

Discussion Board tool

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Overview

The Discussion Board is an area where students can ask questions, clarify points raised in face-to-face lectures and seminars, discuss and debate their ideas, issues, projects and assignments with their fellow students and the module tutor(s) beyond the classroom. These discussions in turn allow the tutor to receive feedback on students' progress and learning.

Tutors can monitor student contributions, respond to student questions and messages, give positive feedback and encourage student contributions as well as guide, and if necessary, moderate, the discussion.

These discussions are asynchronous, that is, active over days and weeks, rather than 'live' with everyone contributing at the same time over the space of an hour, as you would find in a chat room.

Students can be assessed and graded on their contributions and Blackboard Rubrics criteria marking cards can be used for this. Each student's posts will be gathered together to view on one page for this purpose.

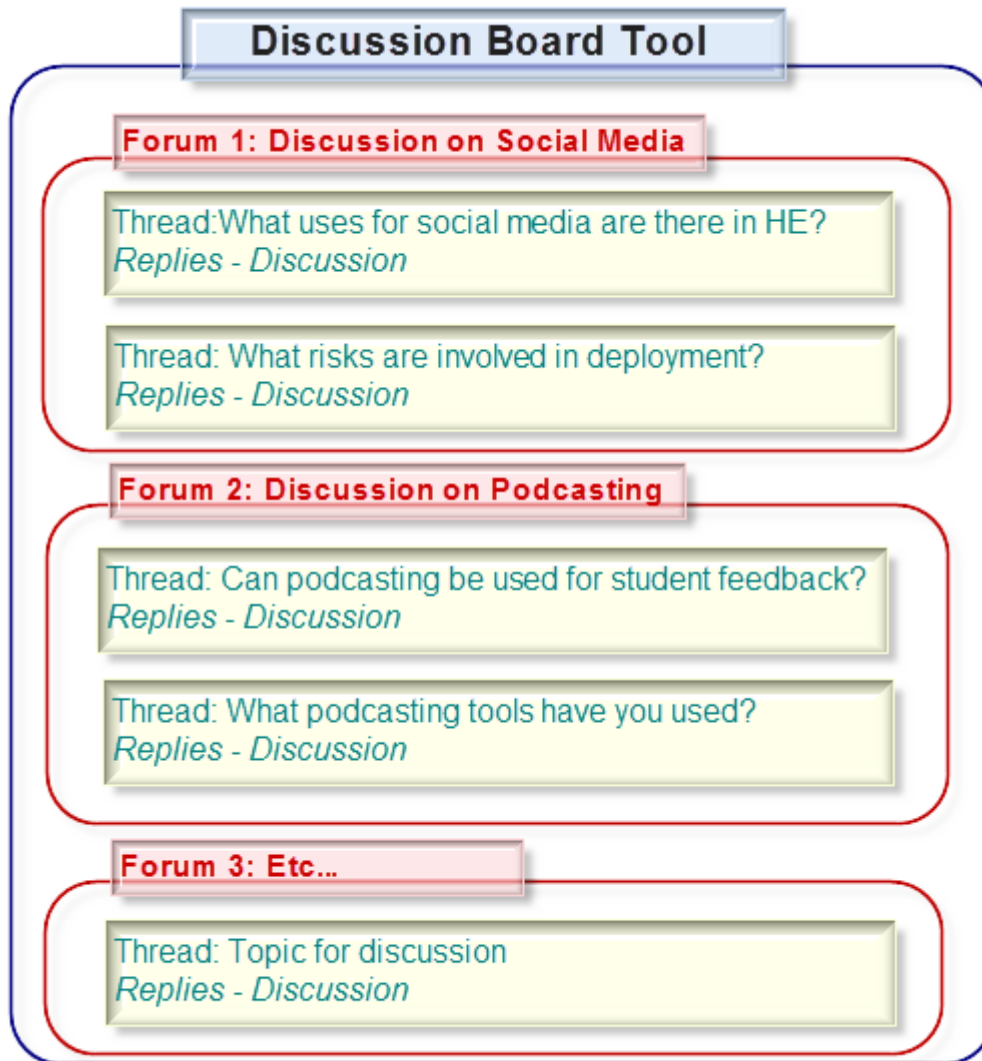
Students using the Blackboard mobile version can contribute from their mobile device.

How does it work?

Whilst Discussion Board is the overall name for this tool, the discussions actually take place in Threads, which are organised by Forums. Forums could be organised by week, topic, and so on.

Within a Forum, you set up one or more Threads, where each Thread is the first message and the start of a new discussion relevant to that Forum. The participants then reply ('post') to that first message in the Thread, and then to each other's replies as the discussion progresses. Students can also be allowed to start Threads.

The diagram below is a simplified representation of the organisation of Posts, Threads, and Forums on the Discussion Board.



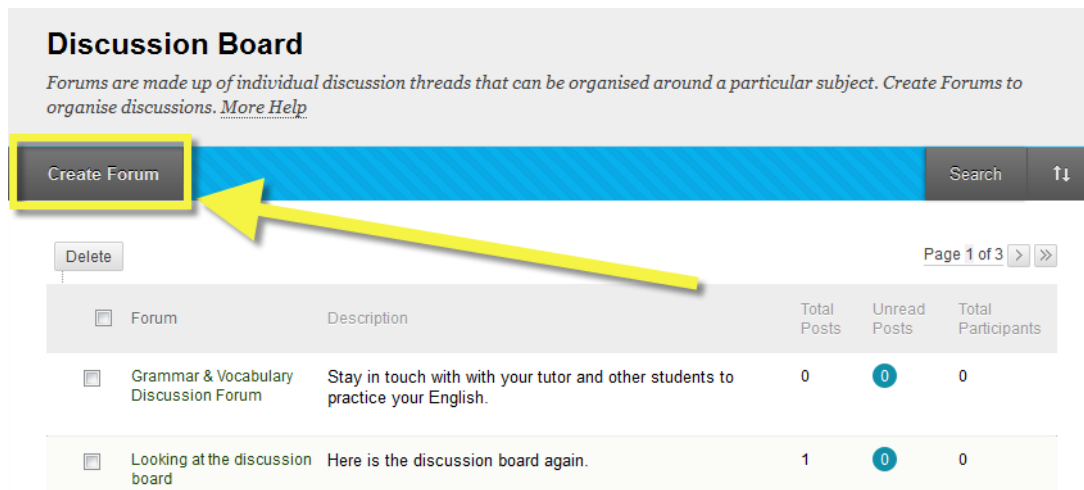
Other useful facets of Discussion Boards include:

- Subscriptions to forums or threads can be enabled so that students can choose to be notified of latest activity by email.
- Students and instructors can also quickly check the latest posts to their forums when they log into VITAL from the **My Blackboard** menu (see the [How To guide on this](#)).
- Forums can be set up for: anonymous postings; postings require moderation before publishing; students can rate posts.
- When working with groups, each group can have its own Discussion Board area where Forums for that group only are held (see the section on Groups below).

Setting up - creating a Forum

These sections deal with setting up discussions for all the students enrolled on a module. Forums for groups are dealt with in the section below. It is worth planning in advance how you want your students to use the forum, whether you want to grade or not and so on, as there are some combinations of settings which disallow certain functionalities when others are switched on, summarised in step 3 below.

1. In the module where you want to create discussion forums, in the **Control Panel** open the **Course Tools** menu and select **Discussion Board**.
2. Select the Discussion Board area to work on by clicking its title (it is usually the module ID e.g. EDEV301-201314 - group boards will appear differently here as well) and on the page that appears click **Create Forum**.



3. Enter the forum information and availability details. You then have a number of options to select for how you want the individual **Threads** in this **Forum** to be set. Some settings preclude others as below.

Allow Anonymous Posts - these kinds of forums cannot be graded.

Allow Members to Create New Threads - this option cannot be selected if you want to grade threads (you can still grade a forum overall however).

4. Some of the useful settings explained.

Viewing Threads/Replies

Standard View	Students can view the whole forum straight away without having to make any contribution first.
Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum.	Students must first create a Thread in the Forum (which could be their response to the overall topic of the Forum) before they can view any other contributions. This can be used to get engagement from students.

Grade The default setting is **No Marking in Forum**. For grading you have two options.

Forum	You can grade a student's contributions across all Threads in a specific forum. This option will gather together on a page a student's posts in a
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	Forum for you to grade overall. You can now set up the points value, and any rubric or due date.
Threads	Just select this option at this point. When you later create individual Threads each can be set up with its own grade and rubric. You will see that the setting allowing students to create their own threads will be automatically set to NO .

In both options there is a setting **Show participants in “needs grading” status after every ‘X’ posts** (for Threads this appears when you are setting them up individually). You would use this, for example, if you had specified that they need to contribute three posts to the thread to be graded. Setting this to “3” would alert you in the **Grade Centre** and in **My Blackboard - Updates** only once they had made the required three posts, rather than for each post.

In marking both Forums and Threads you can offer a grade, written feedback and use the Blackboard Rubrics marking card.

Subscribe. You can enable students to subscribe either to the Forum overall or to individual Threads. This option will send out an email with the latest posts with options on how this appears.

Create and Edit. These are mostly self-explanatory settings. **Allow Anonymous Posts** will give students the choice to post anonymously or not. **Force Moderation of Posts** when selected means that no post is published until approved by moderators (see “Further features” section below).

Allow Post Tagging. Posts can be tagged with keywords for easier searching of large Forums.

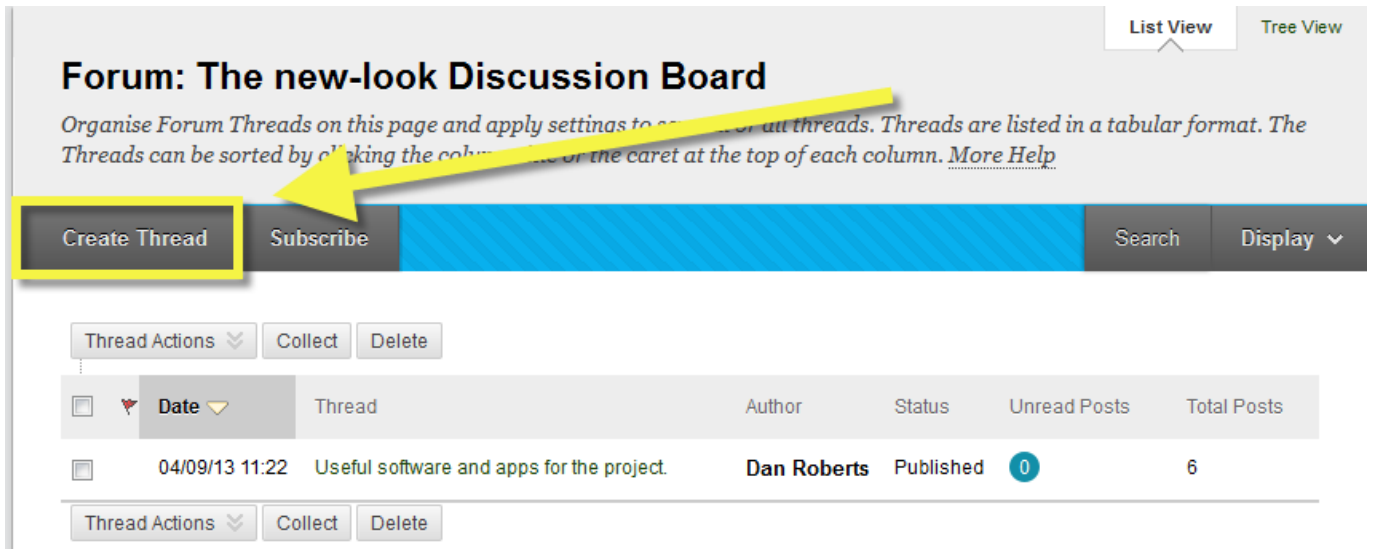
Allow Members to Rate Posts. Participants can rate posts with up to five stars.

5. Click **Submit** to finalise your choices.

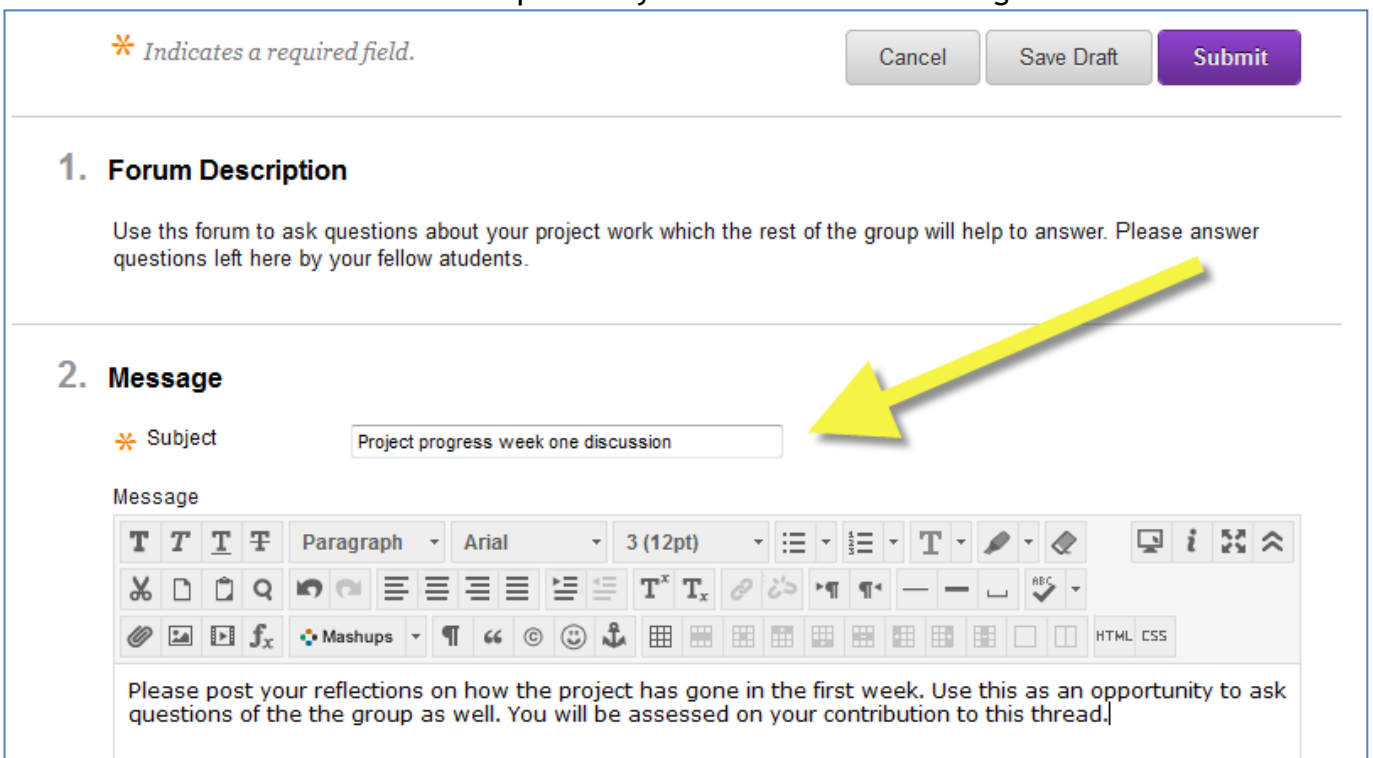
Setting up - creating a Thread

Once you have created a Forum you can then set up threads to guide the discussion and/or you can also let the students create threads so that they can initiate discussions etc.

6. If you have the relevant Forum open click the **Create Thread** button. (If you do not yet have the relevant Forum open, in the module in question, from the **Control Panel**, click **Course Tools** and select **Discussion Board**. Click on the relevant **Forum**).

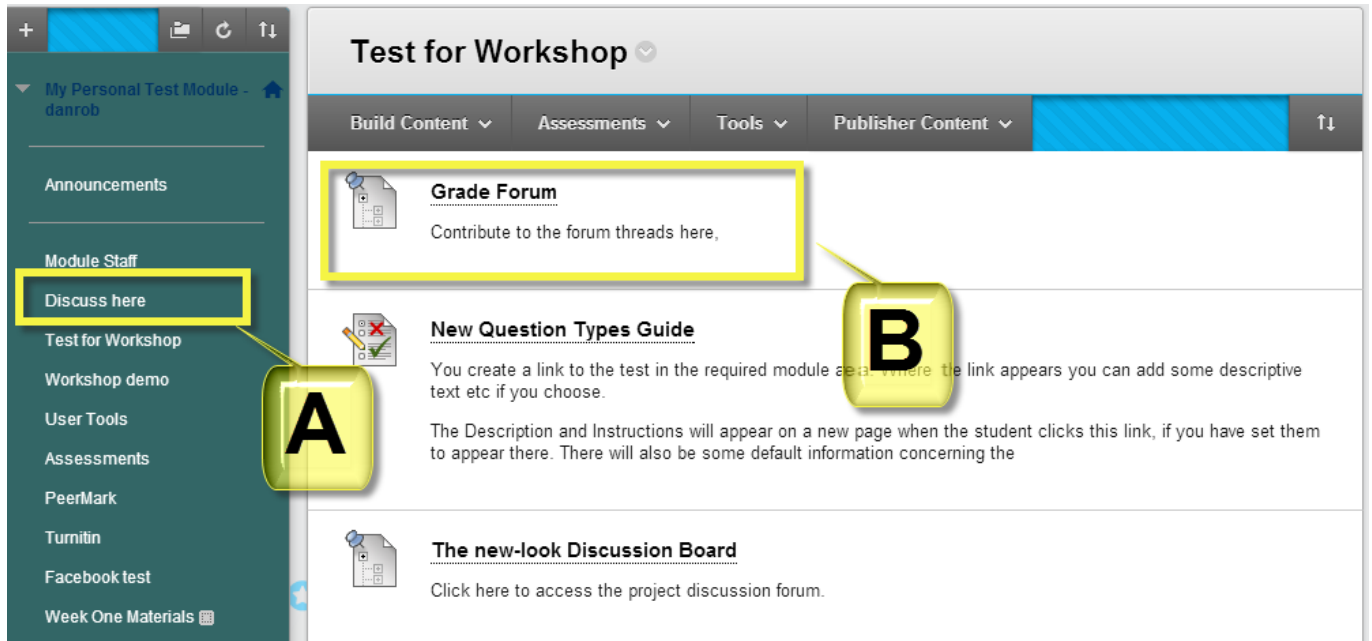


7. You must enter a **Subject** title for the thread (which could take the form of a question) and then additionally you can add a message with more detail for the students. The text editor allows you to add rich multimedia so you are not restricted to text in a forum. Students will then respond to your initial thread message and to each other.



Setting up - making a Forum available to students

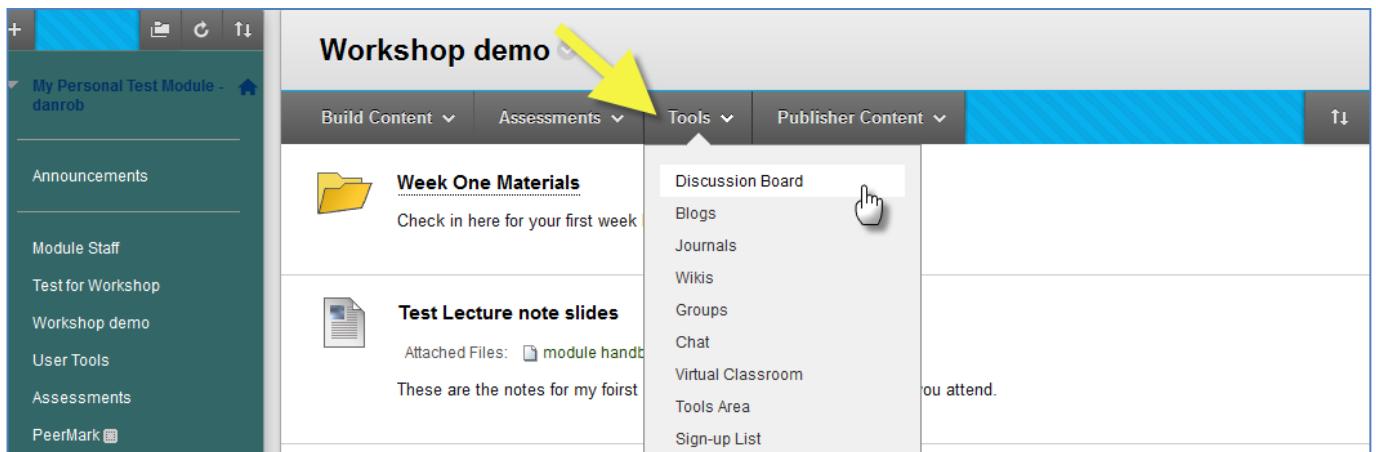
Up to this point you have built the forums and threads in the Control Panel area which students cannot see. You need to make a link from a module Content Area (B) or the module menu (A) for the students to be able access the forums.



Please note: any group forums will automatically appear to the student in their group menus, you do not need to add them as a link.

Adding a link from a content area

8. In the relevant module, with the **Edit mode ON**, go to the content area where you want to add the link (e.g. Learning Resources).
9. Hover the mouse pointer over the **Tools** menu button and then select the **Discussion Board** link.



10. From the page that appears you can either link to a specific **Forum** (listed in the scrolling box on this page) or you can link to the whole **Discussion Board** page which will list all of the forums available to individual students for them to select which one(s) they want to access. Use the radio buttons to select which option and select the specific Forum if this is the route you take. Click **Next**.

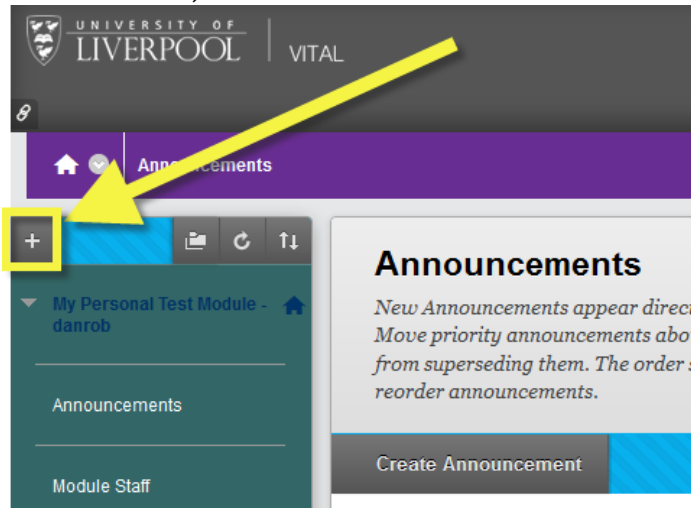
11. On the next page you see, the **Link Name** will be prefilled but you can change this. Enter some descriptive text for the link if you wish. There are the usual visibility options (date restrictions etc.) you can set. Click **Submit** when you are ready.

12. The link to the forum or whole Discussion Board list of forums will now be ready for your students to access (depending on your visibility settings).

Adding a link from the module menu - whole discussion board

Again, you can create a link to the whole Discussion Board area or to individual forums.

13. In the relevant module, with the **Edit mode ON**, hover the mouse pointer over the '+' button, as shown here.

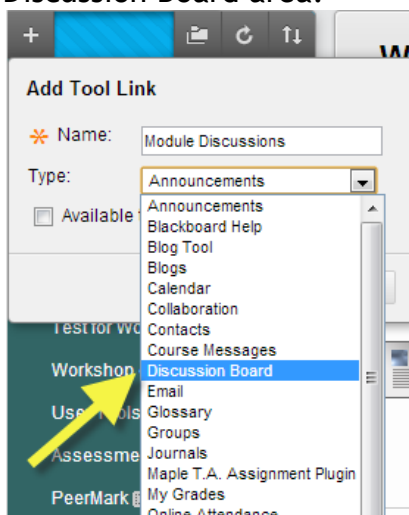


14. On the pop-up menu that appears select the **Tool Link** option.

15. A new window appears. Give the link you are creating a **Name** (e.g. Discussions or Module debate).

16. The 'Type' field is a dropdown list, select **Discussion Board**.

17. Tick the box next to **Available to users** if you want students to immediately access the Discussion Board area.

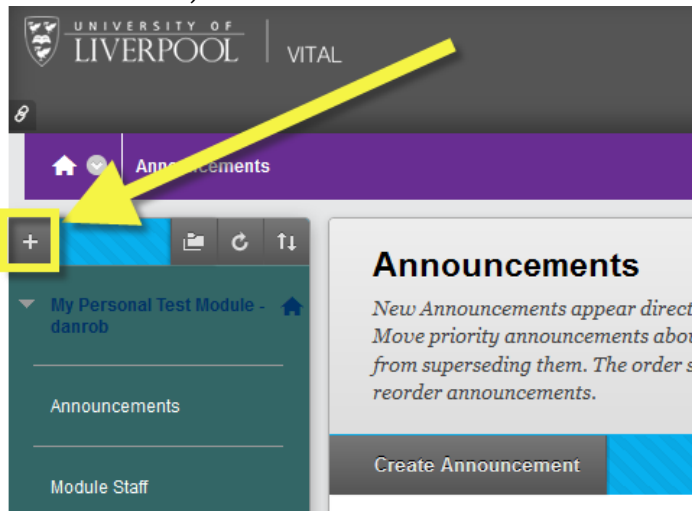


18. Click **Submit**. The link appears at the bottom of your module menu. This can be dragged and dropped into an alternative location on the menu if you wish.

Adding a link from the module menu - specific forum

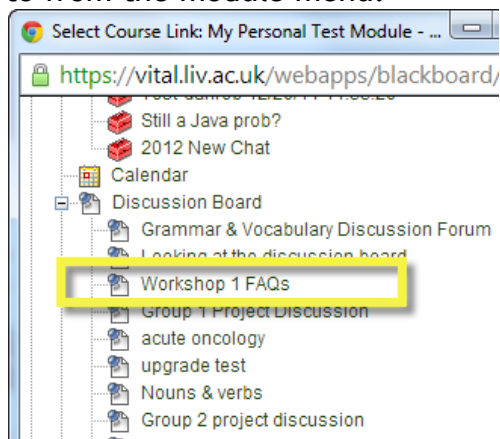
Again, you can create a link to the whole Discussion Board area or to individual forums.

19. In the relevant module, with the **Edit mode ON**, hover the mouse pointer over the '+' button, as shown here.



20. On the pop-up menu that appears select the **Course Link** option.

21. A new window appears. Click the **Browse** button below the **Location** field to open a directory of all of the areas and elements of your module. Scroll down this list until you find the Discussion Board and associated Forums. Select the forum you want to link to from the module menu.



22. The link will automatically be given a **Name** but you can change this.

23. Tick the box next to **Available to users** if you want students to immediately access the Discussion Board area.

24. Click **Submit**. The link appears at the bottom of your module menu. This can be dragged and dropped into an alternative location on the menu if you wish.

Group discussion boards

If running groups through VITAL modules, at the point of group set-up each group can be given a private Discussion Board which only that group can see.

When setting up the individual group or Group Set (batch of groups sharing the same settings) select the **Discussion Board** option and decide whether you are going to let students create **Forums** (default is yes). If you wish to preset the threads that the groups must answer then unfortunately the only way to do this at the moment is to go into each group and set them up individually, there is no batch process for this. The easiest way to do this is to ask the students instead to set up the Threads that you require in their group Discussion Boards.

Because Group Discussion Boards are private to each group, they are each listed separately in the **Control Panel > Course Tools > Discussion Board** area. You will find each group Discussion Board area listed and accessible from here.

PART 2 - Running Discussion Boards

Viewing posts

Posts can be accessed in a few ways.

- Directly in the module from the Control Panel (as an Instructor).
- From the **Posts** section of **My Blackboard** on your VITAL homepage (for all your modules).
- Subscribe to Forums/Threads and get email updates of Discussion Board activity.

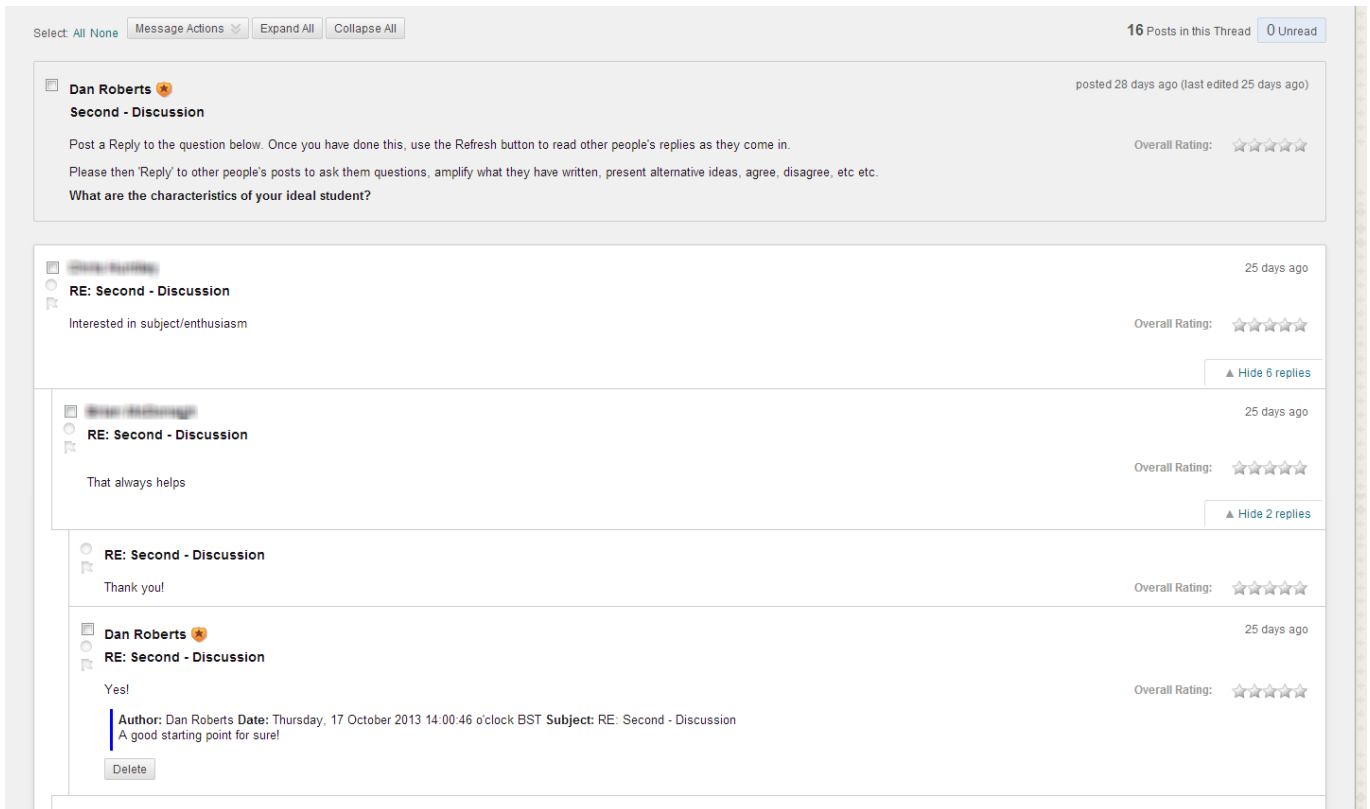
Viewing posts directly in the module

You can access the forums in the module directly and check for the highlighted new posts. As an Instructor you can look at all of the Forums and Threads from the Control Panel. (Students can only access from the links that you make in the module).

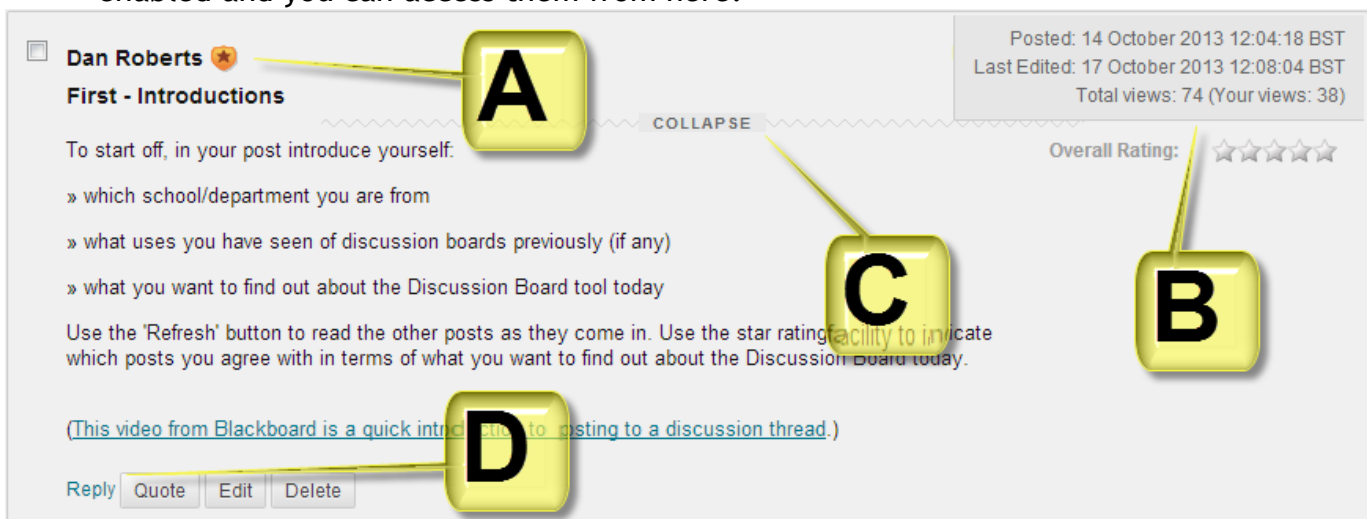
25. From the relevant module, in the **Control Panel**, select **Course Tools** and click on **Discussion Board**.
26. Click the required Discussion Board area (e.g. EDEV301 or Group project) to open it.
27. You will see a list of the available Forums. If they are highlighted in bold then there are unread posts in that forum. You will see three columns for each forum listing how many posts, total and unread, and participants there are.

Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants
3	3	0

28. Click the Forum title you want to read. This opens a page showing the Threads, and again how many posts, total and unread, there are for each Thread.
29. Click the thread title you want to read.
30. The posts in the thread will be fully expanded for you to scroll through the discussion. Where someone has replied to any post in the sequence you will see that the text is slightly indented and attached to the relevant post as in the example below.



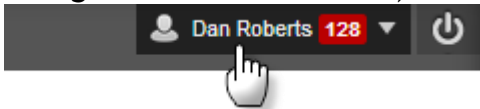
31. Other features to note are that instructor comments are marked by an orange star icon (A). If you hover the mouse pointer over the 'posted' date (B) then you can see how many times the post has been viewed. You can click the COLLAPSE link (C) which appears when you hover the mouse in this area to hide the main body of the text. Holding the mouse over the Reply link (D) will show the other reply options you have enabled and you can access them from here.



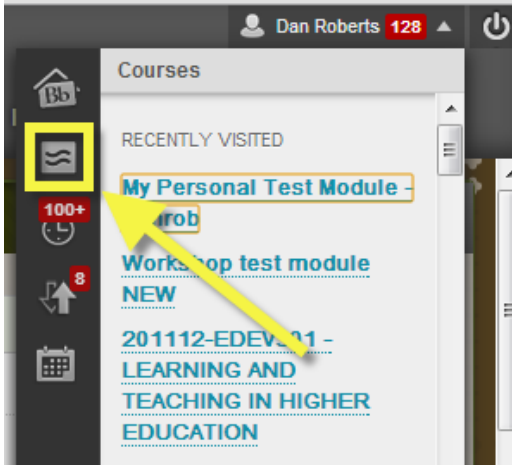
Viewing posts with My Blackboard

The Posts section of the My Blackboard will show you the latest Discussion Board activity across all of your modules without having to go into the modules. Students can also use this facility. Posts can be replied to from here.

32. On your VITAL homepage, click on the **My Blackboard** button to open this menu (upper right hand of the screen).



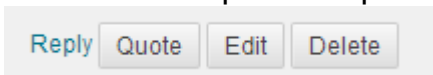
33. From the menu that appears, select the **Posts** icon.



34. From this page you will see on the left hand side the latest posts in date order from across your modules. Clicking on one of these will display it in the right-hand side of the window. You can reply to a post directly from here without having to visit the module or you can link through to the whole forum in the module.

Reply to a Post

35. Hover the mouse pointer in the post to which you want to reply. For the simplest kind of reply click the **Reply** button. You get the full text editor for your reply so rich multimedia posts are possible.



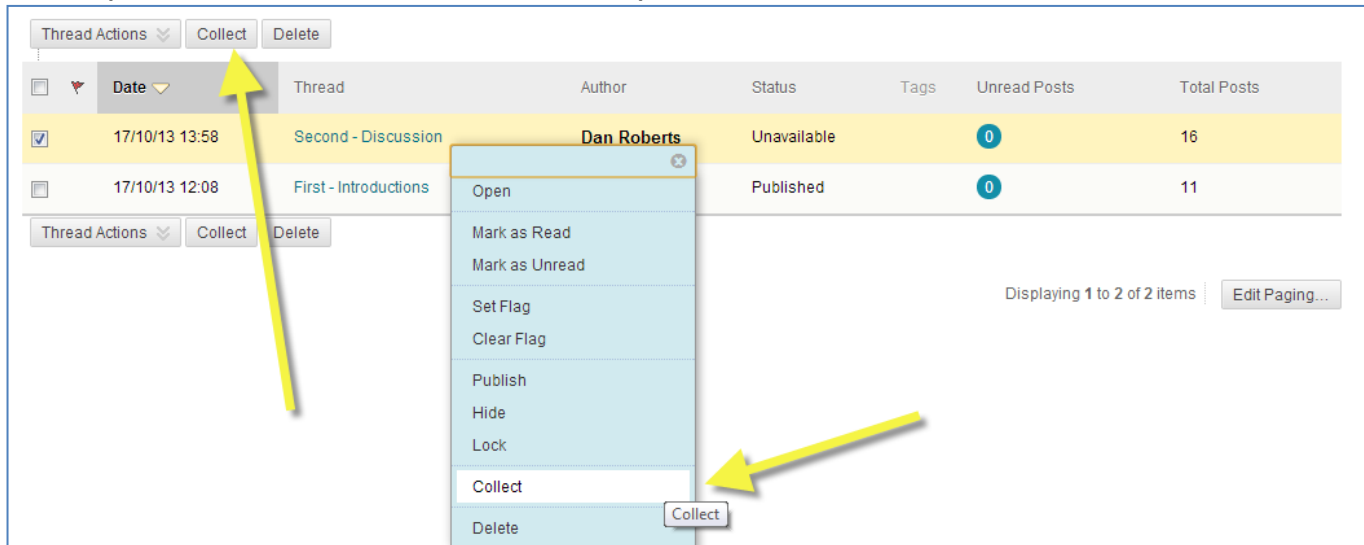
36. You can save your reply as a draft and return to it to complete or if you are ready just click **Submit**. Your reply post is now displayed below the original post, indented.

37. If made available, clicking the **Quote** option creates a reply which includes the whole of the Post you are replying to as well as your reply. As Instructor you are able to **Delete** any post so this option will always be available. You can also directly email the author of (non-anonymous) posts. If you have made **Edit** posts available to student this will appear as option here as well.

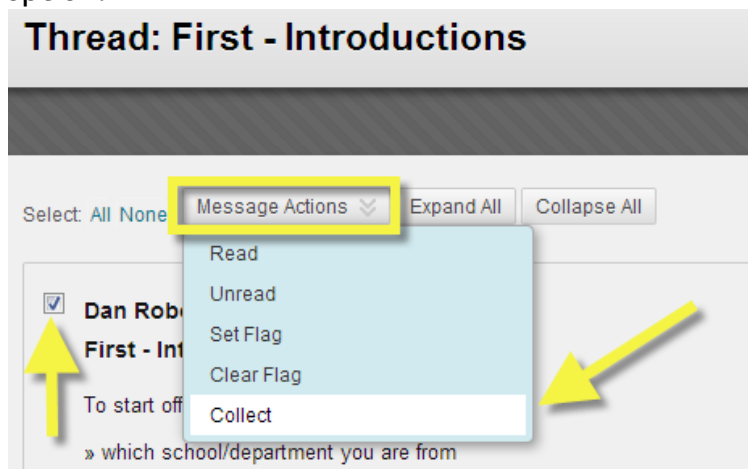
Collect posts - group posts together for printing/reading

A very useful feature is being able to **Collect** selected posts for printing out or reading. This can be done at the whole Thread level, where you can select a whole Thread (all posts) to be collected (and apply ordering/filter criteria before printing), or you can select individual posts in a Thread to Collect and print.

38. To collect all the posts in a Thread, on the page listing Threads in your selected Forum, select the Thread you want to collect, and either click the **Collect** button, or access the contextual menu for that Thread and select **Collect** there. You will see a page with all the posts and a **Print Preview** button to print this.



39. To gather individual posts in a Thread to **Collect** and print, open the Thread from the list of Thread in a Forum, select the individual posts you wish to gather and then under the **Message Actions** button (hover the mouse pointer over this) select the **Collect** option.



Student usage statistics

You can monitor and check whether and which students have accessed the Discussion Board through the **Performance Dashboard**.

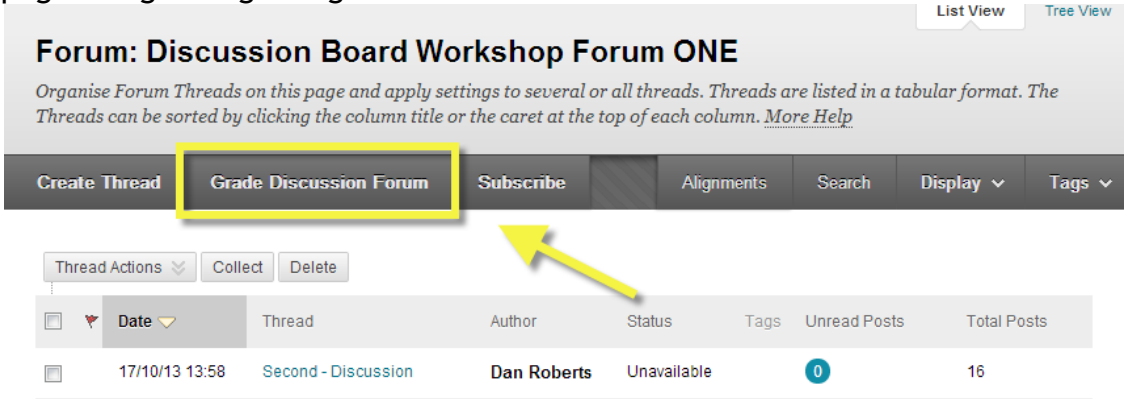
40. In the **Control Panel**, select **Evaluation** and then click on the **Performance Dashboard** link.

41. You will see a table listing all the students on the course. The Discussion Board column displays the number of posts they have made in the forums. Clicking on the number in this column for an individual student will show more detailed statistics on their contributions as well as linking to the posts themselves.

Further features

This guide introduced the basic functionalities of the Discussion Board. The table below gives an indication of some of the more advanced functions and where you can find more information on it. More information is available at:

<https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Discussions> or by contacting the eLearning Unit at elearning@liv.ac.uk.

Function	Description and further support
Grading forums and threads	<p>Forums and threads can be set to be graded as part of assessment in a module.</p> <p>If you have set a Forum to be gradable, then when you select that Forum from the Discussion Board list of forums, you will see a button at the top of that Forum's list of Threads, Grade Discussion Forum. Click this and you will see a list of students on the module, whether they have posted, and a Grade button for each student to click which accesses all their posts in a single page along with grading and feedback facilities.</p>  <p>The screenshot shows the 'Forum: Discussion Board Workshop Forum ONE' interface. At the top, there are 'List View' and 'Tree View' options. Below that is a navigation bar with buttons for 'Create Thread', 'Grade Discussion Forum' (highlighted with a yellow box), 'Subscribe', 'Alignments', 'Search', 'Display', and 'Tags'. Below the navigation bar is a table of threads. The first thread is dated '17/10/13 13:58', titled 'Second - Discussion', by 'Dan Roberts', with a status of 'Unavailable', 0 unread posts, and 16 total posts. A yellow arrow points to the 'Grade Discussion Forum' button.</p> <p>This webpage details grading in Forums and Threads: https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Discussions/Grade_Discussions</p> <p>If you are grading specific Threads then the process is similar, simply click through to the level of the thread itself and at the top of the page will be a Grade button. Click this and you will see a list of students on the module, whether they have posted, and a Grade button for each student to click which accesses all their posts in a single page along with grading and feedback facilities.</p>
Rating posts	A five star rating system which can be deployed for a range of purposes and where students can rate posts based on their content.
Moderating discussion boards and anonymous postings	As forums can be set to allow anonymous postings, moderation of posts before they are published can be enabled. Posts are queued in a moderation list and Instructors read and publish or return posts. Students can be upgraded to moderator level. Can be used with non-anonymised Forums as well. The moderation list is accessible from the Forum - click the Moderate button at the top of the page.
Adaptive release	Forums can be made available for a specific duration or to specific groups and students using Adaptive release.

View all posts by individual student	It is possible to see each individual student's posts within a module via Control Panel > Evaluation > Performance Dashboard.
Flagging messages	Messages can be flagged for later attention or as a quick reference.
Tagging messages	Useful for large, complex forums, tags can be added to posts for easy searching of a Forum for posts related to specific themes. Instructors can create and apply text labels to messages in a forum; other Discussion Board users can read, filter, and search messages using the tags, but cannot create new ones.

Practical tips on using discussion forums

It is good practice to give thorough instructions and guidance to students on the educational purpose of the discussion forums, how to use them, its timescales and the style and nature of contributions expected from them. Students also need to know what level of forum input they can expect of you to make and what you expect of them. They are more likely to engage with the Discussion Board if they know that you are going to read and respond to posts.

Let students practice using a discussion forum and get used to the technology, starting off with simple exercises to build up their confidence of communicating online (e.g. icebreakers).

Consider using your moderation skills the same way you would use them in a classroom setting to get discussions going. For example acknowledge contributions and give positive feedback to more hesitant students etc.

Give students something interesting to talk about. In the question or activity you assign them in a forum, is there something that will draw out debate or discussion?

Blackboard app and Discussion Boards

The mobile versions of Blackboard (**Blackboard** for students, **Blackboard Instructor** for staff) allows students and instructors to read and contribute to discussion boards from these devices. Discussion Boards are no longer tied to contributions from a desktop machine which opens up their applicability to a range of other contexts.

This is a link to the official Blackboard help for using discussion boards on a mobile device for staff: https://help.blackboard.com/Blackboard_App/Instructor/Discussions

This is a link to the official Blackboard app discussion board help for students: https://help.blackboard.com/Blackboard_App/Student/Discussions