

Creating and Grading Discussions in Brightspace by D2L

Introduction

Use the Discussions tool in Brightspace to create and manage student discussions, whether graded or ungraded. When your students post to a discussion topic, they have the HTML toolbar available and can easily insert pictures, create hyperlinks, format their text in various ways, and more.

This handout will introduce you to some essential skills and concepts for creating and managing discussion forums and topics, and grading student posts.

Note: You can create two distinct types of Discussion items – forums and topics.

- **A forum is a category.** Students cannot post to a forum; a forum is not a gradable activity.
- **Topics are discussion boards** where you and your students can post and reply. You can grade posts made to a discussion topic.

Creating a Forum

A forum is a category that can contain multiple topics. To create a discussion forum:

1. From the **Course Tools** menu, select **Discussions**.
2. Click the **New** button and select **New Forum**.
3. Type a **Title** for the forum.
4. (*Optional*) If desired, enter a description of the forum in the **Description** box. This could include general instructions that will apply to all the topics contained in this forum.
5. Click **Save** (or **Save and Close**) at the bottom of the screen.

Creating a Topic

A topic is a discussion board where you and your students can post and reply. Topics can be set up as graded activities (connected to a grade item) or set up to be ungraded (for general knowledge-sharing or question & answer discussion topics, for example).

To create a topic:

1. From the **Course Tools** menu, select **Discussions**.
2. Click the **New** button and select **New Topic**.
3. Choose a forum (a category) for this topic from the **Forum** drop-down menu (or click **New Forum** to create and save a new forum in which to house this topic).
4. If you have already created groups in the course, you'll see two **Topic Type** options from which to choose. (If you don't have groups in the course, continue to Step 5 below.)
 - a. For a class-wide discussion, leave the Topic Type set as "Open topic, everyone can access this topic and its contents".
 - b. For a group-restricted discussion topic, choose the second option ("Group or section topic, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section") and then select the group category from the drop-down menu.
5. Type a **Title** for the topic.

The screenshot shows the 'New Topic Details' form. At the top, there are four tabs: 'Properties', 'Restrictions', 'Assessment', and 'Objectives'. Below the tabs is the title 'New Topic Details'. The 'Forum' field is a dropdown menu currently set to 'General', with a '[New Forum]' link and a question mark icon to its right. Below the forum field is the 'Topic Type' section, which contains two radio buttons. The first radio button is selected and is labeled 'Open topic, everyone can access this topic and its contents'. The second radio button is labeled 'Group or section topic, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section'. Below the topic type section is the 'Title' field, which contains the text 'Introduce Yourself'. Below the title field is the 'Description' field, which features a rich text editor toolbar with icons for video, image, link, paragraph, bold, italic, underline, list, and more options. The text in the description field reads 'In a paragraph or two, introduce yourself to your classmates.' At the bottom right of the description field, there are icons for undo, redo, code, search, and other editing functions.

6. In the **Description** field, enter the instructions for your students to follow when posting to this topic. If you add the discussion to a content module, the description will show in the module.

7. If desired, select additional options.



Options

- Allow anonymous posts ?
- A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic ?
- Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads ?

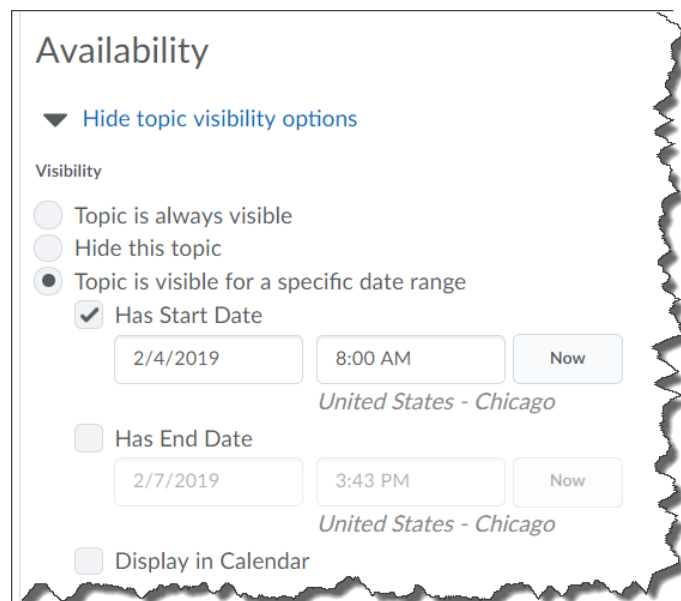
Rate Posts

No Ratings

- “Allow anonymous posts” will give students the option to post anonymously.
 - “A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic” will allow you (the course instructor) to read and approve posts before they appear to the class.
 - “Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads” will prevent students from reading any posts in the topic before they make a post (*aka* start a thread) of their own.
 - Post ratings allow students to up vote classmates’ posts, rate posts, and so on. Post ratings have no connection to how posts are scored/graded, however.
8. By default, the new topic will be visible to your students.

To hide the topic, first expand the Availability Options (by clicking **Show topic visibility options**) then select the “Hide this topic” option.

Alternately, you can choose **Topic is visible for a specific date range**, then set a start date on which the topic will become visible. The topic will be hidden until that date and time.



Availability

▼ Hide topic visibility options

Visibility

- Topic is always visible
- Hide this topic
- Topic is visible for a specific date range
 - Has Start Date
 - 2/4/2019
 - 8:00 AM
 - Now
 - United States - Chicago
- Has End Date
 - 2/7/2019
 - 3:43 PM
 - Now
- United States - Chicago

- Display in Calendar

- By default, students will be able to post immediately in the new topic (*unless it is hidden*). To set date constraints on the topic so that students cannot post before a certain date and time and/or cannot post after a certain date and time, click **Show locking options**, then select “Lock topic” or select “Unlock this topic for a specific date range” and then specify a start and/or end date.

Locking Options

▼ Hide locking options

Locking Options

Unlock topic

Lock topic

Unlock topic for a specific date range

Has Start Date

1/21/2019 3:08 PM Now

United States - Chicago

Has End Date

2/15/2019 11:59 PM Now

United States - Chicago

Display in Calendar

Here the end date functions as a **due date** for the discussion – after this date and time, students will not be able to make any further posts or replies.

- Finally, click **Save** or **Save and Close** to save the new discussion topic.

Associating a Discussion Topic with a Grade Item

When you create a topic, no automatic connection to the grade book exists – it’s up to you to associate a grade item. Here’s how:

- Click on the topic’s **Assessment** tab. (If you are working with an already-existing topic, click the drop-down arrow by the topic name, then choose **Edit Topic**, and then click the **Assessment** tab.)
- If you already have a grade item for this discussion topic score, then select it from the **Grade Item** drop-down menu and continue to step 3. Otherwise, to create a new grade book item:
 - Click the **New Grade Item** link (next to the Grade Item drop-down menu).
 - Type a name for the grade book item in the **Name** field.
 - Enter the maximum possible score for the topic in the **Maximum Points** field.
 - Click the **Save** button.

2. On the topic's Assessment tab, enter the maximum possible score for the topic in the **Score Out of** field. This number must match the value in the Maximum Points field of the grade item – a mismatch can cause problems later.

The image shows a screenshot of the 'Assessment' tab in a learning management system. The 'Score Out of' field is circled in red and contains the value '15'. A callout box points to this field with the text: 'Make sure these two values match to prevent discrepancies when grading.' Below the 'Score Out of' field is a 'New Grade Item' dialog box. The 'Maximum Points' field in the dialog box is also circled in red and contains the value '15'. The same callout box points to this field as well. The dialog box also shows the 'Name' field with 'Module 1 Discussion' and the 'Short Name' field with 'M1D'. The 'Type' is set to 'Numeric' and the 'Category' is 'None'. The 'Save' button is highlighted in blue.

3. Depending on the nature of the discussion activity and how you prefer to grade it, either leave **Allow assessment of individual posts** unchecked, or check the box and choose one of the options. *

4. Click **Save** or **Save and Close**.

* If each student will be posting just once to the discussion topic, the option to "Allow assessment of individual posts" isn't necessary, and may even make grading the topic more time-consuming. What this option does is make it possible to assign a separate score to each post and reply that a student makes to a single topic. For example, if Jane makes 1 post and 3 replies to a topic, you could assess and score each of Jane's posts/replies individually, and set the discussion topic to automatically sum the total of those scores as Jane's grade for the activity.

Discussion Settings

You can customize your discussion settings in order to control what you see when you read and post to discussions. Your students can control their own discussion settings, as well – keep this in mind when giving discussion instructions to your students. What you see on your screen might not be a precise match to what they see on their screens.

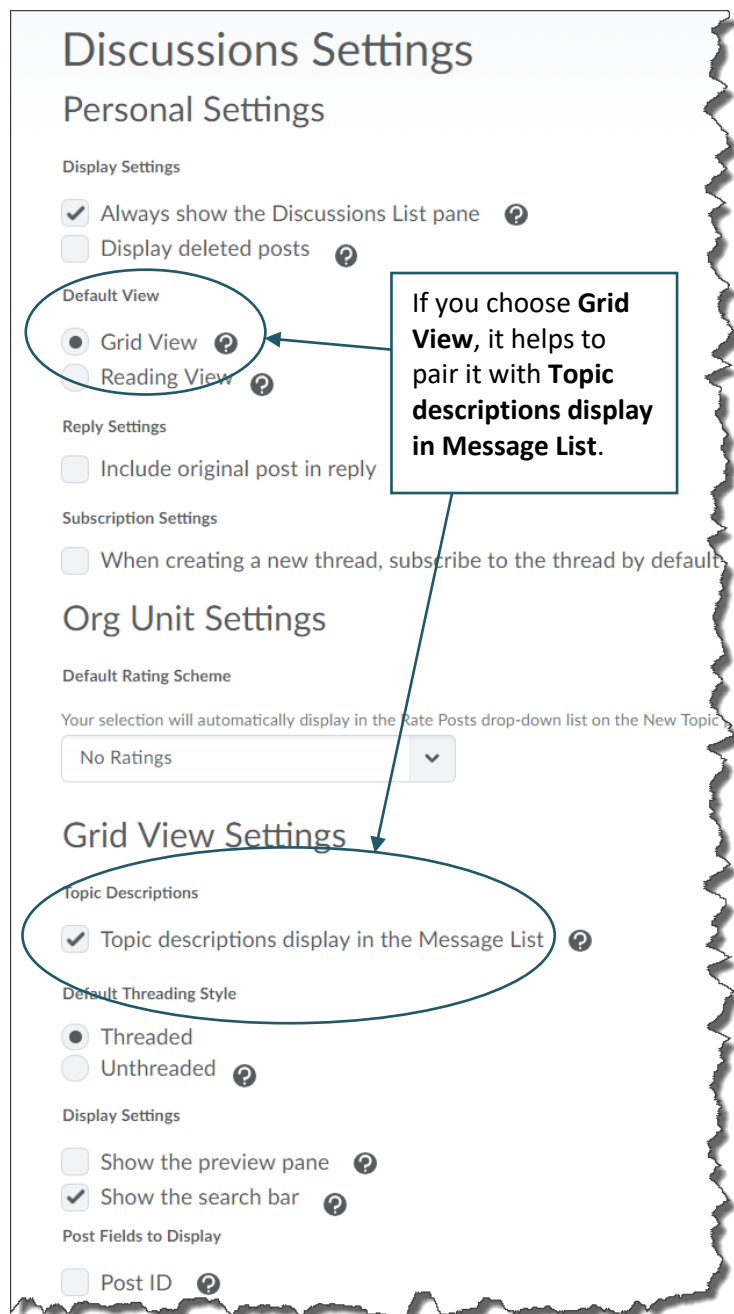
To access your discussion settings, click the **Settings** link on the upper right side of the Discussions screen.

Take some time to experiment with different discussion settings to see what you prefer. Three suggestions for your settings:

- Make it easier to move from one discussion topic to the next by selecting **Always show the Discussions List pane**.
- Save yourself some screen space (and prevent excess scrolling) by selecting the **Grid View**.
- If you select Grid View, keep your discussion directions easy to spot by selecting **Topic descriptions display in the Message List**.
- Make individual posts easier to read and manage by un-selecting the **Show the preview pane**.

Shown here is a screen shot of the settings that CTL recommends you try.

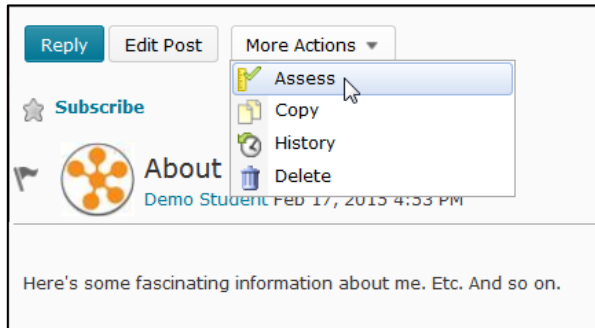
Note that the **Personal Settings** are user-specific, and your settings there only affect your own display. Choices you make in the **Org Unit Settings** will affect the discussions interface for the entire class.



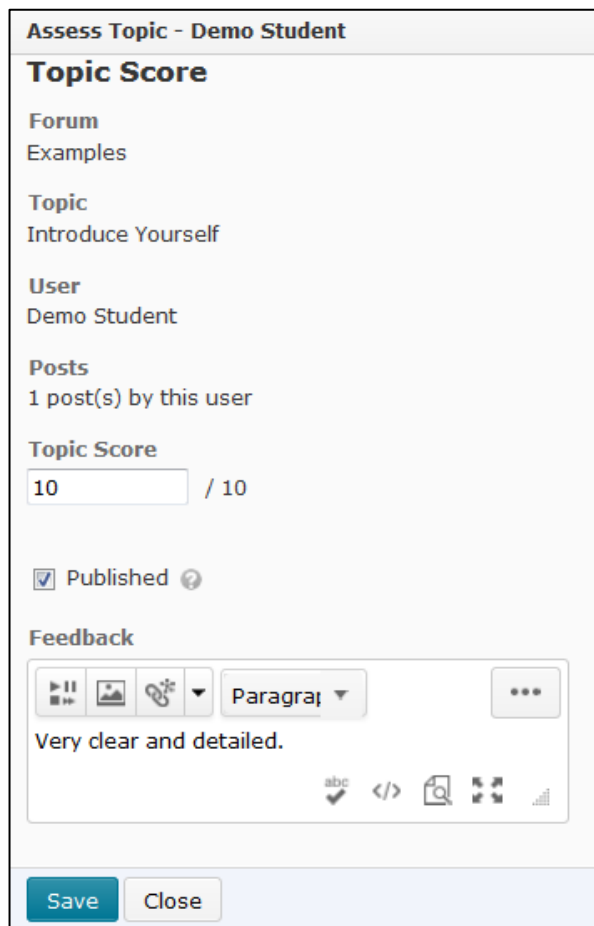
Grading Discussions

To grade discussions, you have multiple options. You can even grade discussions directly from the Grades screen. Ultimately, you'll need to experiment to see what workflow is best for you, but here are the basics:

Method 1: Grade as you go (Grid View only)



This option works best if you have chosen the Grid View in your discussion settings. Simply click on a student's discussion post to open it, read it, and when you are ready to grade it, click **More Actions > Assess**.



In the box that pops up, enter a **Topic Score**, click the **Published** check box (to push the score to the student's Grades), enter something in the Feedback if you wish, and click **Save**.

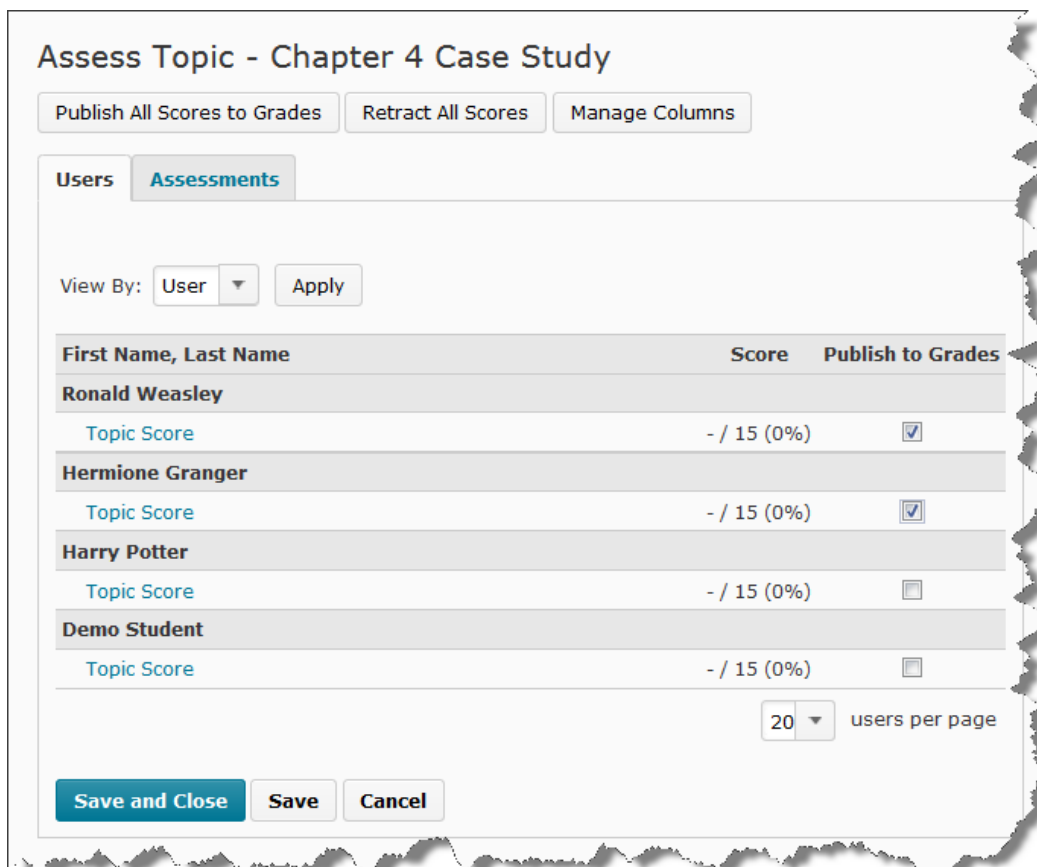
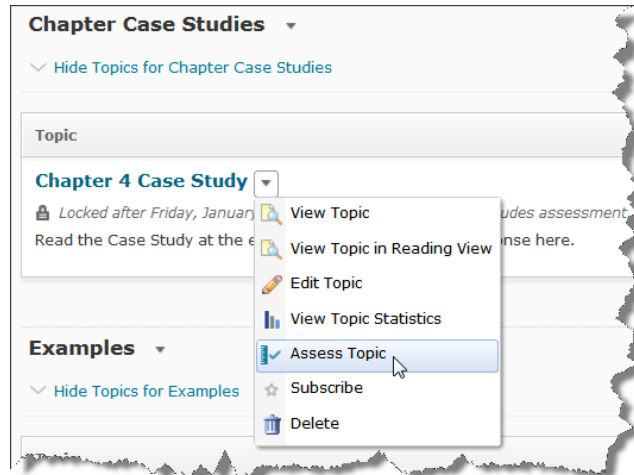
The comments you type in the Feedback box will be visible to students on their Grades screen. It's not the same as replies on the discussion topic, which are visible to everyone.

Note that if you don't click the Published check box, the score and any comments in the Feedback will be saved, but will only be visible to you. This can be useful in cases where you may take several days to grade a discussion activity, and want to publish the scores later on, all at once.

Method 2: Use the Assess Topic screen

On the Discussions screen, instead of clicking directly on the name of the discussion topic you want to grade, click the drop-down arrow next to the topic's name. Choose **Assess Topic** from the drop-down menu.

On the Assess Topic screen, you'll see a **Topic Score** link beneath each student's name. Click that link to view all of a student's posts and replies on that topic. To grade the student's work, enter a **Topic Score**, click the **Published** check box (to push the score to the student's Grades), enter something in the Feedback if you wish, and click **Save and Close**.

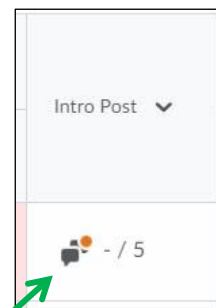


Note that at the top of the Assess Topic screen there are options at the topic that allow you to **Publish All Scores to Grades** at one time, or to **Retract All Scores**.

Method 3: Grade from the Enter Grades screen

Go to **Grades**, and then to **Enter Grades**. Make sure you are looking at the standard view, not the spreadsheet view. (**Tip:** Look for a button that either reads “Switch to Spreadsheet View” or “Switch to Standard View” – use this button to toggle your view if needed.)

Scroll to the right until you see the column for the discussion you wish to grade. If a student has posted to the discussion, a small icon will be present. Click the icon to read the student’s posts and replies, and to grade their work.



This icon on the Enter Grades screen indicates that a student has posted to the discussion. Click the icon to read and grade the post.

Conclusion

Remember that if you want to try something out – such as posting to a discussion topic – from a student’s perspective in Brightspace, you can impersonate your Demo Student (go to the Classlist screen to do this).

And any time you have questions or need assistance with Brightspace discussions, you can call our in-house Brightspace Support team at 468-1919, or email us at d2l@sfasu.edu.