

USING DISCUSSION BOARDS

This guide explains how to access and use discussion boards as part of your studies. It includes replying to posts, creating discussion threads and good practice.

Introduction

Discussion boards provide a learning space for you to engage with and share ideas with your course mates and your course team. They provide the opportunity to discuss any aspects of the module, ask questions, develop your thinking, support each other and build your course community.

Why use discussion boards

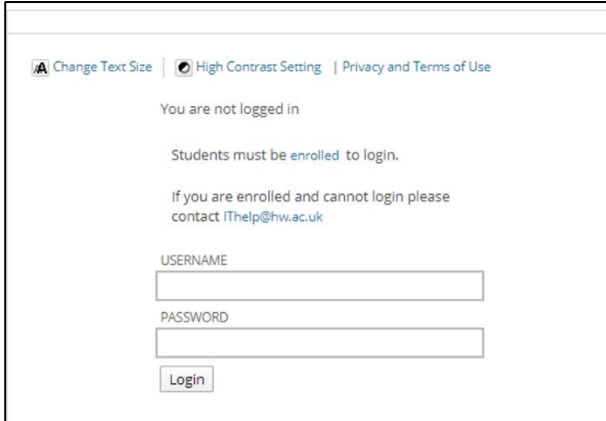
Using the discussion board can help you keep motivated, improve your critical thinking and writing skills. Participating in discussion develops a deeper understanding of your subject. Discussion boards offer a way for students to connect, share their experience and expertise, compare skills, learn and develop in different contexts.

There are lots of benefits to discussion boards including:

- You have more time to consider your response rather than being put on the spot to answer.
- You can keep in regular contact with your classmates and lecturer.
- You can post at a time to suit you which means that people can contribute across different time zones. Though this does mean you sometimes have to wait for a response.
- You can build upon each other's ideas, discussions and discussion examples.
- You can get support when you need it, check your understanding and give support to others.
- Participation in a discussion is active learning, which is much more powerful than simply reading. You learn more by thinking more deeply and discussing with others.

How to access a discussion board

Step 1: Login to your course site on the VLE (Vision).

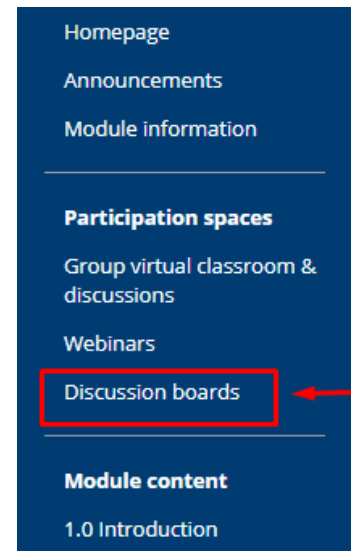


The screenshot shows a login page with the following elements:

- Links: [Change Text Size](#), [High Contrast Setting](#), [Privacy and Terms of Use](#)
- Status: You are not logged in
- Requirement: Students must be [enrolled](#) to login.
- Support: If you are enrolled and cannot login please contact IThelp@hw.ac.uk
- Fields: USERNAME (text input), PASSWORD (password input)
- Button: Login

Step 2: Once you've opened the course website, click on '**Participation spaces**' and then '**Discussion Boards**'.

Alternatively, if your menu shows the '**Discussion Boards**' link in the left-hand menu on the course website, you can click on this link.



Step 3: The main discussion board page appears with a list of available discussion forums. You will have one discussion board per course, which may contain multiple forums and threads.

Accessing individual threads or discussions

Forums are made up of individual **discussion threads** that can be organised around a particular subject. Select a '**forum title**' to view individual discussion threads. Forum titles in bold contain unread messages.

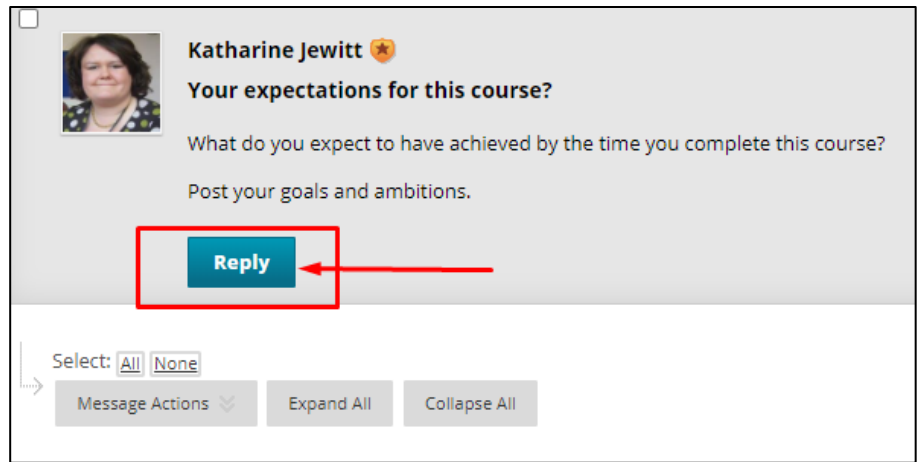
Discussion threads can be organised around a particular subject. A **thread** is a conversation within a forum that includes the initial **post** and all replies to it. When you access a forum, a list of threads appears.

FORUM	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL POSTS	UNREAD POSTS	UNREAD REPLIES TO ME	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Your Questions Answered!	Please use this forum to post any questions you may have about the course. Please feel encouraged to answer each other's questions. I will check this forum once a week.	3	0	0	3

Displaying 1 to 1 of 1 items | [Show All](#) [Edit Paging...](#)

Replying to a thread or post

To reply to a post, click the post to which you want to reply. It will open in the lower part of the page. Click **'Reply'** to open the **'Reply to Post'** option.



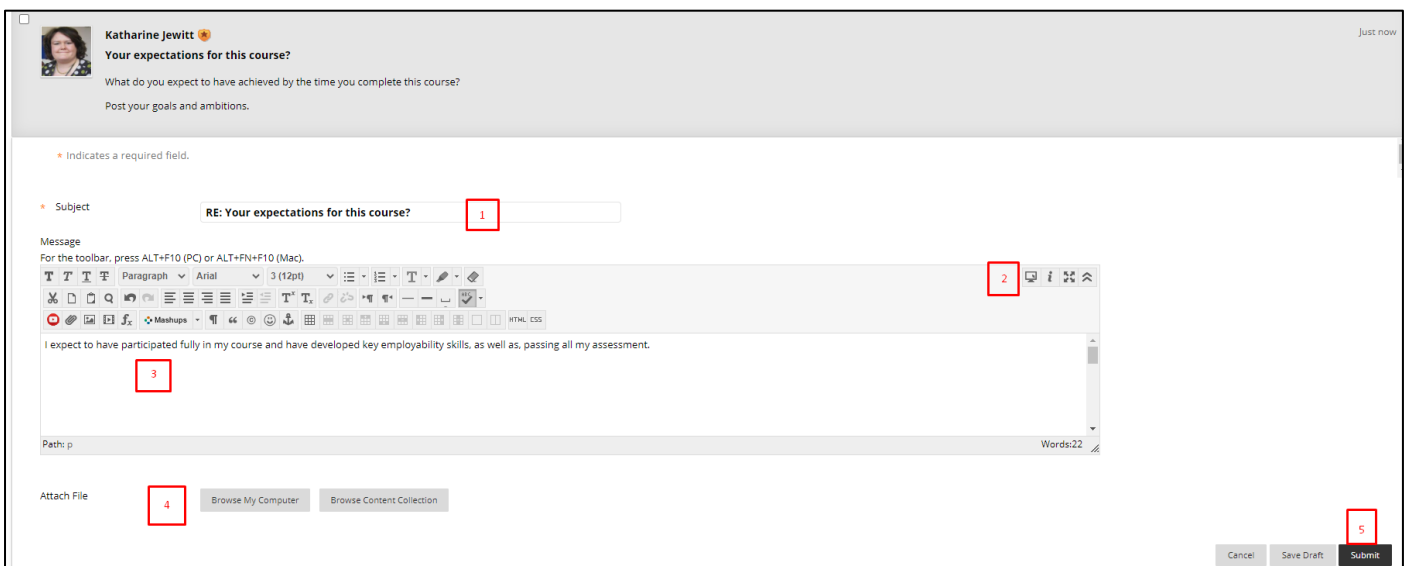
Step 1: Enter a new **subject** or leave unchanged.

Step 2: Click the **'Show More'** (⌵) button if you cannot see all of the tools in the **Toolbar Area**.

Step 3: Then enter your reply in the **message** area.

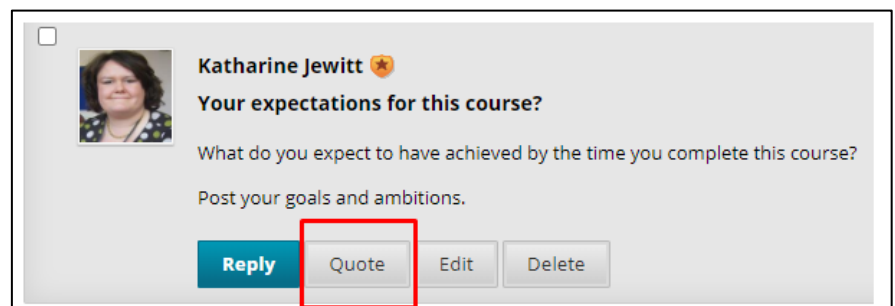
Step 4: Include **attachments** if required.

Step 5: Click **'Submit'**.



Include a Quote in a Reply

When replying, click **'Quote'** to include a quote in your reply. The text of the item to which you are responding will automatically appear in your reply. The quote will be indicated with a line to the left.



Step 1: Enter a new **subject** (if you're changing topic) or leave unchanged (if you're on the same topic).

Step 2: Click the **Show More** (⌵) button if you cannot see all of the tools in the **Toolbar Area**.

Step 3: The quoted text appears in the message area with a line to the left.

Step 4: Enter your reply in the **message** area beneath the quoted text. If you decide you would not like to include the quoted text, you can simply delete the text from the message area.

Step 5: Include **attachments** if allowed and desired.

Step 6: Click **'submit'**.

The screenshot shows a forum reply form for a post by Katharine Jewitt titled "Your expectations for this course?". The form includes a subject field (1) containing "RE: Your expectations for this course?", a rich text editor (2) with a toolbar, a message area (3) containing the quoted text, an attach file section (4) with "Browse My Computer" and "Browse Content Collection" buttons, and a bottom right area (5) with "Cancel", "Save Draft", and "Submit" buttons.

Create a new thread

A thread is a conversation within a forum that includes the initial post and all replies to it.

To create a Thread, go to a forum and click **'Create Thread'** to open the Create Thread box.

The screenshot shows a forum titled "Forum: Course questions" with a sub-header "Forums are made up of individual discussion threads that can be created and threads appear. More Help". Below the header are two buttons: "Create Thread" (highlighted with a red box and an arrow) and "Subscribe".

Once in the **'Create Thread'** box:

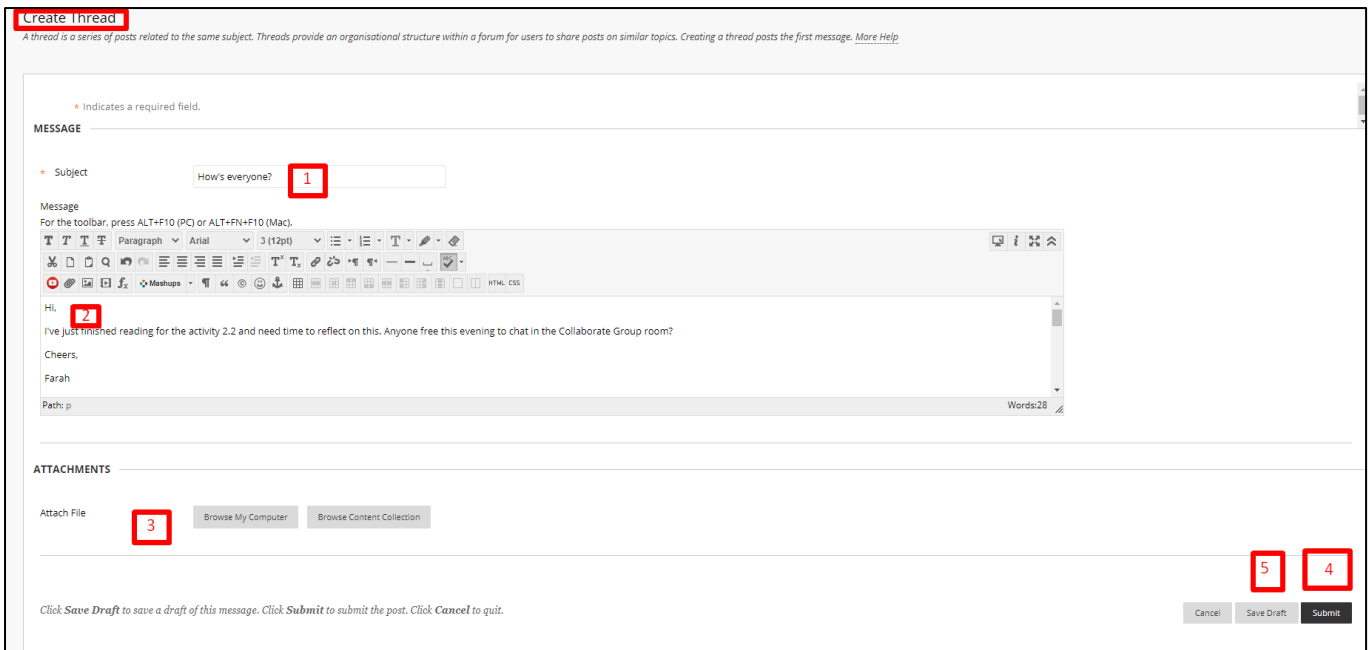
Step 1: Type your **subject**. The text entered here will appear as a link in the forum.

Step 2: Type your **message**.

Step 3: **Attach a file** if desired and if the attachment setting has been turned on.

Step 4: Click **'submit'**.

Step 5: If you are not ready to post your Thread, click **'Save Draft'**. A copy of your Thread will be saved. To go back and edit it, select Drafts Only from the action menu of the Display button. Click the **message subject**, and then click **'Edit'**.

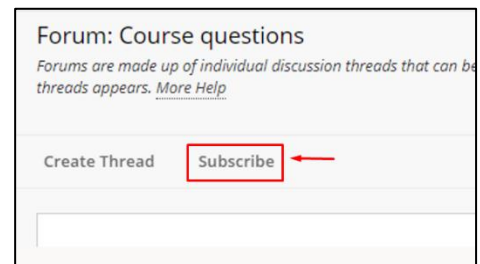


Subscribing and Unsubscribing

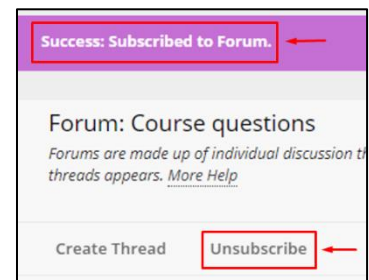
You can receive alerts by email when new posts are made. Your course team chooses whether you can do this at the forum or thread level.

Subscribe / Unsubscribe to the forum

Step 1: When the forum email subscription feature is enabled, select **'Subscribe'**, which is found at the top of the forum, to the right of the **'Create Thread'** box. You'll receive emails when new posts are made to the forum.

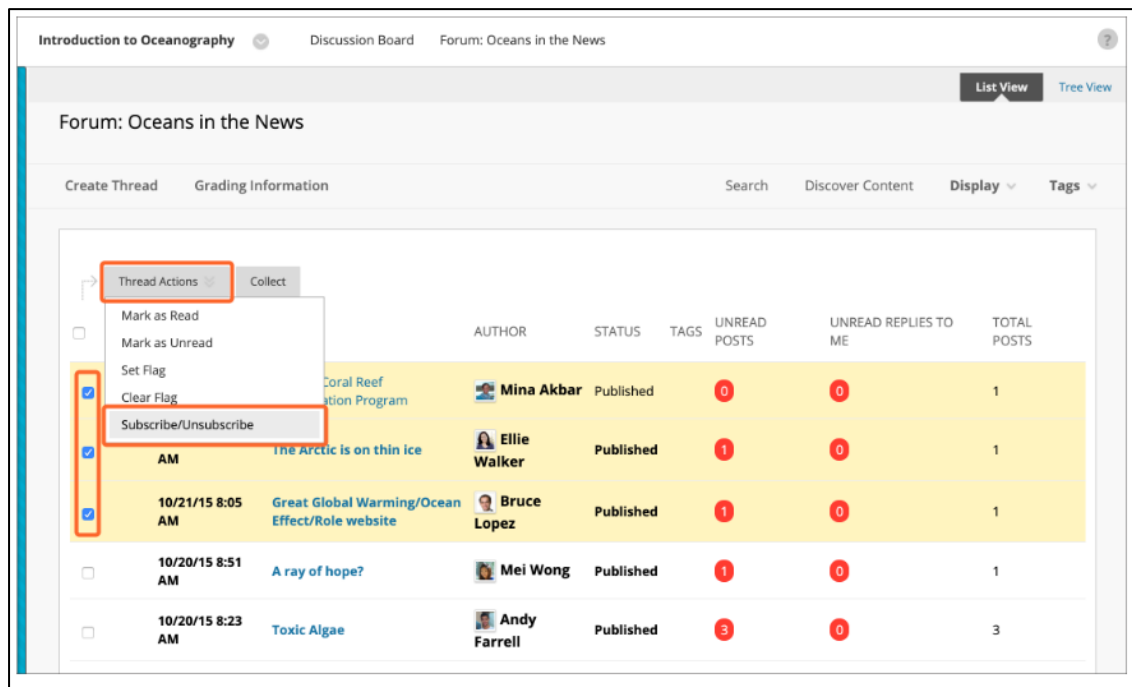


Step 2: Confirmation that you have subscribed will appear at the top of the forum page. You can unsubscribe at any time by clicking **'Unsubscribe'** found at the top of the forum board, next to **'Create Thread'**.



Subscribe / Unsubscribe to discussion threads

Step 1: When the thread email subscription feature is enabled, you can choose to subscribe to selected discussion threads, rather than the whole forum. Select one or more thread check boxes and click 'Subscribe' in the Thread Actions menu. You'll receive emails when members make new posts to the selected threads.



Step 2: You can unsubscribe at any time by selecting the thread check box, by the thread and clicking 'Unsubscribe' from the 'Thread Actions' drop down menu, which is found at the top of the list of threads.

Behaviour in discussion boards

The University has a responsibility to maintain an educational environment where all students can participate safely. Just as in a campus university there are certain modes of behavior which are not acceptable. In order to maintain this educational environment, forums are moderated to maintain an appropriate atmosphere and environment in the forum. An atmosphere of open discussion will be maintained, but if necessary, messages will be removed. Your responsibility is to try to communicate in a reasonable manner and to help in maintaining a friendly, supportive environment.

Top Tips

- Get involved and make a commitment to regularly access, read and contribute to the discussions.
- Help people get to know you. Where relevant, and you feel comfortable to do so, you might choose to share things that connect you with others in the group. This helps to build community across the course.
- Take some responsibility to keep the discussions active. The more you put in, the more you will benefit.
- Have a go, don't be afraid to make mistakes and enjoy chatting.

Troubleshooting

Why can't I see my discussion post?

Check if you accidentally saved your contribution as a draft. Return to the forum page, access the 'Display menu', and select 'Drafts Only'.

Select 'Search' at the top of the main discussion board, forum, or thread page and search for a term you used in your message. Click on the draft message to begin editing or click send.

Why can't I see other students' discussion posts?

Your instructor may require you to respond to a discussion before you can read other responses and replies. When you 'post first', you aren't influenced by your classmates' responses. When you open this type of discussion, a message appears: **'Post a response to see discussion activity. You can't view discussion activity yet. Responses and replies appear when you post a response'**.

Can I prevent the loss of text?

If you are composing a message and it takes more than 30 minutes to complete, the page may reset. When the page resets, it will not save your thread and you will lose the body of your message. Firstly, think about whether you need to write a very long message (bear in mind that this is a conversation not an essay). If you do need to write a lot or if you need time to think whilst you write, try writing your message in Word, Notepad or TextEdit and then paste the text into the 'Create Thread' area. This will also work as a means to protect against loss of work if you lose your internet connection or there is a software error

If you have ongoing issues accessing or using a discussion board you may wish to speak to your course team, who may suggest that you contact the IT helpdesk.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Blackboard Learn (2020) **Forums Guidance** [Online] Available at

<https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Interact/Discussions/Forums>



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