
WebCT 4.x: Discussions

Competencies

After reading this document, you will be able to:

- Send and read messages
- Search messages
- Compile messages into a single file for download

About Discussions

Discussions allow students, instructors, and teaching assistants to send, read, and search for messages.

Discussions are divided into different topics that allow your instructor to create discussion groups around particular subjects. Topics can be public or private. Everyone in your course can access public topics, while private topics are available only to the set of students and teaching assistants that the instructor chooses.

By default, *Discussions* contains three public topics:

- **All:** contains all messages from all public topics
- **Main:** the main discussion area
- **Notes:** messages related to a page of content in a Content Module

Reading a Message

By default, messages are presented by threads. Threaded messages are a series of replies to the same subject. The header row of each message thread displays the following information:

- **Status:** displays the number of unread messages in the thread over the total number of messages in the thread.
- **Subject:** displays the subject of the first message in the thread and the magnifying glass icon. You can view the message thread by clicking the magnifying glass icon.



Tips

- To view both read and unread messages, click **All**.
- To view messages in chronological order, click **Unthreaded**.
- To display any messages that were just sent, click **Update Listing**.
- To view a different topic, from the select topic drop-down list, select a topic and click **Go**.

1 From *Discussions*, do one of the following:

- If you want to view messages for a single topic, click the topic containing the messages you want to read. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- If you want to view all messages, click **All**. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.

2 In the header row, expand the thread by clicking the arrow next to it. All unread messages in the thread appear.



Note A paper clip icon appears if the message has attachments.

3 Click the name of message that you want to read. The message opens.

4 If the message includes a file attachment, you can do the following:



Note It is recommended that you install updated anti-virus software before viewing or downloading any attachments.

- If you want to display the file attachment:
 - » From the *Discussion Messages* screen or an open message, click the paper clip icon or **See Attached**. The *Attachments* screen appears.
 - » From the *Attachments* screen, click the file you want to view. The file is displayed.
- If you want to download the file attachment to your computer:
 - » From the *Discussion Messages* screen or an open message, click the paper clip icon or **See Attached**. The *Attachments* screen appears.
 - » Select the file and click **Download**. Your browser's file download screen appears.
 - » Follow the onscreen instructions.
 - » Click **Close**. The message appears.

5 When you have finished reading the message, you can:

appears.

- Reply to the message.
- Download the message.

Marking all messages as read



Note Threaded messages, whether collapsed or expanded, are marked as read.

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the folder that contains the messages you want to mark. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Click **Mark all as read**. All messages are marked as read.

Marking selected messages as read

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic containing the messages you want to mark. The *Discussions Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Display the messages that you want to mark.



Note By default, only unread messages are listed. To view all messages, click **All**.

- 3 Select the messages that you want to mark as read:
 - To select individual messages in a thread, select the check box next to each message.
 - To select all messages in a thread, in the thread's header row, select the check box next to the magnifying glass icon.
 - To select all messages in a topic, in the topic's header row next to *Subject*, select the check box.
- 4 Click **Mark as read**. The selected messages are marked as read.



Tip To automatically scroll to the bottom of the screen to click **Mark as read**, click **Message options**.

Marking selected messages as unread

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic containing the messages you want to mark. The *Discussions Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Display the messages that you want to mark.



Note By default, only unread messages are listed. To view all messages, click **All**.

- 3 Select the messages that you want to mark as unread:
 - To select individual messages, select the check box next to each message.
 - To select all messages in a thread, in the thread's header row, select the check box next to the magnifying glass icon.
 - To select all messages in a topic, in the topic's header row next to *Subject*, select the check box.
- 4 Click **Mark as unread**. The selected messages are marked as unread.



Tip To automatically scroll to the bottom of the screen to click **Mark as unread**, click **Message options**.

Sending messages with or without attachments

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic where you wish to post a message. The *Discussions Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Click **Compose message**. The *Compose Discussion Message* screen appears in a new browser window.
- 3 If you want to post the message to a different topic, from the *Topic* dropdown list, select the topic to which you want to post the message.
- 4 In the *Subject* text box, enter the subject for your message.
- 5 Compose your message by doing one of the following:
 - In the Message text box, enter your message. The following message options are available:
 - » To change the number of viewable lines in the *Message* text box, from the *Height of edit area* dropdown list, select a number and click **Resize**.
 - » To allow text to continue horizontally beyond each visible line, select *Don't wrap* text.
 - Click **HTML Editor**.



Note Depending on administrator settings, the HTML Editor may not be available. If available, you may also find this utility in Microsoft Word under

Insert / Object / Create New / Microsoft Equation. To use this option, create your equation and save the file. Instructions for attaching the file appear below.

- 6 If you want to insert an equation, use the WebEQ Equation Editor for Microsoft Windows or for Macintosh.



Note Depending on administrator settings, the Equation Editor may not be available.

- 7 If you want to attach a file:
 - Next to *Attachments*, click **Browse**. Your computer's file browser appears.
 - Locate and select the file you want to upload. The path and filename of your attachment appears in the *Attachments* text box.
 - Click **Attach file**. The filename appears as a link, and the file is attached to your message.
- 8 If you want to preview your message before sending:
 - Click **Preview**. A preview of your message appears in a new browser window.
 - Click **Close**. The *Compose Discussion Message* screen appears.
- 9 Click Post. Your message is posted to the discussion topic.

Replying to or quoting a message

You can reply to discussion messages that were posted by others in the course.



Note If replying to a message containing an equation, you cannot edit the equation. You can insert or edit an equation only by replying privately or quoting the message.

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic that contains the message to which you want to reply. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Click the message to which you want to reply. The message appears.
- 3 Choose the format for your reply:
 - To reply to all members of the topic without including the original message, click **Reply**. The *Compose Message* screen appears with the original message at the bottom of the screen.
 - To reply only the person who posted the message, click **Reply Privately**.

Message text box and at the bottom of the screen.



Note When you reply privately, your reply is sent as **mail message** to the person who posted the message, rather than being sent as part of the discussion forum. The recipient of your reply should check their mail messages for your response.

- To include the original message in your reply to all topic members, click **Quote**. The *Compose Message* screen appears with the original message in the *Message* text box and at the bottom of the screen.
- 4** In the *Subject* text box, edit the subject for your message.
- 5** Compose your message by doing one of the following:
- In the *Message* text box, enter your message. The following message options are available:
 - » To change the number of viewable lines in the Message text box, from the Height of edit area drop-down list, select a number and click **Resize**.
 - » To allow text to continue horizontally beyond each visible line, select *Don't wrap text*.
 - Click **HTML editor**.



Note Depending on administrator settings, the HTML editor may not be available.

- 6** If you are replying privately or quoting a message and you want to insert or edit an equation, use the WebEQ Equation Editor for Microsoft Windows or for Macintosh.



Note Depending on administrator settings, the Equation Editor may not be available.

- 7** If you want to attach a file:
- Next to *Attachments*, click **Browse**. Your computer's file browser appears.
 - Locate and select the file you want to upload. The path and filename of your attachment appears in the *Attachments* text box.
 - Click **Attach file**. The filename appears as a hyperlink, and the file is attached to your message.
- 8** If you want to preview your message before sending:
- Click **Preview**. A preview of your message appears in a new browser

window.

- Click **Close**. The *Compose Discussion Message* screen appears.
- 9 Click Post. The reply is posted to the discussion topic.

Downloading messages

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic containing the message you want to download. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Click the message that you want to download. The message appears.
- 3 Click **Download**. Your browser's file download window appears.
- 4 Follow the onscreen instructions.
- 5 Click **Close**. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.

Compiling and downloading messages

This feature allows you to select messages, compile them into one file, and download the file to your computer.

- 1 From *Discussions*, click the topic that contains the messages you want to compile and download. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.
- 2 Display the messages you want to compile:
 - To display all messages, click **All**.
 - To display only unread messages, click **Unread**.
- 3 Select the format by which you want to select messages for compilation:
 - If you want to display messages in chronological order, click **Unthreaded**.
 - If you want to display messages by threads, click **Threaded**.



Note Threaded messages are a series of replies to the same subject. To expand a thread, click the hyperlink triangle.

- 4 Select the messages to compile:
 - To select individual messages, select the check box next to each message you want to compile.
 - To select all messages in a thread, in the header row, select the check box next to the magnifying glass icon.
 - To select all messages displayed, in the header row next to *Subject*, select the check box.

- 5 Click **Compile**. The *Compiled Messages* screen appears displaying your compiled messages.



Tip To automatically scroll to the bottom of the screen to click **Compile**, click **Message options**.

- 6 If you want to download your compiled messages:
 - Click **Download**. Your browser's file download window appears.
 - Follow the onscreen instructions.
- 7 Click **Close**. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears.

Searching messages

You may search messages by:

- first name of the message author
- last name of the message author
- user name of the message author
- thread subject
- unique message number
- date that the message was sent
- content of the mail message

After you have searched your messages, you can compile and download them.

To search messages:

- 1 From *Discussions*, click **Search**. The *Search Topics* screen appears in a new browser window.
- 2 Select your search parameters:
 - From the *Search* drop-down list, select the messages to search.
 - From the *Topic* drop-down list, select the topic to search.
 - From the Criteria drop-down list, select the filter to apply to your search:
 - None** = no filter
 - First Name** = first name of the message author
 - Last Name** = last name of the message author
 - User ID** = user name of the message author
 - Subject** = the thread subject

Message No = the unique message number associated with each message

Date = the date that the message was sent

Message = any of the words in the text of the mail message

- From the *Comparison* drop-down list, select how the information entered in the Value text box will be compared with the search *Criteria*

Contains = retrieves messages containing the letters or numbers entered in the *Value* text box

Equals = retrieves messages that match exactly the letters or numbers entered in the *Value* text box

Before = in combination with the Date or Number filter, retrieves all messages before the date or number entered in the *Value* text box. In combination with a text filter (Name, Subject, Message) retrieves all messages containing letters that occur alphabetically before the word entered in the *Value* text box.

After = in combination with the Date or Number filter, retrieves all messages after the date or number entered in the *Value* text box. In combination with a text filter (Name, Subject, Message), retrieves all messages containing letters that occur alphabetically after the word entered in the *Value* text box.

Starts with = in combination with a text filter (Name, Subject, Message) retrieves messages with words that begin with the letter entered in the *Value* text box.

Ends with = in combination with a text filter (Name, Subject, Message) retrieves words that end with the letter entered in the *Value* text box.

- In the *Value* text box, enter the words or numbers you want to search. If you have selected the Date filter, type the date in the format mm,dd,yyyy including the commas.

- 3 Click **Search**. The *Discussion Messages* screen appears listing all messages that satisfy your search requirements.

Changing topic settings

Topic Settings allows you to control how many threads per page to display on your screen. Selections made in *Topic Settings* will apply only to your own screen.

- 1 From Discussions, click **Topic Settings**. The *Topic Settings* screen appears.
- 2 Next to *Threads per page*, select the number of threads you want to view at once:
 - To set a limit for the number of threads to display per page, enter the limit number in the *Display* text box.

- To view all the threads in a topic at once, select *Display all messages* at once.
- 3** Next to Length of subject, select the number of characters to display in the Subject column for each thread and message:
 - To set a limit for the number of characters to display for the subject of each thread and message, enter the limit number in the *Display first* text box.
 - To display the entire subject of each thread and message, select *Display entire* subject.
 - 4** Click **Update**. *Topic Settings* is updated.
 - 5** To return to the *Discussions* table, click **Back**.

Viewing members of a private topic



Note Depending on administrator settings, you may not be able to view the members of your private topics.

- 1** From the *Discussions* screen, under the *Status* column, click **private** for the topic whose members you want to view. The *Private Topic* screen appears.
- 2** To return to the *Discussions* screen, click the **Discussions** link in the breadcrumbs.