category, or create a new category and new topic simultaneously. Once a category is created, you can edit it, move it, or even delete it.

To create a new category

1. Open the **Discussions** main page by clicking on **Discussions** under the **Course Tools** menu, and then click the **Create Category** button to open the **Create Category** screen.
2. Enter a name and description (500 characters maximum) for the new category in the respective fields. Then click **Save**.

Other actions

Click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to the category title for the category you want to modify or delete, and select actions from the drop-down list that appears.

Note: If you delete a discussion category you will also delete all the topics and messages in the category.

Managing discussion topics


To create a discussion topic:

1. From the **Discussions** screen, click **Create Topic**. The **Create Discussion Topic** screen will appear.
2. Select the type of discussion you wish to create (threaded, blog or journal), and click **Next**. Give the topic a name, add any details or instructions in the **Description** field, and respond to the further selection items presented.
3. Click **Save**.


To view a topic:

From the **Discussions** screen, click on the topic name to see a list of messages that have been posted to the topic.

To copy or move a topic:

1. On the **Discussions** screen select the topic(s) you want to move or copy by clicking in the check box next to each topic.
2. Click on the *Move/Copy*  icon next to the topic you wish to move it to. From the menu that appears you can move or copy the selected topic above or below this.

Other actions:

- On the **Discussions** screen, click on **All Topics** to see all topics from all categories.
- Click on any underlined heading to sort topics by that heading.
- Click on the *ActionLinks*  icon for a topic to see a drop-down list of the actions possible (e.g. edit properties, show/hide, delete, apply selective release criteria).



Note: If you delete a topic, all the messages posted to that topic will also be deleted.

Managing discussion threads

A thread is a series of replies to the same subject.


Expanding and collapsing threads

On the **Messages** screen:

1. Click on the expand icon  to the left of the first message in the thread to see all messages in the thread.
2. Click on the collapse arrow  to hide the messages in the thread.


Copying or moving threads

Threads can be copied or moved from one discussion topic to another.

1. From the **Messages** screen, select each thread that you want to move or copy. All messages in the threads will be selected.
2. From the **Move to** or **Copy to** drop-down list, select the topic to which you want to copy the threads, click the *Go* icon  and then **OK**.

Other actions:

On the **Messages** screen:

- Click on the **Threaded** or **Unthreaded** buttons to view messages as either threaded or unthreaded.
- Click on **All** or **Unread** at the top of the screen to view all messages or only those that have not been opened.
- On the **Messages** screen, select multiple messages and compile them for printing using the **Create Printable View** button.
- To delete a thread click on the *ActionLinks*  icon and select **Delete** from the drop-down list.

Note: If you delete the first message in a thread, all the messages in the thread will also be deleted.

To display all messages in a thread:

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- On the **Messages** screen, in the **Threaded** view, click on the title for the first message in the thread you want to display. In the **Message** window that appears, click on **Display Complete Thread** to show the compiled messages in a pop-up window.
The contents of this window can be printed or saved to a text file.

On the **Compiled Messages** screen:




- Click the title of the thread to produce a compiled messages pop-up window.
- Click on **Lock Thread/Unlock Thread** to lock (make read-only) or unlock a thread.

Managing postings in blogs and journals

Note: Only authors can edit their entries; allowed viewers/readers can make comments.

- To organise the entries list by date, author or rating use the **Sort by:** facility.
- To change from ascending to descending order, click the option again. The arrow will indicate which direction items are sorted.

Sort by: **Date**  Author Rating

- To change the number of entries displayed click on the *Paging Preferences*  icon.
- To delete an entry and its associated comments, check the box for the entry and click on the  **Delete** button.
- To prevent further comments on an entry click on the **Lock Message** button.
- To compile entries for printing or saving to file, select the entries and click on  **Create Printable View**.

References:

Designer and Instructor Reference: Application Pack 2 for Blackboard Learning System – Vista Enterprise License (Release 4) 2006 Blackboard Inc

Vista 4.2 Online Help (Blackboard Inc.)

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