Discussion and Private Messages Overview ................................................................. 3
Objectives .................................................................................................................. 3
Additional Recommended Resources ......................................................................... 3
Categories, Forums, and Topics Defined ...................................................................... 3
Configuring your Preferences with My Profile ............................................................ 4
Posting and Managing Topics .................................................................................... 5
Create a New Topic .................................................................................................... 5
Reply to a Topic .......................................................................................................... 5
Read a Topic ................................................................................................................ 5
Edit a Topic ................................................................................................................. 6
Lock a Topic ................................................................................................................. 6
Delete a Topic ............................................................................................................. 6
Set up a Graded Topic ............................................................................................... 6
Grade Student Responses By Topic .......................................................................... 7
Locating Topics ........................................................................................................... 8
Searching Topics ....................................................................................................... 8
Viewing Recent Topics ............................................................................................... 8
Managing Forums ....................................................................................................... 9
Create a New Forum ................................................................................................. 9
Edit a Forum ............................................................................................................... 9
Delete a Forum .......................................................................................................... 9
Set up a Graded Forum ............................................................................................. 10
Grade Student Responses By Forum ....................................................................... 10
Glossary ...................................................................................................................... 11
Icons ............................................................................................................................ 12
Support and Workshops ......................................................................................... 13
Attend a Tutorial Demo ............................................................................................ 13
Get Help ...................................................................................................................... 13
**DISCUSSION AND PRIVATE MESSAGES OVERVIEW**

The *Discussion and Private Messages* tool allows you to conduct asynchronous online discussions among site participants and communicate privately with individual site participants through the private messaging component. *Discussion and Private Messages* is useful for both academic and collaborative work, such as:

- Creating online discussion topics for students,
- Sharing and commenting on documents and topic posts,
- Conducting online asynchronous discussions among remote participants,
- Providing user community support forums, and more.

**OBJECTIVES**

This guide will familiarize you with the steps to:

- Configure your notification and other preferences with My Profile
- Create and manage Categories and Forums
- Post, read, reply to, and manage Topics
- Search for topics by keyword and jump to Recent Topics
- Grade posts at the Topic or Forum level

**ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

- Using the UVaCollab Editor
- Discussion Tools Comparison Guide

**CATEGORIES, FORUMS, AND TOPICS DEFINED**

There are three primary parts that are used to organize and conduct online conversations in *Discussion and Private Messages*:

- **Categories** are the top-level organizing construct in *Discussion and Private Messages*. In most cases, you will only need the default Main category.
- **Forums** are second-level organizing constructs that are assigned to a category. Forums help to organize discussion topics into meaningful groupings.
- **Topics** are the actual threaded discussions that comprise an initial post to get the conversation going. Participants then reply to the topic to further the conversation. Topics are posted within a forum.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Safari are the only recommended browsers for the best experience in UVaCollab.

To avoid unexpected results, do not use the browser navigation (Back and Forward buttons) while logged into UVaCollab. Instead, use the built-in navigation features.

Browser cookies and JavaScript must be enabled in your web browser in order to log into and use features in UVaCollab.

**WHICH DISCUSSION TOOL?**

*Discussion and Private Messages* is one of two discussion tools available for use in your UVaCollab sites. The other discussion tool is the Forums tool. For a comparison of the two tools, refer to the Discussion Tools Comparison Guide.
By default, Discussion and Private Messages has one category named Main and two forums: Worksite Discussions and Questions.

Click on a forum title to begin adding new topics or to read and reply to existing topics. Steps to perform these activities are described in more detail in the Topics section of this guide.

See the section on Managing Forums for steps to add, modify, and configure forums.

You and your site participants will also want to Configure Your Preferences for Discussion & Private Messages. Once configured, these preferences will apply to all of your sites in UVaCollab that use this tool.

**CONFIGURING YOUR PREFERENCES WITH MY PROFILE**

Setting profile preferences is optional. You may set up your profile, notification preferences, and upload an avatar in Discussion and Private Messages, as follows:

1. Click My Profile in the menu at the top of the screen. Note that your account information is already populated and cannot be edited.
2. In the section for General Information about yourself, provide additional information as desired.
3. Set Preferences as desired. In particular, you may want to enable the option to Send e-mail notification when new topics are posted in order to receive email notices of new posts.
4. To add an avatar that is displayed next to your posts, upload a photo from your desktop. Image dimensions should not exceed 130 x 130 pixels.
5. When you are finished configuring your profile and preferences, click Submit at the bottom of the screen. Once configured, these preferences will apply to all of your sites in UVaCollab that use Discussion and Private Messages.
POSTING AND MANAGING TOPICS

Topics are the threaded discussions that comprise an initial post to get the conversation going. Participants then reply to the topic to further the conversation. Topics and replies are posted within a given forum.

CREATE A NEW TOPIC

All site participants can initiate conversations (unless you have made a forum Read Only or Reply Only). They can post new topics as well as reply to existing topics.

1. On the Discussion and Private Messages home page, click a Forum title (e.g., Worksite Discussions) to add a new topic to that forum.
2. Click the New Topic button.
3. In the Title field of the editor window, enter a title or subject for your new topic.
4. Enter text in the body of the topic editor.
5. To include an attachment, scroll to the bottom of the screen to add up to 3 attachments.
6. Click Submit at the bottom of the editor to post your topic.

REPLY TO A TOPIC

1. Click on a topic title to read and reply to it.
2. Click the Post Reply button.
3. In the editor, type your reply.
4. Click the Submit button.

Tip: To reply to a thread within a topic, click the quote button in the right upper margin of the thread to include that post and reply to it.

READ A TOPIC

1. Click on the topic title to read the topic and all replies in a single view.
2. Once read, click the Mark Topic as Read link found at the top and bottom of the view. This will change the background color of the topic as well as the icon in the topics list as a visual cue to indicate you have already read all posts in that topic.

PRINTABLE VIEW OF TOPIC

For a printable view of a topic and all replies, right-click on the topic title and select the option to Open in New Window or Open in New Tab. In the new window or tab, use the browser’s print command (File > Print) to print the page.
EDIT A TOPIC

Only the creator of a topic or an instructor/owner in the site can edit a topic.

1. Navigate to the topic to be modified.
2. Click on the Edit button in the upper-right of the topic display.
3. Make the necessary changes.
4. Click the Post button to complete the modification.

LOCK A TOPIC

Only the instructor/owner of the site can lock a topic. Locking a topic will make the thread read-only.

1. Click on the forum that contains the topic you want to delete.
2. Click in the check box beside the topic you are locking.
3. Click the Lock button.
4. You will see a confirmation message appear.

DELETE A TOPIC

Only the instructor/owner of the site can delete topics and messages.

1. Click on the forum that contains the topic you want to delete.
2. Click in the check box beside the topic you are deleting.
3. Click the Delete icon.
4. Click the OK button to confirm the deletion.

SET UP A GRADED TOPIC

There are two parts that need to be completed to grade at the topic level. In Part I, you need to designate that the forum will be graded at the topic level, as opposed to the forum level. In Part II, you will need to select which topics should be graded. The following directions will walk you through both parts of this process.

**Part I:** In the forum, you will need to enable grading and then select that grading will be done by topic.

1. Click Manage at the top of the page.
2. Click on the name of the forum that this topic is located in.
4. Select the By Topic option.
5. Press Save.

**Part II:** Once grading is enabled by topic, select which topics will be graded and enter the desired grading settings.

6. Navigate back to your topic by pressing Discussion Home at the top. Then click on the name of the forum, followed by the name of the topic that you wish to enable grading.
7. Click **Edit** in the upper-right of the topic display.
8. Under **Grade Topic**, select **Yes**.
9. In the textbox, designate a **Topic Point Value** for posted responses.
10. Optionally, you can check the **Number of replies required** box and enter a number of replies needed for credit.
11. If you wish for this grade to appear in the **Gradebook** (if the Gradebook tool is added this site), select the option to **Send to Gradebook**.
12. Press **Post** when done.

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**GRADE STUDENT RESPONSES BY TOPIC**

Once you have set up a graded topic, you can read student responses, give each student a grade, and enter optional comments for their review.

1. Next to the forum containing the topic(s) you wish to grade, click **Grade Topics**.
2. Next to the **Topic Title**, in the **Scores** column, click **Grade Topic**. On the bottom half of this page, you will see a list of your students.
3. To read the student’s post(s) within this topic, click on the student’s name. When you are done reading this student’s posts, click **Grading Home** to return back to the grading page.
4. In the **Grade Topic** box next to each student’s name, enter their grade into the provided textbox.
5. Next to each student’s name you will also see:
   - **Last Post**: This is the timestamp of their most recent post within this topic.
   - **Posts**: This is the number of posts that this student has authored within this topic.
   - **Released**: This checkbox indicates if the grade has been shared back with the student.
   - **Grader Comments**: Click on this link to display a textbox to enter a comment to share with the student about their post(s).
6. If you wish for the topic grades to appear in the **Gradebook** tool, check **Send to Gradebook**.
7. Lastly, when done making changes to student(s) grades, click the **Save** button.
8. Repeat the steps above for each student.
LOCATING TOPICS

SEARCHING TOPICS

The discussion tool allows you to search for topics by keywords found in the topic title or message body.

1. Click **Search** at the top of the screen.
2. Under the **Search Terms** section, enter your **search terms**. Note that accurate word(s) must be provided. Partial words will not return information.
3. Select the option to...
   - **Search all items** if the string must be matched, or
   - **Search any term or as is written** if any of the terms included should be matched and the condition does not require that all are found.
4. Under the **Search Options** section, you may optionally specify where to limit your search.
5. Click the **Search** button at the bottom of the screen to run the query and view your search results.

VIEWING RECENT TOPICS

Click **Recent Topics** to view a list of the most recent messages that have come into the **Discussions and Private Messages** tool in your site.

To read the last message posted to a topic, click the **Last message icon** that follows the name of the poster.
MANAGING FORUMS

Forums help to organize discussion topics into meaningful groupings. Site Owners/Instructors have access to a Discussion and Private Messages Manager to add, edit, hide, or delete forums and categories. This section focuses on managing forums. These steps can similarly be applied to category management.

CREATE A NEW FORUM

1. In Discussion and Private Messages, click ➡️ Manage at the top of the page.
2. Click the ✉️ Add button to create a new forum.
3. On the Forum Management page, enter a Forum Name.
4. Next, select which Category this forum should belong in. If you have not created any new categories, select the default category, Main.
5. In the Description textbox, optionally enter information or a description about this forum.
6. Optionally, enter Open, Due, and Allow Until Dates.
   a. If a Due Date is entered and the Allow Until is left blank, the forum will automatically lock (become read-only) on the Due Date.
   b. If a Due Date and an Allow Until Date are entered, students can still post in the window between the Due and Allow Until Dates. These posts will be marked LATE. When the Allow Until date passes, the forum will automatically lock (become read only).
   c. If the dates are left blank, the forum will remain available for users to make new posts.
   d. If you wish to hide the contents of this forum before it becomes available, check the Hide Until Open box.
7. Select the Forum Type. You can choose this forum to be normal (allow post/reply), reply only, or read only. The default setting is normal.
8. Under the Allow Access settings, select if this forum will be available to All Site Participants, Deny Access (will hide the forum), or Allow Access to Selected Groups.
9. For grading information, please refer to the grading by Forum or by Topic sections of this guide.
10. Click the Save button at the bottom of the screen.

EDIT A FORUM

Instructors/Owners can change the forum settings, including adjusting availability dates, renaming the forum, changing access, and making the forum read-only or reply-only at any time.

1. In Discussion and Private Messages, click ♂️ Manage.
2. Click on the name of the forum you wish to edit.
3. Make changes as necessary.
4. Click Save when done.

DELETE A FORUM

1. In the Discussion and Private Messages menu, click ⬅️ Manage.
2. Check the box next to the forum you would like to delete, and then click the Delete button.
SET UP A GRADED FORUM

You can grade students at the forum level or at the topic level. For information on the latter, please refer to the set up grading by Topic section of this guide. For directions on how to set up by forum, please follow the steps below.

1. Click 🔄 Manage at the top.
2. Click on the name of the forum that you wish to enable grading
4. Select the By Forum option.
5. In the Point Value textbox, designate the maximum score possible for posted responses.
6. Optionally, you can check the Number of replies required box and enter a number of replies needed for full credit.
7. If you wish for this grade to appear in the Gradebook tool (if the Gradebook is added to the site), select the option to Send to Gradebook.
8. Press Save when done.

GRADE STUDENT RESPONSES BY FORUM

1. In Discussion and Private Messages, next to the forum you wish to grade, click Grade Forum.
2. To read the student’s post(s) within this forum click on the student’s name. When you are done reading this student’s posts, click Grading Home to return back to the grading page.
3. In the Grade Forum box next to each student’s name, enter their grade into the provided textbox.
4. Next to each student’s name you will also see:
   - Last Post: This is the timestamp of their most recent post within this forum.
   - Posts: This is the number of posts that this student has authored within this forum.
   - Released: This checkbox indicates if the grade has been shared back with the student.
   - Grader Comments: Click on this link to display a textbox to enter a comment to share with the student about their post(s).
5. If you wish for the forum grades to appear in the Gradebook tool, check Send to Gradebook.
6. Lastly, when done making changes to student(s) grades, click the Save button.
7. Repeat the steps above for each student.
GLOSSARY

- **Discussion Home**: Links back to main Discussion page.
- **Search**: Links to search function in Discussion and Private Messages.
- **Recent Topics**: Provides a listing of the most recent postings whether it be a brand new topic or reply to a topic.
- **Member Listing**: Provides a list of site’s members.
- **Manage**: Instructor/Owner option, links back to Discussion and Private Messages management interface.
- **My Profile**: Links to your Discussion and Private Messages profile.
- **My Bookmark**: Links to a list of topics you have previously bookmarked.
- **Private Messages**: Links to the Inbox and Sent Box for any Private Messages you have received or sent.
- **Mark All As Read**: Marks all topics as being read.
ICONS

- **New Posts**  
  Indicates that new messages have been posted.

- **No New Posts**  
  Indicates that no new messages have been posted.

- **Read Only**  
  Indicates postings are read only.

- **Reply Only**  
  Indicates postings are reply only.

- **Group Forum**  
  Indicates that these postings are only for selected groups.

- **Deny Access**  
  Indicates access to postings have been denied.

- **Not Open Yet**  
  Indicates that this topic will not open before the available date.

- **Locked**  
  Indicates that the forum or topic is now read only.

- **Invisible**  
  Indicates that this forum or topic is not visible to students/members.

- **Last Reply**  
  Click to view the last or most recent reply in this forum or topic.
SUPPORT AND WORKSHOPS

ATTEND A TUTORIAL DEMO

If you are new to UVaCollab, we recommend that you attend a demo to become acquainted with features and learn tips and tricks for putting them to best use for your group or course. View the DEMO SCHEDULE available from the Gateway (login) page menubar.

GET HELP

If you have questions or encounter problems using features in UVaCollab, please contact collab-support@virginia.edu for assistance.