

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



Introduction

The Discussions tool in Brightspace provides students (and lecturers) with an area to communicate and collaborate in, to pose questions, and to share information and opinions.

One of the key benefits of a discussion tool is that it allows time for reflection - it is an *asynchronous* tool. You can take your time, choosing what you want to write, based on your own thoughts and those of others, before clicking 'Post'.



[Pixabay](#)

This guide will give you an overview of the Discussions tool before going into some detail about how to make the most of the tool.

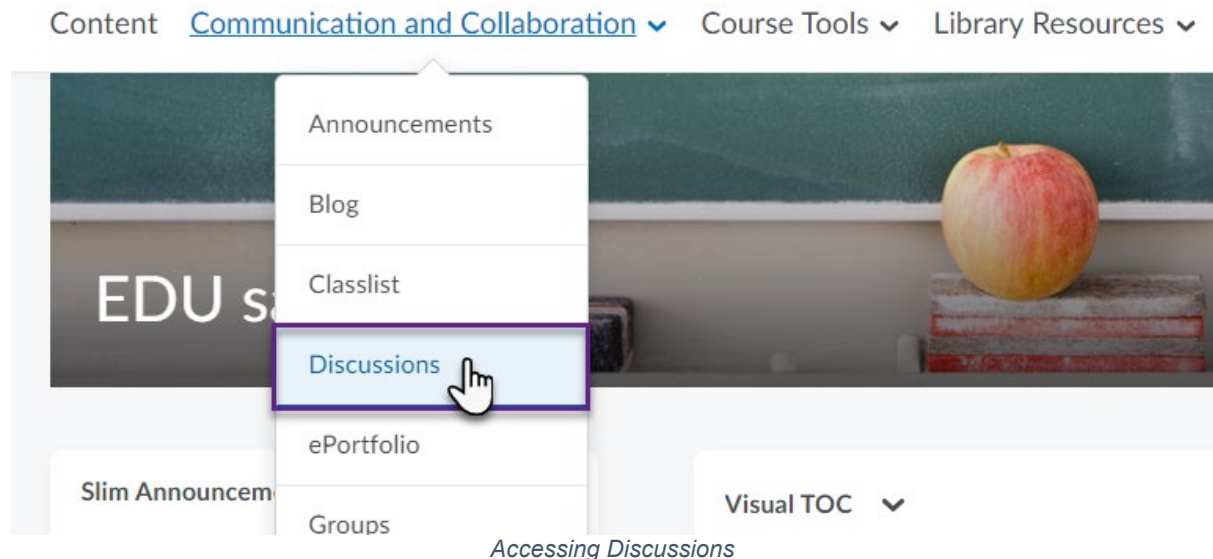
Also, along the way, you will find some useful tips and tricks - these will be highlighted in blue.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Discussions overview

Accessing the discussion tool

The Discussions tool can be found in the Communication and Collaboration area of the Brightspace navbar.



A hierarchy

The Discussions tool has four main levels in its hierarchy: **Forums**, **Topics**, **Threads** and **Posts**.

Forums

Forums are the top level of discussions - they are best thought of as an administrative way of grouping various discussions together.

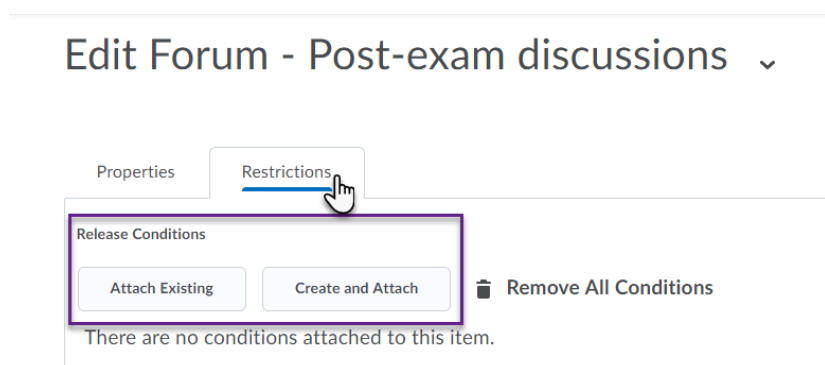
Note: Only lecturers can create forums.

Tips and tricks:

Forums can be created and set to become

available at different times across the duration of your module or be available to students all the time. This is done using the **Restrictions** tab when setting the forum up (shown opposite).

Forums can also be restricted by many other conditions: access to particular groups only, completion of an activity required, a score in a quiz etc.



Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Topics

Forums are made up of topics (in fact, forums are only visible **one or more topics** are added). A topic is often the description of what is going to be discussed. For example, a forum called 'Weekly discussions' could contain topics named 'Week 1 discussion', 'Week 2 discussion' etc. with each of those weekly topics posing a question in the form of a statement or a short paragraph (they can also contain links, images, multi-media).

Note: Like forums, topics can only be created by staff

Threads

Threads are the first level of response to a topic. Students can start **threads** and so can lecturers.


Tips and tricks: Pay close attention to the instructions given to you in the discussion topic. Some topics might ask all the students in the class to create new threads when responding - giving you lots of different options when it comes to building up discussions; however, some lecturers might post the first thread and ask you to only reply to that. This is one way to keep discussions very focused.

You have various options when creating a thread: you can **subscribe** to a thread (which means they will be notified when anyone replies to their thread); you can **'pin'** the thread (this means it will always appear at the top of your list of threads, even if ordered by most recent first). And, if it has been set up, you will be able to **post anonymously**.

Posts

Whenever you reply to a thread you are creating a **post**. In most discussions this is where the real debate goes on.

Note: It could be that your lecturer has asked you to each create threads in reaction to a question posed in a topic - but unless others interact directly with that thread (by replying) then all you will have is a collection of answers, not a discussion. So, **watch out for the instructions your lecturer gives you**.

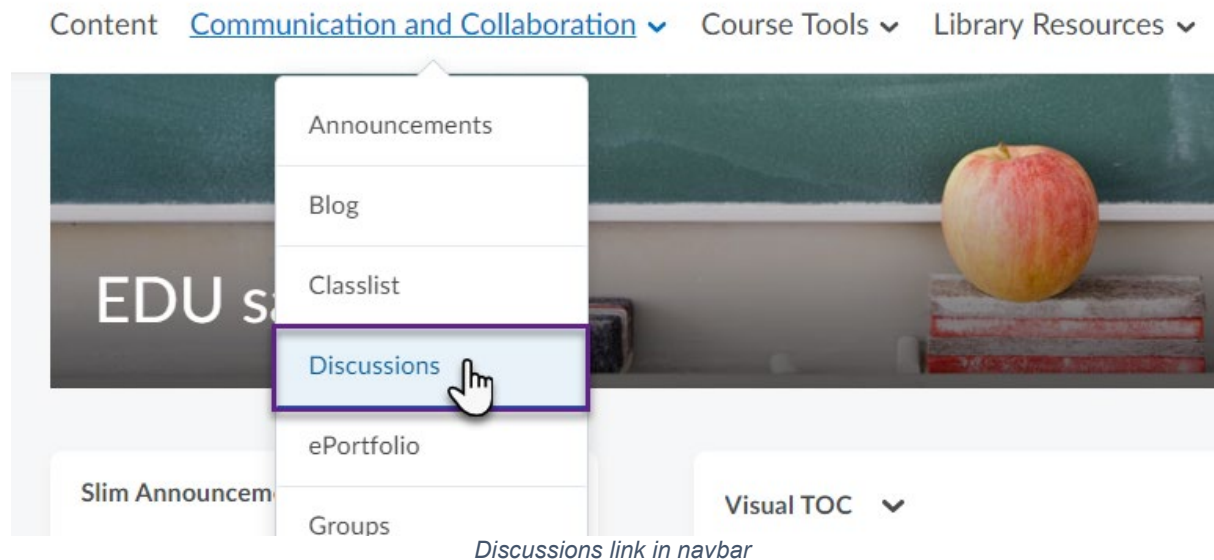
Topic	Threads	Posts	Last Post
Sample Forum - Postgraduate Research	2	3 (3)	 Carolin Radtke 10 July at 10:37 AM

Sample discussion topic (showing threads and posts, inc. unread posts)

Tips and tricks: When you go to Discussions and are viewing a particular topic, you will see the total number of threads followed by the number of posts* (*there may also be a **number in brackets** under Posts (see below) - this is the total number of **unread** posts and a quick way to see if anything has happened since you last visited).

Creating and replying to threads

To create a thread - go to: Communication and Collaboration > Discussions



Discussions link in navbar

From the Discussions list, scroll to the topic you wish to add a thread/s to.

In our example opposite there are currently no threads. The question posed in the topic is clear, as is the instruction that all students should start a thread (to share their definition) and reply to at least one other person. At the beginning of a semester, this is a sensible way to get everyone used to the Discussions interface. To post a thread in response to the question posed in the topic, you would click on Start a New Thread.

Tips and tricks: Clicking on Subscribe under the topic title (shown opposite) means that the user will be notified whenever anyone posts to this topic. There are three

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

options for how such notifications will be displayed:

Customise Notifications

Customise notifications for the Discussion Topic "Week 1: How would you define global education?"

Notification Method

Show notifications in minibar only

Send me an instant notification

Include in my summary of activity

Emails will be sent to 'edu@uhi.ac.uk'

Subscribe Cancel

Notification options

Settings Help Search Week 1:...

Week 1: How would you define global education?

★ Subscribe

This forum is for week... discussions.

At the beginning of the semester I'd like to start the ball rolling with a question around how we define global education. Not everyone will see it the same way. This is also a subject we will circle back to later in the semester.

Instructions: Please add a thread of your own and reply to at least one other person's thread.

Start a New Thread

Filter by: All Threads Sort by: Most Recent Activity

There are no threads in this topic.

Starting a new thread

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

You must give your thread a title; a full html editor allows for the thread to be composed of text, images, links, even multi-media. You can also add attachments.

When you start a thread, the default is for you to be automatically subscribed to the thread (meaning you will receive notifications when others reply). If you do not want to be notified, you should remove the check mark.

Once you are finished composing, click Post. At this point, unless moderation is in effect, the thread is visible to all others who have access to the topic, and can accept replies.

My initial thoughts...

Paragraph B I U

I'm not going to head to the library or go online to research various definitions, I'm just going to write down what I think this phrase means to me right now, before starting this session.

Subscribe to this thread

Add attachments

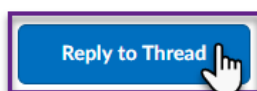
Post Cancel

A thread

To reply to a thread, from the Discussions list, click on the title of the thread. You will then see a button: Reply to Thread.



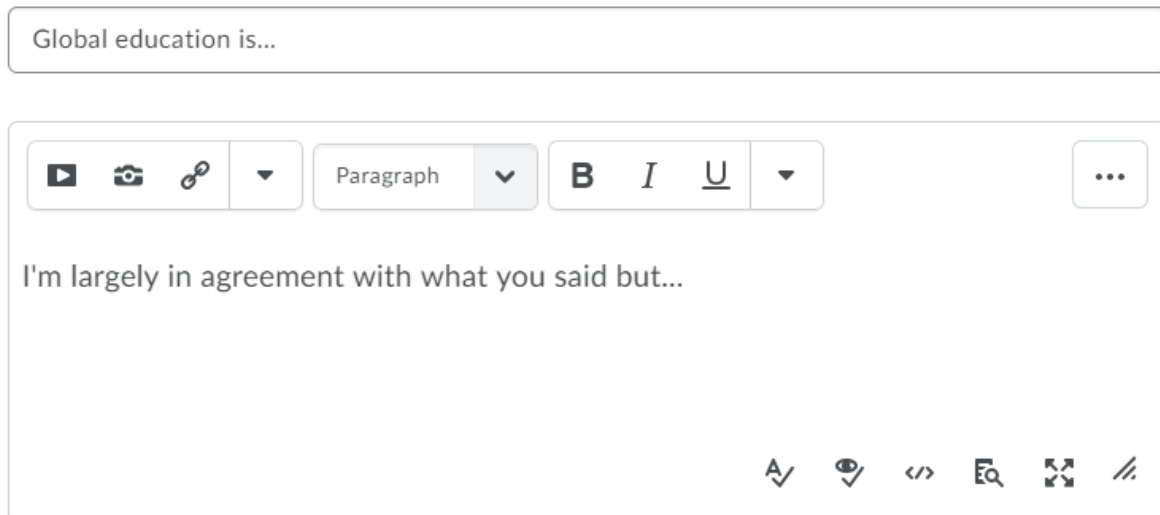
I think global education is curriculum that opens pupils/students minds to the broader world - the way things are beyond their borders.



Replying to a thread

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Clicking on this takes you to a page very much like the Start a New Thread screen, where you title your reply, add text, imagery etc. When ready, click Post.



Global education is...

I'm largely in agreement with what you said but...

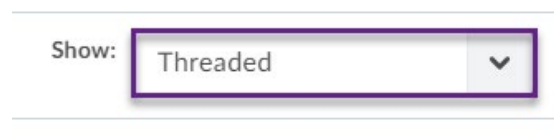
[Add original post text](#)

Contents of a reply

Once there are replies to threads, the option to *reply to the reply* will be available, in addition to reply to thread.

It's perfectly possible that this process could go several layers deep, especially if there are multiple opinions involved.

Tips and tricks: As replies to replies build up, when viewing a topic, select Threaded from the Show drop-down menu, each new reply will be indented - making it's position in the hierarchy more obvious.



Show: Threaded

Selecting Threaded from view dropdown menu

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

The screenshot shows a discussion thread titled "Global education is..." by user "Edu Test" posted on 25 September 2019 at 7:40 PM. The main post text is "I think global education is curriculum that opens pupils/students broader world - the way things are beyond their borders." Below this is a blue button labeled "Reply to Thread". A callout bubble points to this button with the text "To reply to the thread above, click here".

Below the main post is a section for replies. The first reply is from "Edu Test" posted "1 minute ago" with the text "I'm largely in agreement with what you said but...". A callout bubble points to this reply with the text "This is a response to the thread above". Below the reply is a blue button labeled "Reply". A callout bubble points to this button with the text "To reply to the reply, click here".

At the bottom of the reply section, there is a pagination indicator showing "< 1 / 1 >".

How replies can build up

Posting anonymously in discussions

When lecturers are setting up forums (and topics) there is a check-box for Allowing anonymous posts. It is possible that you will be taking part in discussions that allow for anonymous posting. Below you can see what that could look like.

Note: If forums/topics are set up to allow anonymous posts, all those enrolled on the unit/module (including teaching staff) will be able to post anonymously.

What you will see

If anonymous posting has been applied to a topic, when you come to create a thread (or replying to an existing thread) before clicking Post to share your thoughts, you will be asked if you want to Post as Anonymous (picture opposite).

If you do choose to Post as Anonymous, the author displays as 'Anonymous'

Important note: When students post as anonymous details of authorship are also hidden from teaching staff. However, if a post involves a breach of university policy, system administrators will be able to identify authorship.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Discussions List > View Topic

Week 1: Welcome to the module

☆ Subscribe

Hi there

I'm very much looking forward to this module...

Post as Anonymous Subscribe to this thread

[Add attachments](#)

Post Cancel

A user selecting 'post as anonymous'

Making the most of discussions

The following items cover some further practicalities of discussions and some tips on how to stay aware of activity in a discussion (so you don't miss anything).

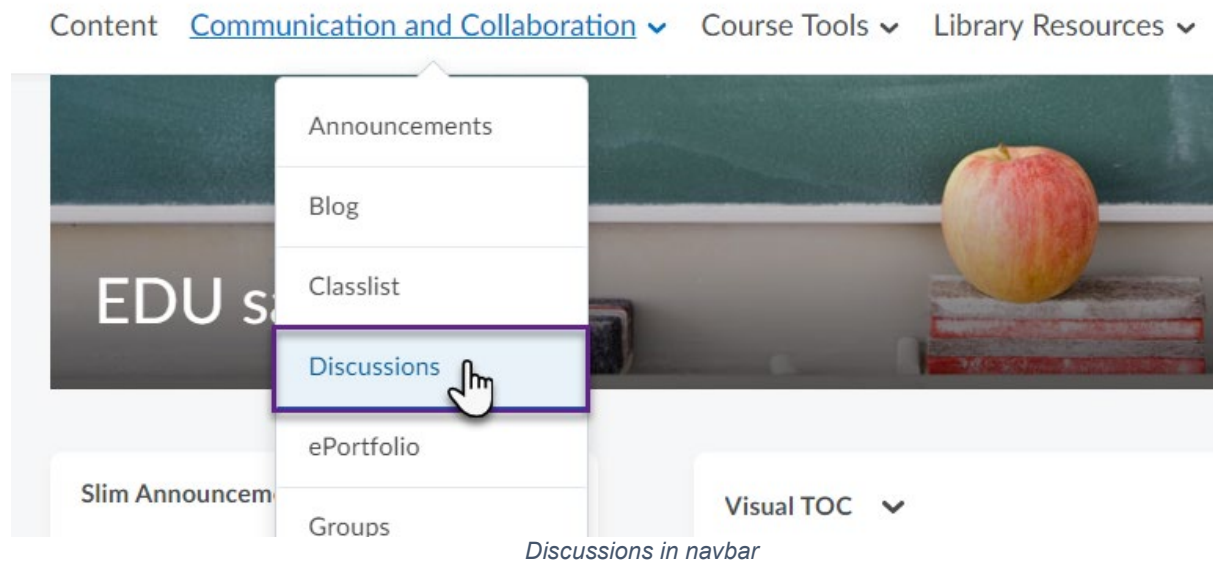
Being directed to discussions

There are various ways in which your lecturer might direct you to a particular discussion in Brightspace. It's good for you to know the different possibilities. The following 4 methods are well-established but there are alternatives even beyond these:

1. Via the **Navbar**

You might be told to go straight to the Discussions area via the navbar (picture opposite) and to look for a particular Topic in the discussions list.

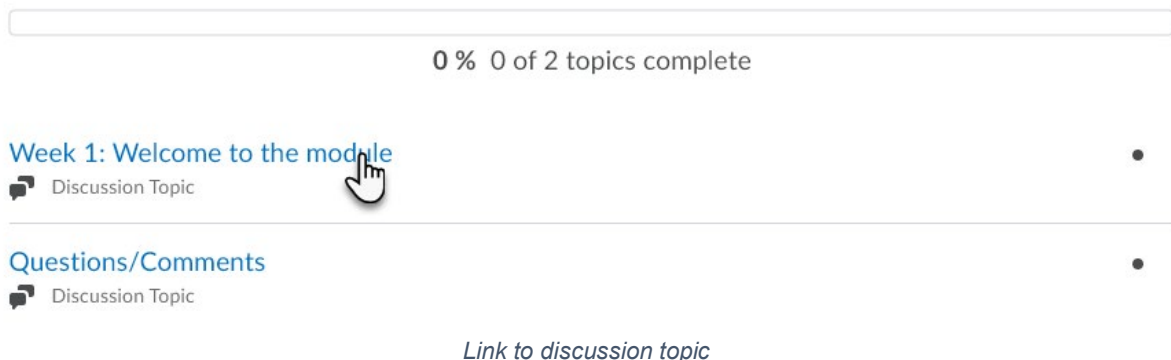
Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



2. Via the **Table of Contents**

Your lecturer might create an area (either a *module* or *sub-module*) in the Table of Contents of your unit/module for discussions.

When added in this way, when you navigate to the Discussions area you will see links to specific discussions (opposite).



3. Via a **Course Item**

As you saw in 2. above, lecturers can create items that consist of a link to a discussion and nothing else. They can also create items which include links to discussion activities (using something called a quicklink) but also potentially much more (example opposite).

To go to the Discussions area to take part in the discussion, you would click on the link.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

[Table of Contents](#) > [Learning resources](#) > [Week 1](#) > [Summary](#)

Summary ▾



Well done to all of you! We have covered a lot in our first week...

- Contrary to popular belief, Lorem Ipsum is not simply random text.
- It has roots in a piece of classical Latin literature from 45 BC, making it over 2000 years old. Richard McClintock, a Latin professor at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, looked up one of the more obscure Latin words, consectetur, from a Lorem Ipsum passage, and going through the cites of the word in classical literature, discovered the undoubtable source.



Activity:

Now that we've reached the end of Week 1 I would like to pose a question, that I would like you to debate openly in the Discussions area: [Week 1 reflection](#)



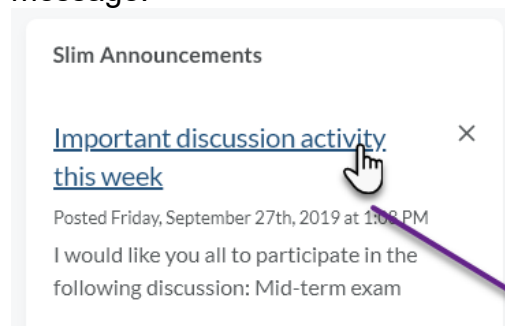
Discussion link in course item

4. Via Announcements

Finally, there are announcements (Communication and Collaboration > Announcements), links to discussions can also be added to those. Lecturers use the same quicklink function that is used in 3. above to do this.

Announcements are visible on your module home page at the top left of the screen (in the Slim Announcements widget).

Note: The Slim Announcements tool does not show links - to see links you need to click on the title of the announcement. This will take you to the full text of the message.



[Announcements](#) > [Important discussion activity this week](#)

Important discussion activity this week

Posted 27 September 2019 6:08 PM

I would like you all to participate in the following discussion: [Mid-term exam](#)

Discussion link in announcement

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Views

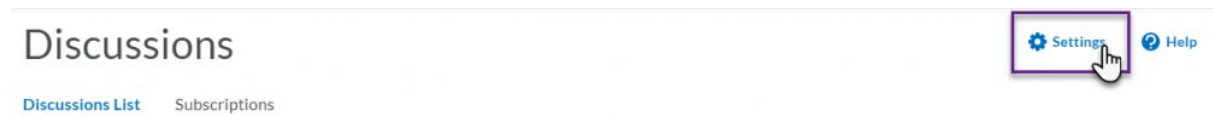
Brightspace offers various alternatives when it comes to visualising a discussion. There are two different *views* available to you: **Grid** and ***Reading** (*Reading view is the default). These views do not alter the look of the initial Discussions List screen but they do make a noticeable difference when it comes to viewing topics and threads.

Note: There are further viewing options *within* each of the main views.

Reading view

Navigate to the **Discussions List** (Communication and Collaboration > Discussions)

At the right of the screen, click on ***Settings** (*Settings is available at all levels throughout the Discussions tool, whether you are viewing the Discussions list, creating thread, or replying).



Discussion settings button

In Settings you can change a variety of things that will affect the look and feel of the Discussions tool. First of all, under **Default View**, make sure that **Reading View** is checked.

Default View

- Grid View
- Reading View

Reading view

In Reading view one of the most notable options is whether or not to display the **Discussions List pane**:

Personal Settings

Display Settings

- Always show the Discussions List pane
- Display deleted posts

Always display Discussions List pane option

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Reading view with Discussions List pane showing:

Content Communication and Collaboration Course Tools Library Resources Help

Discussions List View Topic Settings Help Search Week 1...

Weekly discussions

Week 1: Welcome to the module

Week 2

Week 3

Reflections

Webinar subjects

Final semester

Forum for 10th May

Test forum for 10th May 2

Week 1: Welcome to the module

This panel is the Topics List, showing you where you are in the Discussions List as a whole

Filter by: All Threads

Sort by: Most Recent Activity

I'm here - all the way from America!

Andrew Gibson posted 24 September 2019 8:18 PM

Hi, I'm

0 Unread 4 Replies 4 Views

Last post 1 hour ago by Andrew Gibson

List pane in view

Reading view with Discussions List pane hidden:

Content Communication and Collaboration Course Tools Library Resources Help

Discussions List View Topic Settings Help Search Week 1...

Week 1: Welcome to the module

Click here to open the Topic List (which can either be pinned or retract when you begin to type)

Filter by: All Threads

Sort by: Most Recent Activity

I'm here - all the way from America!

Andrew Gibson posted 24 September 2019 8:18 PM

Hi, I'm

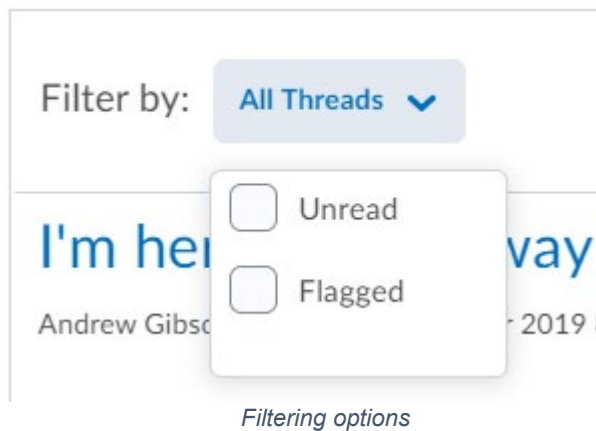
0 Unread 4 Replies 4 Views

Last post 1 hour ago by Andrew Gibson

List pane hidden

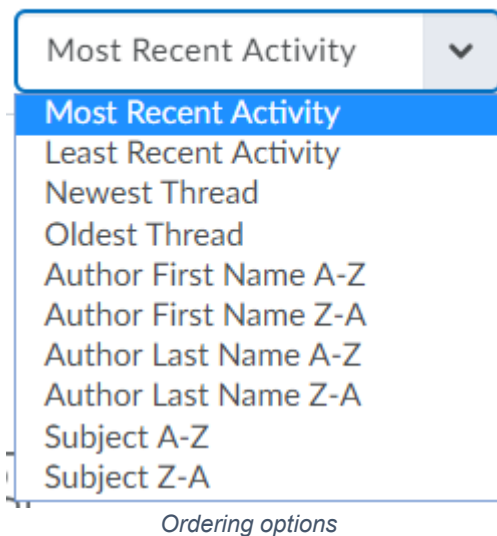
In addition, within Reading view within a topic you can filter threads (show all; unread only or flagged only):

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



You can also adjust the order in which threads are shown in a variety of ways (including most recent activity, least recent activity and author first name):

Sort by:



Tips and tricks: We suggest you test out a few of this alternatives when you have a fairly well-populated discussion. It is not a case of one view fits all.

Grid view

Navigate to the **Discussions List** (Communication and Collaboration > Discussions) At the right of the screen, click on ***Settings** (*Settings is available at all levels throughout the Discussions tool, whether you are viewing the Discussions list, creating a forum, topic, thread, or reply).

Discussions

[Discussions List](#) [Subscriptions](#)





Discussions settings button

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Under **Default View**, check the **Grid View** box.

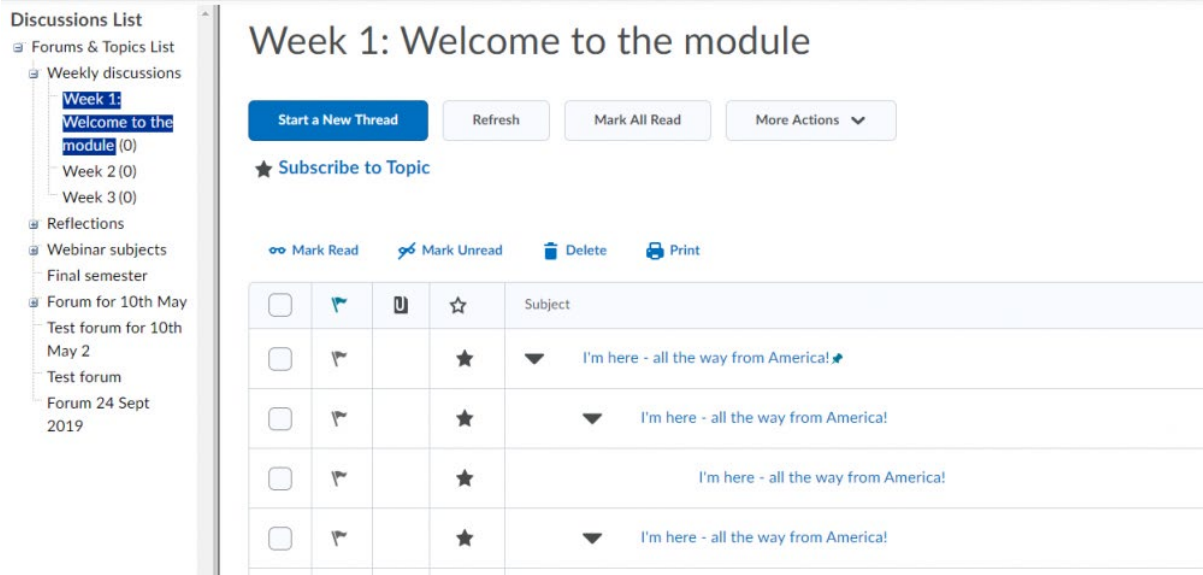
Default View

- Grid View 
 Reading View 

Grid view

In Settings you can change a variety of things that will affect the look and feel of the Discussions tool. As is the case in Reading View, showing or hiding the Discussions List pane has an effect on the layout:

Discussions List pane visible:



The screenshot shows the Brightspace Discussions interface. On the left, the 'Discussions List' pane is visible, showing a tree view of forums and topics. The main content area displays 'Week 1: Welcome to the module' with a 'Start a New Thread' button, 'Refresh', 'Mark All Read', and 'More Actions' buttons. Below these are 'Subscribe to Topic' and action buttons for 'Mark Read', 'Mark Unread', 'Delete', and 'Print'. A table of discussion topics is shown below, with columns for checkboxes, flags, lock status, star status, and subject text.

<input type="checkbox"/>				Subject
<input type="checkbox"/>				I'm here - all the way from America!
<input type="checkbox"/>				I'm here - all the way from America!
<input type="checkbox"/>				I'm here - all the way from America!
<input type="checkbox"/>				I'm here - all the way from America!
<input type="checkbox"/>				I'm here - all the way from America!

List pane visible

Discussions List pane hidden:

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Discussions List > View Topic Settings

Week 1: Welcome to the module

[Start a New Thread](#)
[Refresh](#)
[Mark All Read](#)
[More Actions](#)

★ [Subscribe to Topic](#) View: Threaded [Apply](#)

[Mark Read](#)
[Mark Unread](#)
[Delete](#)
[Print](#)

<input type="checkbox"/>				Subject	Authored By	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	▼ I'm here - all the way from America! ⚡	Andrew Gibson	24 September 2019 8:18 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	▼ I'm here - all the way from America!	Andrew Gibson	26 September 2019 7:42 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	I'm here - all the way from America!	Andrew Gibson	26 September 2019 7:43 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	▼ I'm here - all the way from America!	Andrew Gibson	26 September 2019 7:44 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	I'm here - all the way from America!	Andrew Gibson	26 September 2019 7:44 PM

List pane hidden

However, when in Grid view, the display option that has a great impact is **Show the preview pane**.

Preview pane showing:

Week 1: Welcome to the module

[Start a New Thread](#)
[Refresh](#)
[Mark All Read](#)
[More Actions](#)

★ [Subscribe to Topic](#)

[Mark Read](#)
[Mark Unread](#)
[Delete](#)
[Print](#)

<input type="checkbox"/>				Subject
<input type="checkbox"/>			★	▼ I'm here - all the way from America! ⚡

[Reply](#)
[Edit Post](#)
[More Actions](#)

★ [Subscribe](#)
 ☆ [Unsubscribe](#)
[Open in a New Window](#)

I'm here - all the way from America! ⚡
 Andrew Gibson 24 September 2019 8:18 PM

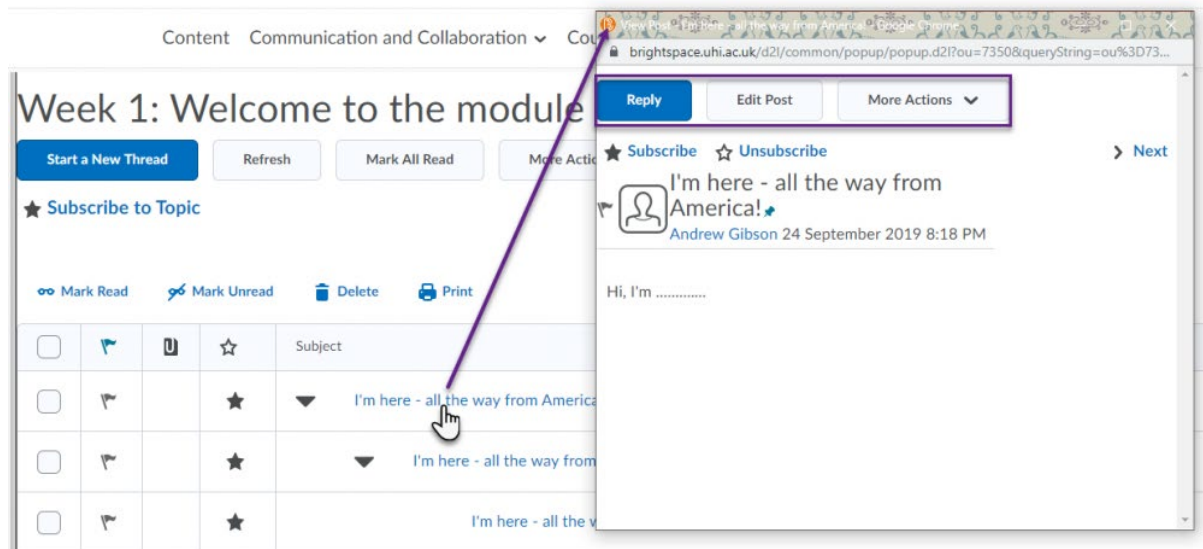
Hi, I'm

Preview pane visible

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

When the Show the preview pane is checked, the lower section of the screen acts as the viewer. In our opinion, this can, even on a large monitor, make it hard to see content (requiring scrolling). This is not our display preference.

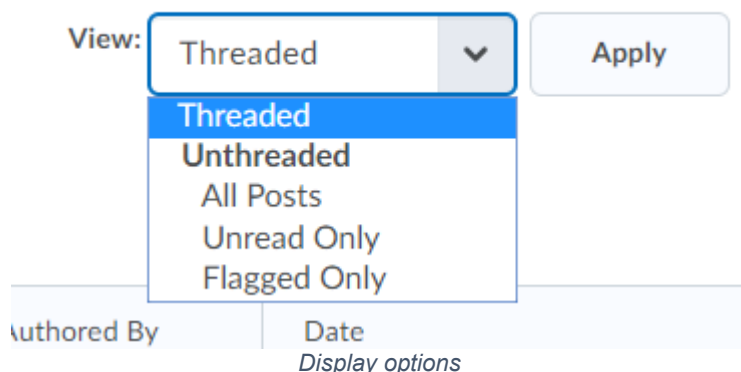
Preview pane hidden:



Preview pane hidden

When Preview pane is unchecked, any time you click to start a thread or reply to a thread a popup box appears for you to type in. This popup can be moved around the screen and changed in size. **This is our preferred display option.**

As is the case in Reading View, in Grid View, you can further alter the display by showing posts as **threaded** or **unthreaded**.

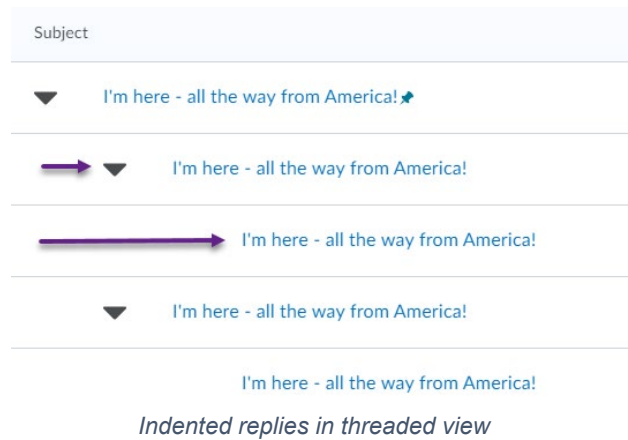


Display options

Tips and tricks: The major difference between the two views is that in threaded view, replies are *indented* from threads, and replies to replies one indent further.

We feel that makes specific activities easier to see in the tool - but as always, it is up to you which layout you prefer.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



Keeping on top of participation


Discussion list

There are a few features of the Discussions tool that are designed primarily to help you keep on top of participation. When you visit the Discussion list (Communication and Collaboration > Discussions), this screen gives you a useful summary of the activity in all your forums and topics.

Opposite each topic you can see how many threads there are, how many posts (including how many you haven't read) and the author, date and time of the last post (below).

Weekly discussions ▾

This forum will feature weekly discussion topics.

Topic	Threads	Posts	Last Post
Week 1: Welcome to the module ▾	3	7	 Andrew Gibson yesterday at 7:44 PM
Week 2 ▾	0	0	
Week 3 ▾	0	0	

Discussions summary screen

This is helpful but if you want to be even more aware, there are three functions in particular that we want to draw your attention to: Subscriptions, Notifications and Statistics.

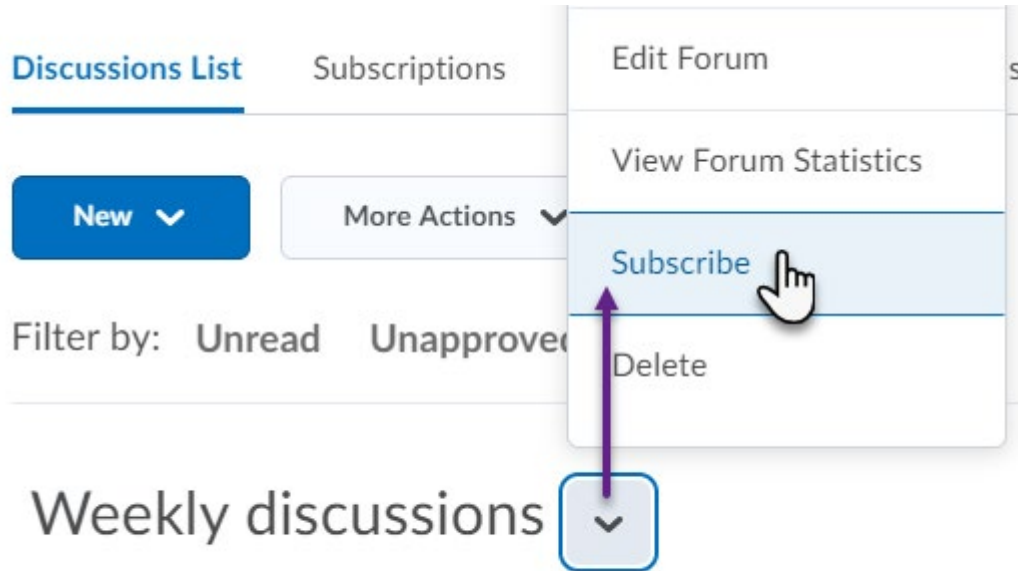
Subscriptions (and Notifications)

Subscribing to a forum or topic means that you are signing up to be notified of any changes made in those forums or topics.

To subscribe to a forum, navigate to the Discussion list (Communication and Collaboration > Discussions) where you will see all the forums and topics you have

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

access to. To the right of each forum there is a drop-down menu. From the menu select **Subscribe**.

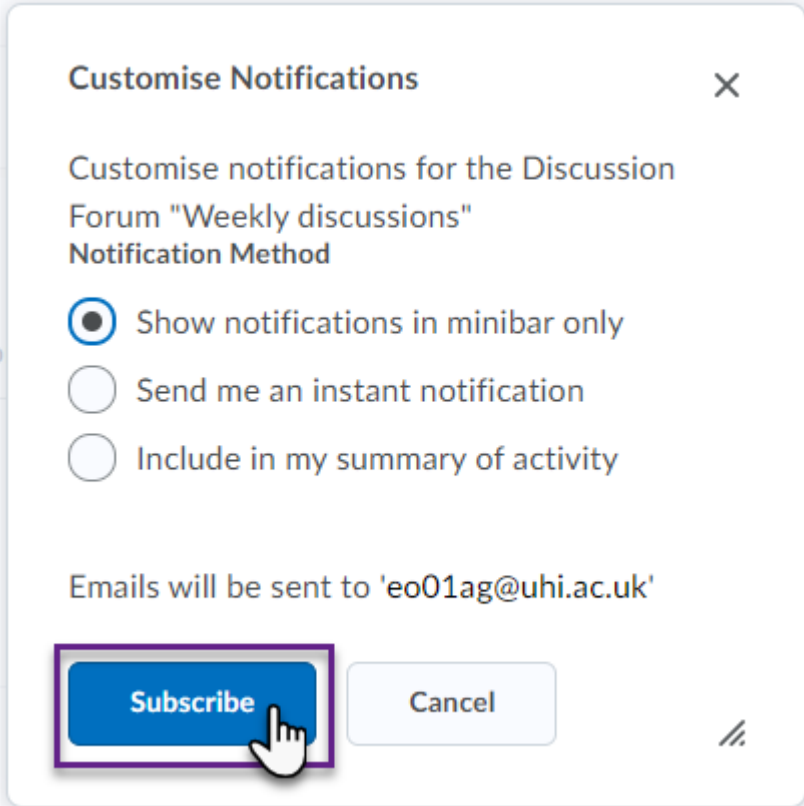


This forum will feature weekly discussion topics.

Subscribing to a forum

When you click Subscribe you will be asked how (and how often) you would like to be notified of changes. Select as appropriate.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



Notification options

To subscribe to a topic, the process is the same (opposite).

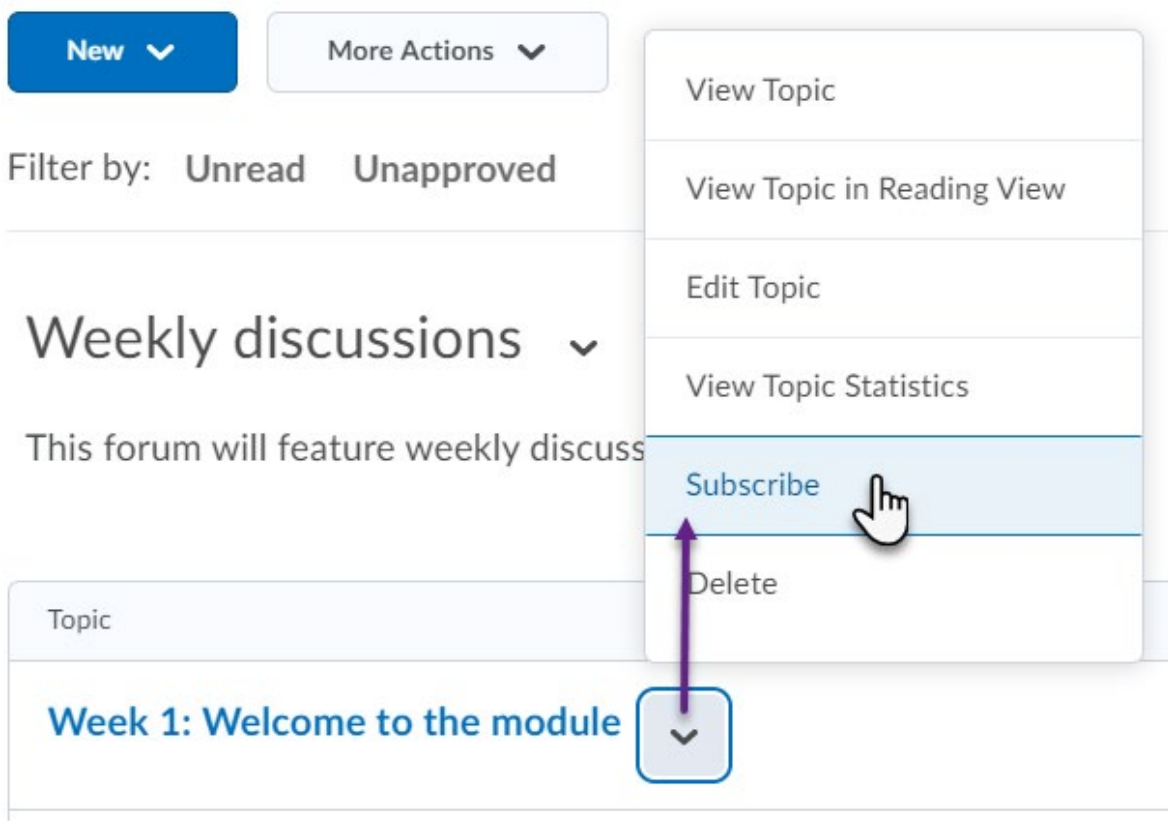
Note: if you subscribe to a forum, you are automatically subscribed to each topic in that forum. If you are only interested in being notified about particular topics, subscribe at the topic level (opposite).

Subscribing to a thread is slightly different - to do that look out for the Subscribe star at the top of the thread viewer (below).

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions



Subscribing to a forum



Subscribing to a topic

To view all of your subscriptions in one place, click on the **Subscriptions tab**.

You are able to control which subscriptions are displayed: All, Forum only, Topic only or Thread only.

Essential Student Skills: Brightspace Discussions

Discussions

Discussions List

Subscriptions

Display

All Subscriptions

Apply

All Subscriptions

Forum Subscriptions Only

Topic Subscriptions Only

Thread Subscriptions Only

Show notifications in minibar only

Send me an instant notification

Include in my summary of activity

Subscriptions tab, with filtering options

Lower down the Subscriptions tab page you are shown your default notification method, then if you scroll down you will see a summary of the activity in the forums/topics you have subscribed to (opposite). To go one layer deeper, click on the topic title.

Forum Level Subscriptions

Get updates when there are new posts to the topics in the listed forums.

Weekly discussions
3 topics, 7 posts

★ Subscribed

Notification Frequency:

Show notifications in minibar only

Send me an instant notification

Include in my summary of activity

Clicking on subscribed topic title