

# Managing discussion categories, topics and threads

## Step-by-step 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 take 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.

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## Managing discussion categories

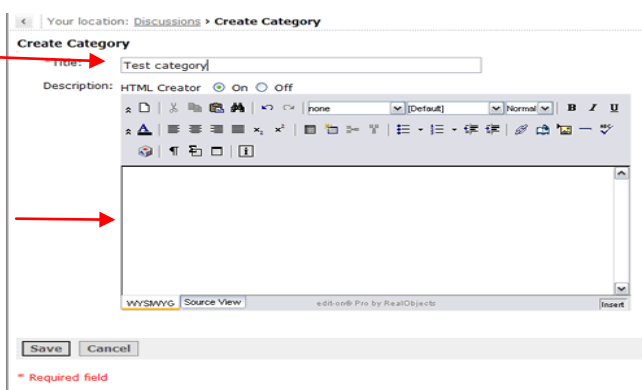
Categories are useful where you have many topics; it makes locating them easier for you, and for students.

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.

### Creating discussion categories

We will create a category for an existing topic or topics. (Creating a category when creating a topic is covered under [Managing discussion topics](#)).

1. Click on **Discussions** under the **Course Tools** menu, and then click on **Create Category** to open the **Create Category** screen.




Category name

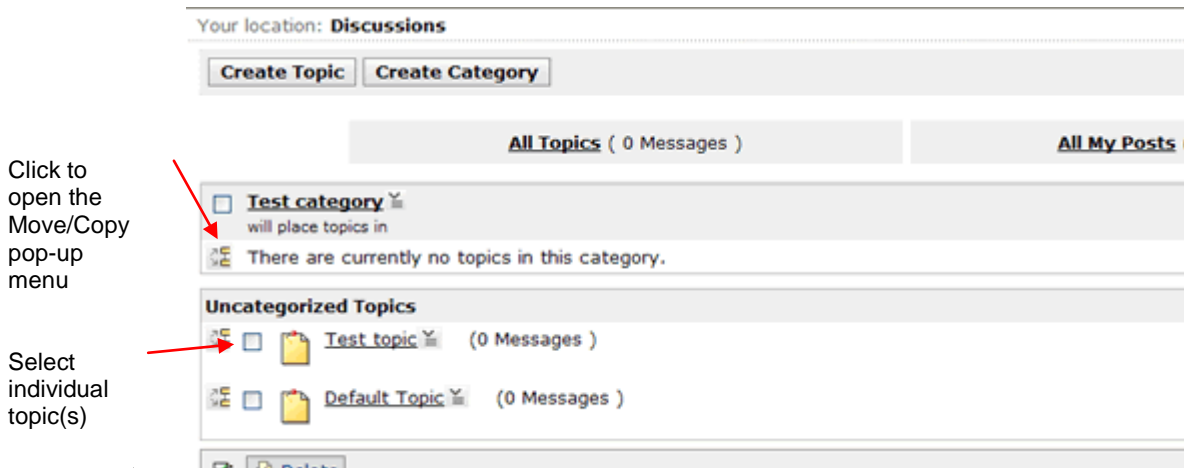
Category description

Save Cancel


\* Required field

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2. Enter a title (required) and description (500 characters maximum) for the new category in the respective fields. Then click **Save**.
3. Select the topic(s) you want to move or copy to the new category by checking the box next to each one.
4. In the empty new category, click the *Move/Copy*  icon, select **Move Selected Items Here** from the pop-up menu.
5. If you want to create a copy of the topic in the new category, select **Copy Selected Items Here** from the pop-up menu.




### Modifying categories

1. Click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to the category title for the category you want to modify, and select **Edit Properties** from the drop-down list that appears. The **Edit Category** screen will appear. This is identical to the **Create Category** screen.
2. After you have modified the category's name and/or description, click **Save**.

### Deleting categories

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

1. To delete a category, Click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to the category title for the category you want to modify, and select **Delete** from the drop-down list that appears.
2. A confirmation message will appear. Click **OK** and the category will be deleted.

## Managing discussion topics



### Creating topics

You can create a topic and leave it unassigned to a category, assign it to an existing category, or simultaneously create a category for it.

1. From the **Discussions** screen, click **Create Topic**. The **Create Discussion Topic** screen will appear.

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2. Select the type of discussion you wish to create (threaded, blog or journal) by clicking the radio button, then click **Next**.
3. Enter a name for the topic in the **Title** text box; enter optional details about the topic and/or instructions for students in the **Description** text box.
4. Choose whether to show or hide the item.
5. Place the topic in a category by either selecting the category from the list or creating a new one.
6. If you wish to make the topic assessable, select **Topic is gradable**, enter a title for the **Grade Book** column (e.g. 'Topic X discussion'), and click on the appropriate radio button for method of grading (numbers or letters — A, B etc.), or grading form.
7. If appropriate, associate the topic with a specific goal (or goals).  
Note: beforehand you will need to enter a goals set with the **Goals** tool under the **Course Tools** menu.
8. If you wish to include peer assessment of postings, click the expand icon  next to **Peer Review** and choose the method of peer assessment – simple voting or via a grading form.
9. Click the expand icon  next to **Topic Behaviour Options** and select the appropriate posting rules, and whether postings are to be anonymous or identifiable. For journal entries, also select whether they are to be 'private' – just visible to the student and instructors or 'public' – viewable to the class.
10. Click **Save**; The **Discussions** screen will appear and your topic will be added.

### Creating topics for learning groups

You can set up and assign one or a number of topics to specific learning groups. (For example, you may have the one topic for discussion, but wish to have the topic discussed in groups within the course. Or you may want to assign a separate topic to each group.) This can be done through the Group manager tool — see 'Creating discussion topics for groups' in the guide [Creating and Managing Learning Groups](#).

In situations where you intend to have different topics for groups, as an alternative you can establish the topics in the usual way and use the **Selective Release** map to release each topic to a particular group.

### Viewing topics


- From the **Discussions** screen, click on the name of the topic that you want to view. The **Messages** screen for the topic will open and its messages will be displayed.
- To see a list of all messages posted to all topics in **Discussions**, click on **All Topics**. The **Messages** screen will open listing the messages and the topics they were posted to (under the **Topics** column).

## Copying and moving topics


You can copy a discussion topic (and all its messages) and place it above or below a topic in another discussion category, or copy it into a category that contains no topics.

You can move a discussion topic (and all its messages) and place it above or below a topic in the same, or different discussion category, or move it to a category that contains no topics.

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 you want to move or copy.
2. Select the location to move or copy the topic to by doing one of the following:

To move a topic above or below a topic in the same or another category, next to the topic you want to move the topic above or below, under **Move**, click the *Move/Copy*  icon. Select either **Move Selected Items Above** or **Move Selected Items Below**.


To copy a topic into another discussion category do as in a. above, and in the pop-up menu select either **Copy Selected Items Above** or **Copy Selected Items Below**.

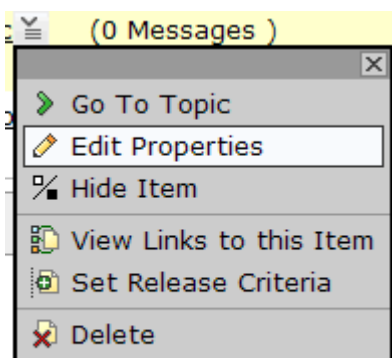
To move or copy a topic into a category that does not contain any topics, next to the empty category, under **Move**, click the *Move/Copy*  icon and in the pop-up menu, select **Move Selected Items Here** or **Copy Selected Items Here**.

3. In each case, the **Discussions** screen will refresh and the topic(s) moved or copied to their new location.

## Modifying topics

You can change the title, description and settings for a topic. (But note: you cannot change any of the settings related to grading in a topic already declared as gradable (i.e. assessable).


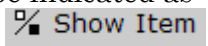

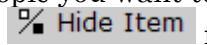
1. From the **Discussions** screen, find the discussion topic you want to modify, click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to its title and select **Edit Properties** from the drop-down list that appears.



2. The **Edit Topic Properties** screen will appear.



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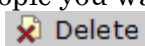
1. To make a topic visible, find the topic you want to make visible on the **Discussions** screen (it will be indicated as 'hidden'), click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to its title and select  from the drop-down list that appears.
2. The screen will update, with the topic now listed on the students' **Discussions** main page.
3. To hide a topic, find the topic you want to hide, click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to its title and select  from the drop-down list that appears. The screen will update and the status of the topic will be updated to 'hidden' in **Teach** view. It now does not appear on the students' **Discussions** main page.

### Deleting topics

You can delete one or a number of topics within a category from the **Discussions** screen.

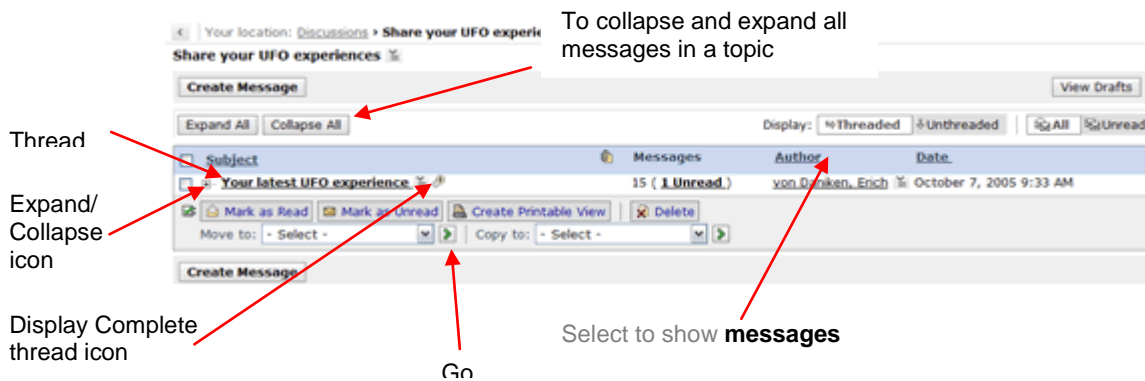
**WARNING:** Deleting a topic will delete all the messages posted to the topic.

To delete a topic from the **Discussions** screen (which lists both categories and topics):

1. Find the topic you want to delete, click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to its title and select  from the drop-down list that appears. A confirmation message will appear.
2. Click **OK** and the topic will be deleted.



## Managing discussion threads

A thread is a series of replies to the same subject, with the original message at the top of the thread.



### Expanding and collapsing threads


From the **Messages** screen, do one of the following:

- To expand a thread, click the *Expand*  icon next to the subject heading. The collapsed thread will be expanded.
- To expand all threads, click the **Expand All** button in the table heading row. All threads in the topic will be expanded.
- To collapse a thread, click on the *Collapse*  icon next to the thread's subject heading. The expanded thread will be collapsed.

- To collapse all threads, click the **Collapse All** button in the table heading row. All the threads will be collapsed.

### 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 menu, select the topic to which you want to move or copy the threads and click the *Go* icon .
3. Confirm that you want all messages moved or copied when prompted, by clicking **OK**. The **Specify thread** pop-up window will appear and the threads will be moved or copied.

### Showing messages as threaded or unthreaded


When messages are unthreaded, you view them in the order in which they were posted to the topic, rather than the order in which they were posted, as replies, to a subject.

1. From the **Messages** screen, toggle to the view in which you want to display the messages:



2. To toggle to the unthreaded view, click the **Unthreaded** button. The screen will update to display the messages as unthreaded.
3. To toggle to the threaded view, click **Threaded** button. The screen will update to display the messages as threaded.

### Displaying (compiling), saving & printing all messages in a thread

On the **Messages** screen, in the *Threaded* view, find the first message in the thread for which you want to display all the messages and click the *Display Complete Thread*  icon. The **Compiled Messages** pop-up window will appear.

You can either save and/or print out the compiled messages from this screen – the action buttons are at top of screen.

### Deleting threads

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


1. On the **Messages** screen, find the first message for the thread that you want to delete, click on the *ActionLinks*  icon next to its title and select  **Delete** from the drop-down list that appears.
2. Click **OK** when you see the confirmation message. The thread and all of its messages will be deleted.

## Managing postings in blogs and journals



In comparison to threaded discussion, users create *entries* (rather than messages) and make *comments* (rather than replies). Only authors can edit their own entries. Students in the class/group can make comments to a blog entry; in journals, only the instructors – if set up as a private journal.

### Displaying entries

#### By date/author/rating

- Entries can be displayed by date (with most recent entry first or last in the list), or by author (in alphabetical or reverse alphabetical order).
- Select from the Sort by: options 
- To change from ascending to descending order, click the option again. The arrow will indicate which direction items are sorted.

#### By page

You can set the number of entries that appear on a page with the *Paging Preferences*  icon, located at the bottom right of the page. 


### Editing and deleting entries and comments

The instructor's authority to modify entries or comments is limited. Only the author of an entry can edit that entry. Comments cannot be edited by the author or instructor; however the instructor can delete an entry (and any associated comments).

- To delete an entry and its comments, select the entry by clicking its checkbox and click on the **Delete** button.


### Locking messages

You can stop students from making further comments to an entry by locking the message.

- Click on  for the entry you wish no further comments on. The **Lock Message** button will change to an **Unlock Message** button.


### Forwarding messages

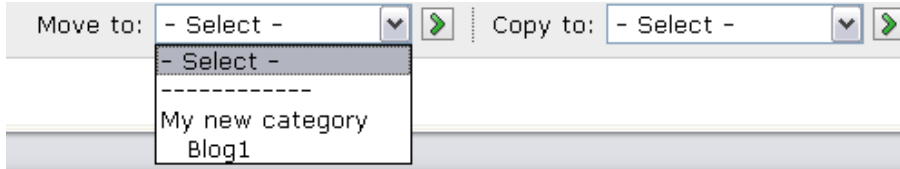
You can forward an entry to another member of the course who does not have access to the blog or journal. Note: you cannot forward the entry to an outside email address.

1. Click on  for the entry you want to forward. The mail tool will open.
2. Choose the recipient for the mail.
3. Click on **Send**.


## Moving entries

You can move or copy an entry to another topic of the same kind (journal or blog) with the move to: and copy to: options.

1. Choose where to move or copy the entry to from the drop-down list
2. Click on the **Go**  button.



## Compiling entries

1. Select the entries you wish to compile, by clicking in the checkbox beside the subject.
2. Click on  [Create Printable View](#).
3. You can choose to print or save the compiled entries.

## 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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