# Discussions

# What is the Discussions tool?

The **Discussions** tool allows instructors or site leaders to create an unlimited number of class discussions, and is integrated closely with other tools such as Resources and Gradebook.

A **Discussion** is a mandatory category or grouping for topics. **Topics**, which are created within discussions, are where participants can post conversations. A **Conversation** is the thread of messages in which participants post their contributions. A conversation can be created by instructors or students inside of a topic.

Some the features in the **Discussions** tool include the following:

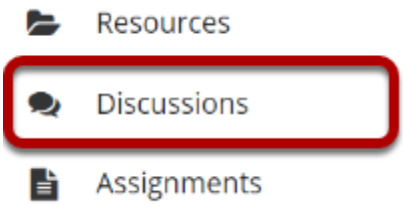
- **Grading**: Interactions can be assigned a point value and sent to the Gradebook with comments.
- **Availability dates**: Discussions and topics can be released according to specified dates.
- **Moderation**: Instructors can choose to moderate messages posted to topics.
- **Counts of unread posts at a glance**: On your site's Home or Overview page, you can see how many unread messages or posts you have in both Messages and Discussions. From Home, you can see these totals for all sites in which you are enrolled.
- **Email notifications**: Site members can elect to receive no email notification, notification for all new postings in a site, or notification for responses to conversations they've posted in. The default is to receive notifications about new postings in conversations to which you have contributed.
- **Statistics**: Discussions statistics are available for site owners to determine the participation level of individual participants. You can also read all of a particular participant's posts using this feature.
- **Post before reading option**: The site owner (or another participant with the appropriate role) can enable participants to submit their posts to a topic before they have permission to read the responses of others.
- **Group awareness**: Site leaders can change discussions and topic settings in combination with predefined groups to allow or deny access to specific discussions per group.
- **Direct link to individual messages**: Site leaders can copy a direct link to individual messages to use elsewhere.
- **Composing messages**: A Rich Text Editor allows rich text, plain text, and HTML editing. You can add attachments to any message by linking to files or web links in Resources.
- **Quoted text**: Use the Insert Original Text option to insert the previous post into your response.

## Footer

- **Email the author of a message**: Site leaders can directly email the author of a posting from within the Discussions tool.

*Note: A discussion with the name of the site and a topic titled "General Discussion" are created by default.*

## To access this tool, select Discussions from the Tool Menu in your site.




## Footer

# How do I create a new discussion?

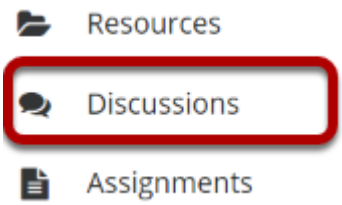
The **Discussions** tool is organized by **Discussions**, **Topics**, and **Conversations**.

- A **Discussion** is a mandatory category or grouping for topics.  There may be more than one discussion in the course or project site.
- **Topics** are required within Discussions in order for site participants to be able to post, read, and reply to messages.
- **Conversations** are messages or threads of discussion posted within a Topic.

This article covers the process for creating a new Discussion.

Discussions are useful for grouping several similar topics together, such as graded discussions, or group topics. They can also be used to specify the default topic settings for all topics within the discussion. All new topics will inherit the discussion settings by default.

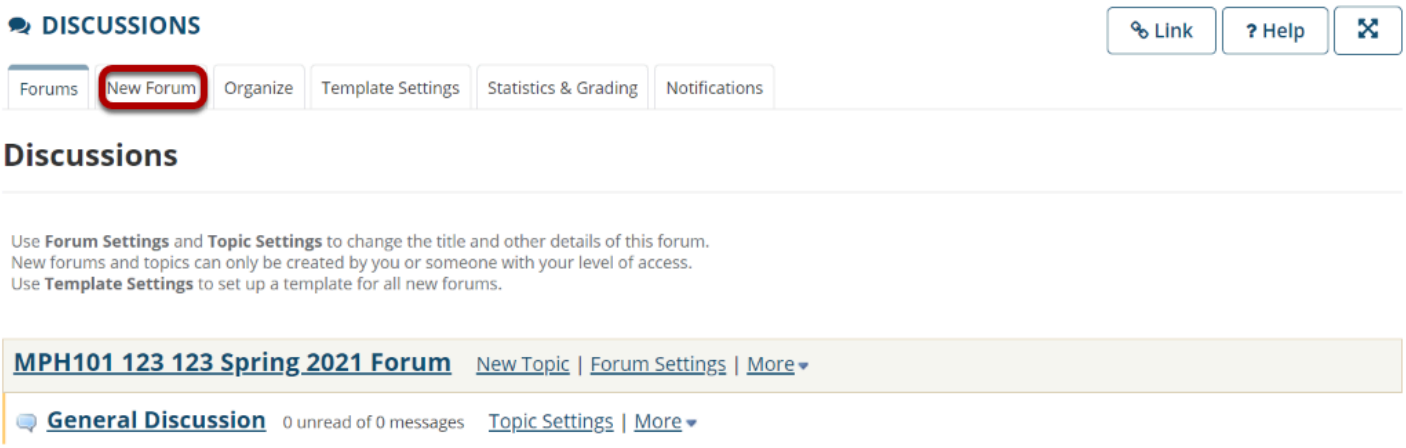
## Go to Discussions.




Select the **Discussions** tool from the Tool Menu.

## Footer

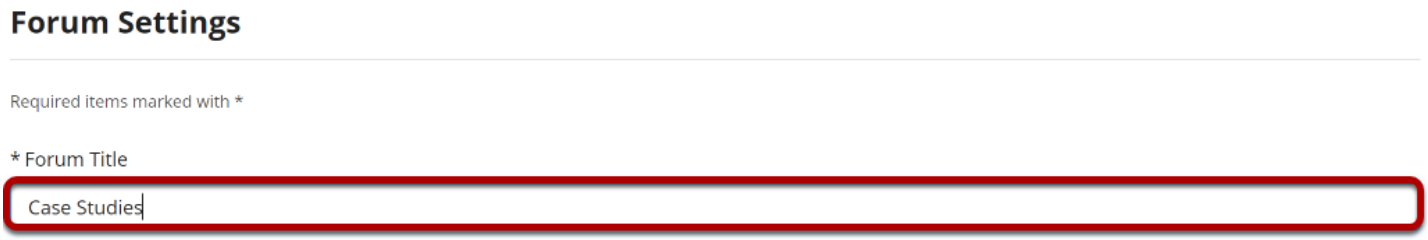
# Click New Forum (New Discussion).




By default, new sites are populated with a single discussion titled after the name of the site, and containing one topic for General Discussion. The default discussion and topic may be edited for posting messages, adding more topics to the existing discussion, or adding a new discussion.

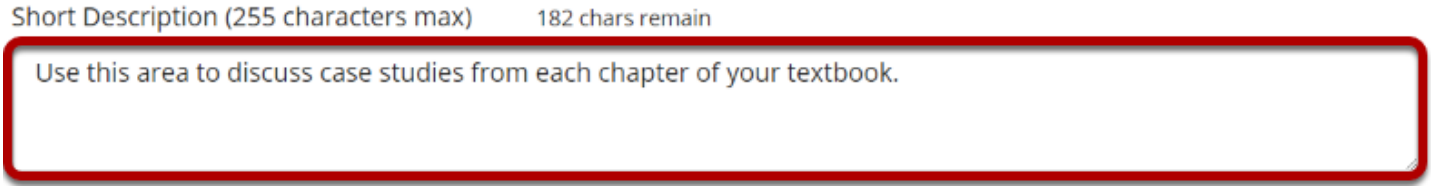
Click **New Forum** to add a new discussion.

# Title the Discussion




Discussion titles are required. Name the discussion a title to easily identify the types of topics expected within it.  Remember that users post messages within topics, not discussions. Discussions are a grouping or classification of topics.

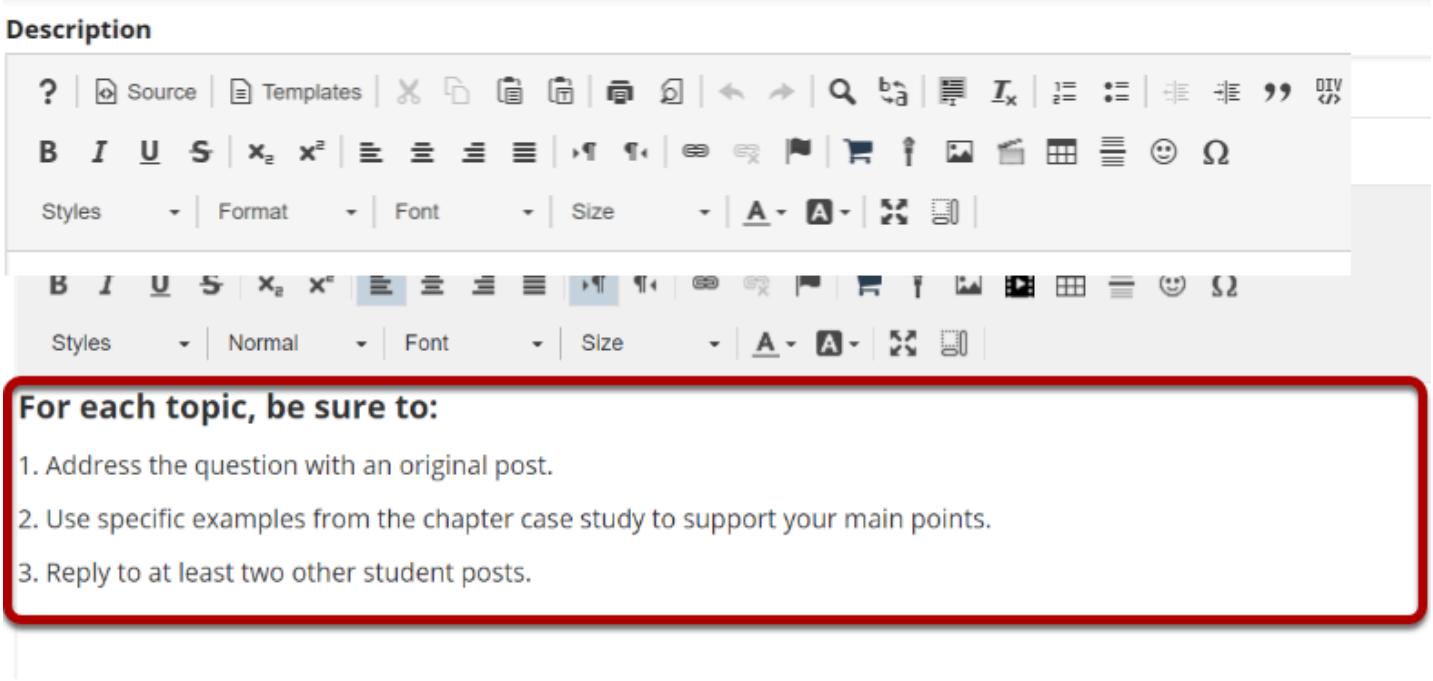
# Enter a short description.




## Footer

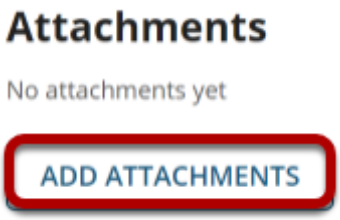
If desired, enter a description into the text box provided. The **Short Description** field only allows a maximum of 255 characters and does not allow formatting of text.  This information is displayed to users when they view the Discussions tool.

## Enter a detailed description.




To provide more detailed instructions about the items in this discussion, use the **Description** area to enter the information. This area includes the Rich Text Editor and allows for more advanced formatting options.

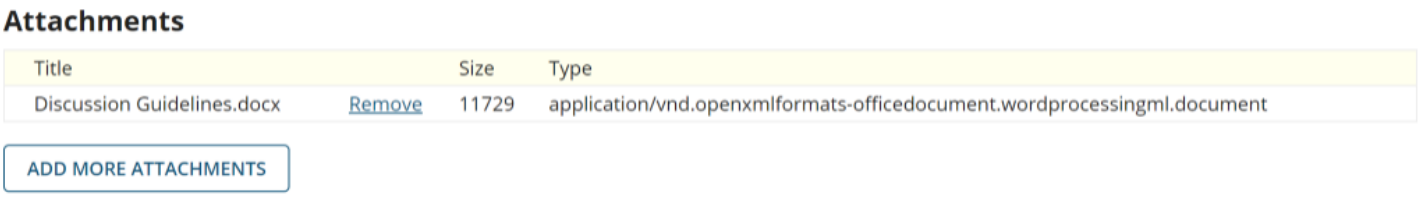
## Add attachments. (Optional)




Optionally, you may attach files to the discussion. Click the **Add attachments** button to browse for and select a file.

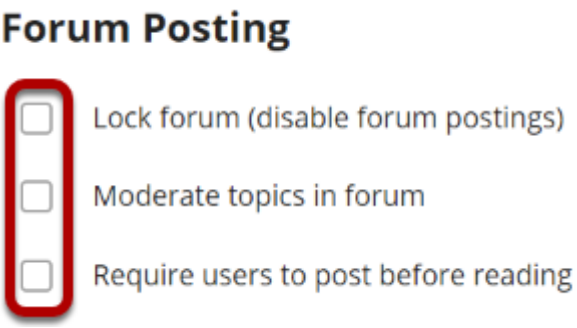
## Footer

## View Attachments




After a file is attached, the file name, file size, and file format will be displayed.

# Select discussion posting options.

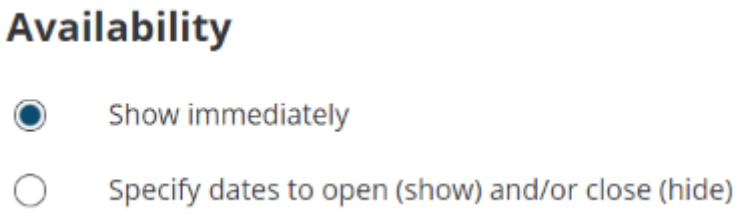



There are several discussion posting options from which to choose. Remember, any settings selected here will apply to all of the topics within this discussion by default. (However, these may be overridden by the settings on an individual topic if desired.)

- **Lock forum**: This option locks the discussion so users can no longer post messages. However, they can continue to read existing messages.
- **Moderate topics in forum**: This option means all messages posted within topics in this discussion must be approved by the instructor before other students can see them.
- **Require users to post before reading**: Selecting this option requires users to post their own response first before they can view other messages posted previously. This is a good option to select if the Instructor wishes students to respond to a discussion prompt before seeing other student responses.

## Footer

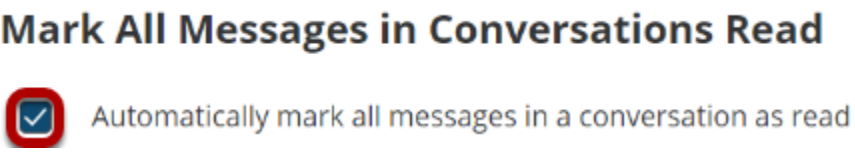
## Select availability.




The default option is to **Show Immediately,** or you can choose to **Specify dates to open (show) and/or close (hide).**

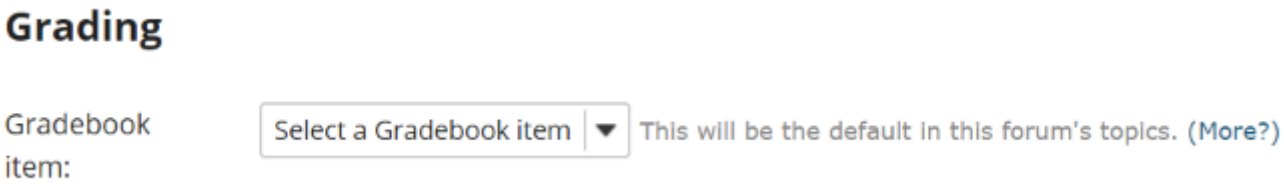
*Tip: Setting open and close dates at the discussion level can be tricky because individual topics may also have specified dates. However, the discussion must be visible in order for the topics within the discussion to be available to students. Typically, instructors set open/close dates at the topic level only.*

## Select Read Options.




The default option is unchecked, allowing the user to mark each post as read after reading. Selecting this option will mark all messages within a conversation, or thread, as read.

## Specify Gradebook item.




When grading discussion posts, select a specific Gradebook item for the grades to be included in the Gradebook calculations.

*Note: You must first create the Gradebook item in Gradebook tool before you can select it to be associated with a discussion or topic.*

## Footer

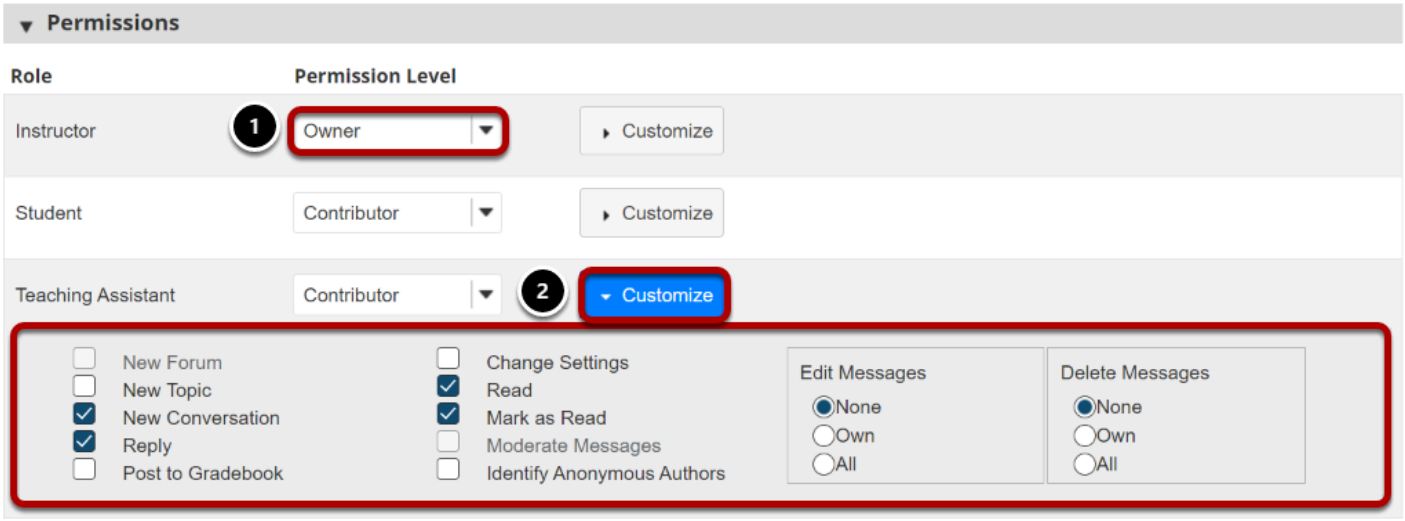
*Tip: Similar to open/close dates, associating with the Gradebook at the discussion level is not always ideal because individual topics may also be graded. Faculty may prefer to grade discussions at the topic level.*

# Permissions

In most cases, the default discussion permissions are appropriate. By default, instructors are discussion **Owners**, and all other site participants are **Contributors**. The discussion owner may add and delete topics, modify permissions, edit the discussion and topic descriptions, etc. Contributors may only read, post, and reply to messages.

To modify the default permissions, click **Customize** to expand the permission settings.

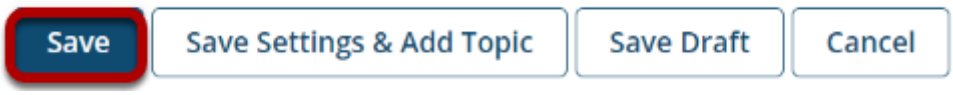
## Modifying Permissions




1. Select the drop-down menu next to each role/group to choose one of the pre-configured options (i.e., Author, Contributor, None, Nonediting Author, Owner, Reviewer, Custom).
2. Discussion permissions may be customized for different user roles, or for groups within the class. Click **Customize** to further expand the options for a particular role and define more granular custom permissions.

*Note: Groups must already exist in order for group role permissions to display.*

# Click Save.




## Footer

Once completed, scroll to the bottom of the page and select the **Save** button. (Alternately, if you would like to go directly to the screen to begin adding a new topic to the forum you just created, you may select **Save Settings & Add Topic** instead.)

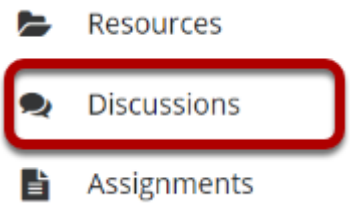
*Note: All discussions need at least one topic in order to be active.*

## Footer

# How do I add a new topic?

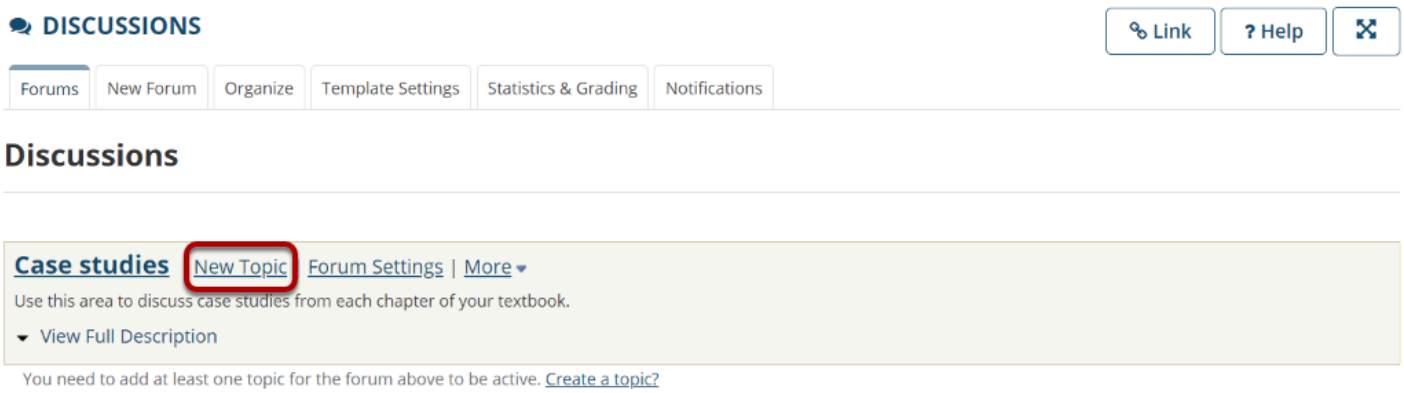
A Discussion must contain a **Topic** in order for users to create a post. (See also How do I create a new Discussion?)

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from Tool Menu in your site.

## Select New Topic.




## Create a Topic Title.

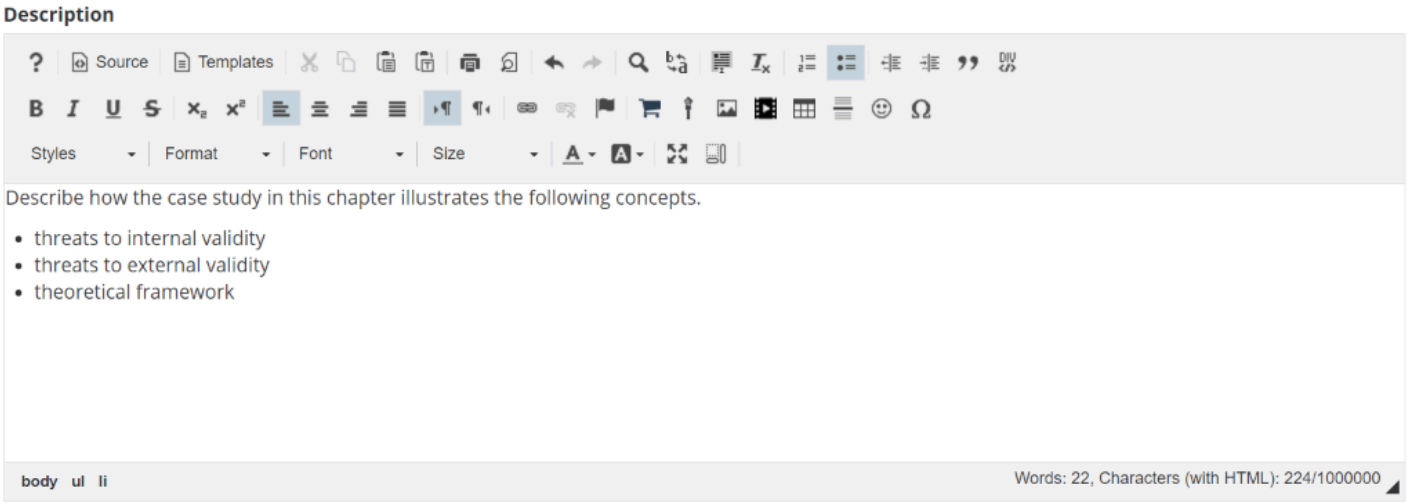
Topic titles are required for every topic.

## Footer

## Create a Short Description.

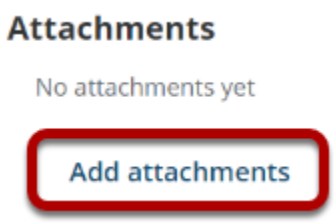
Be aware that this short description only allows a maximum of 255 characters.

## Create a detailed Description.




This description box allows the use of the Rich Text Editor.

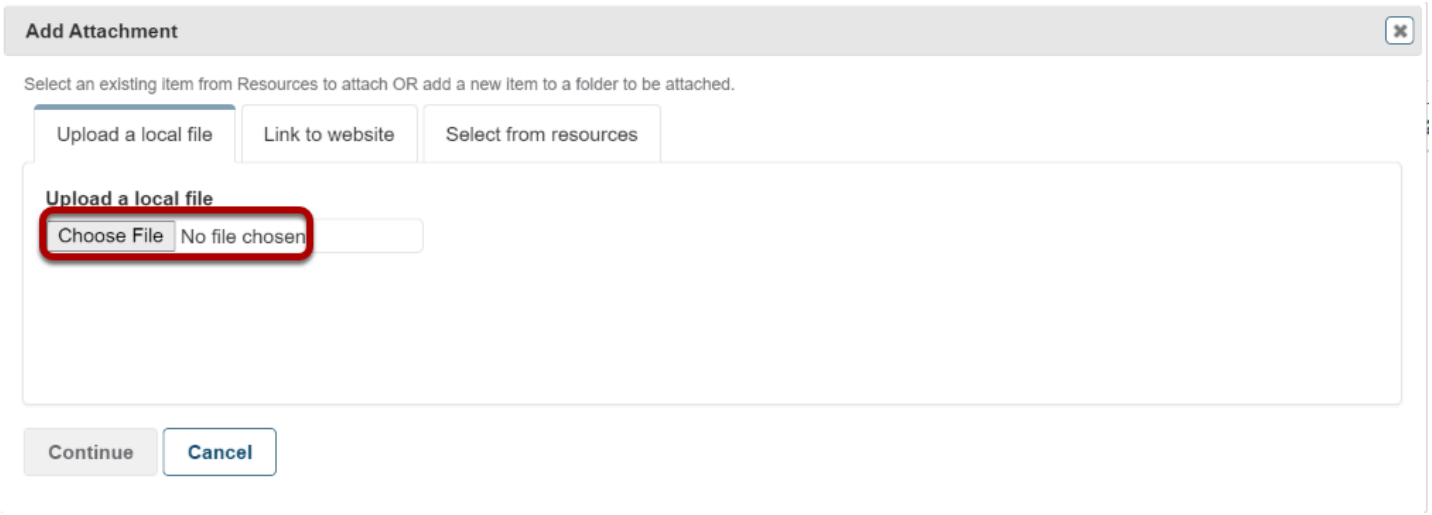
## Add Attachments.




Additionally, you can add file attachments to the discussion. Click the **Add attachments** button to browse for and select a file.

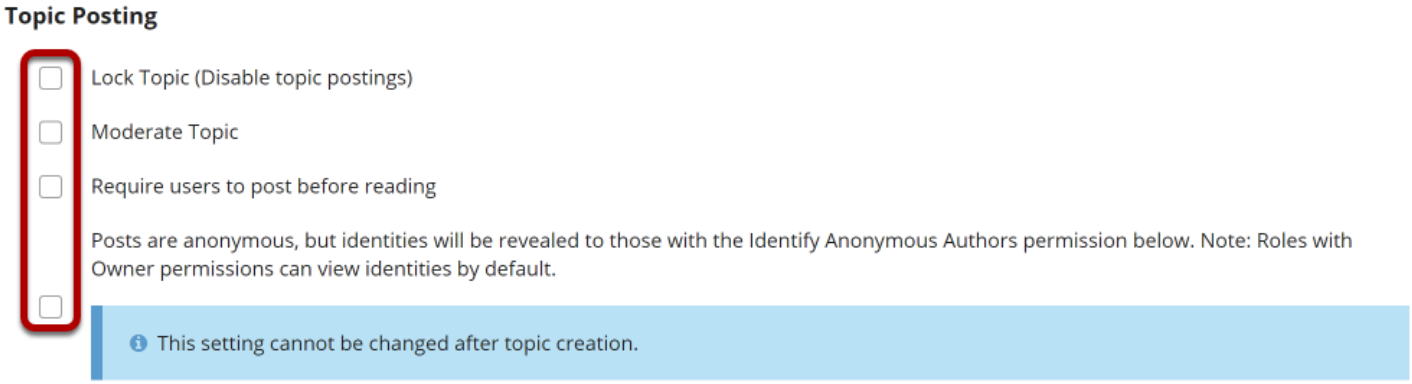
## Footer

## View attachments.




After a file is attached, the file name, file size, and file format will be displayed.

## Select Topic Posting options.



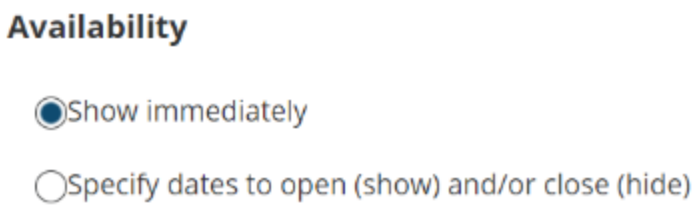

There are several topic posting options from which to choose. Any settings selected here will apply to this topic only.

- **Lock topic**: This option locks the topic so users can no longer post messages. However, they can continue to read existing messages.
- **Moderate topic**: This option means all messages posted within the topic must be approved by the instructor before other students can see them.
- **Require users to post before reading**: Selecting this option requires users to post their own response first, before they can view other messages posted previously. This is a good option to select if the Instructor wishes students to respond to a discussion prompt before seeing other student responses.
- **Posts are anonymous**: Select this option if you want site participants to be able to post without displaying the name of the post's author.

## Footer

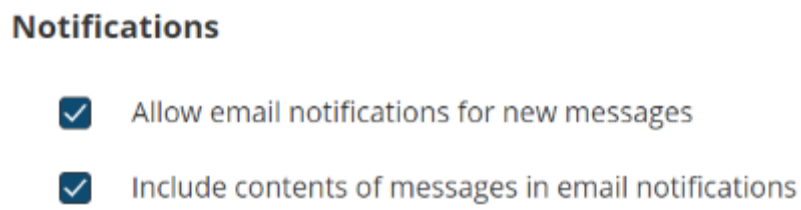
*Note: The anonymous setting cannot be changed once the topic is created, so be certain that you want anonymous postings before saving!*

## Select Availability.



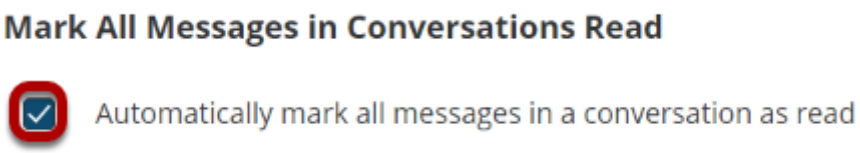

The default option is to **Show Immediately**, or you can choose to **Specify dates to open (show) and/or close (hide)**.

## Select Notifications.




Select to **Allow email notifications for new messages** whenever a new message is posted. Select to **Include contents of messages in email notifications** when email notifications are enabled.

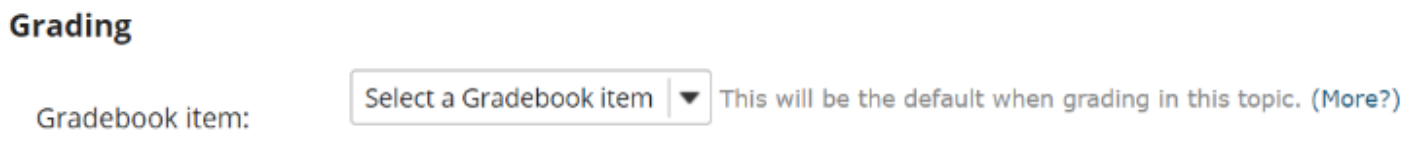
## Select Read options.




The default option is to unchecked, allowing the user to mark each post as read after reading. Selecting this option will mark all messages within a conversation, or thread, as read.

## Footer

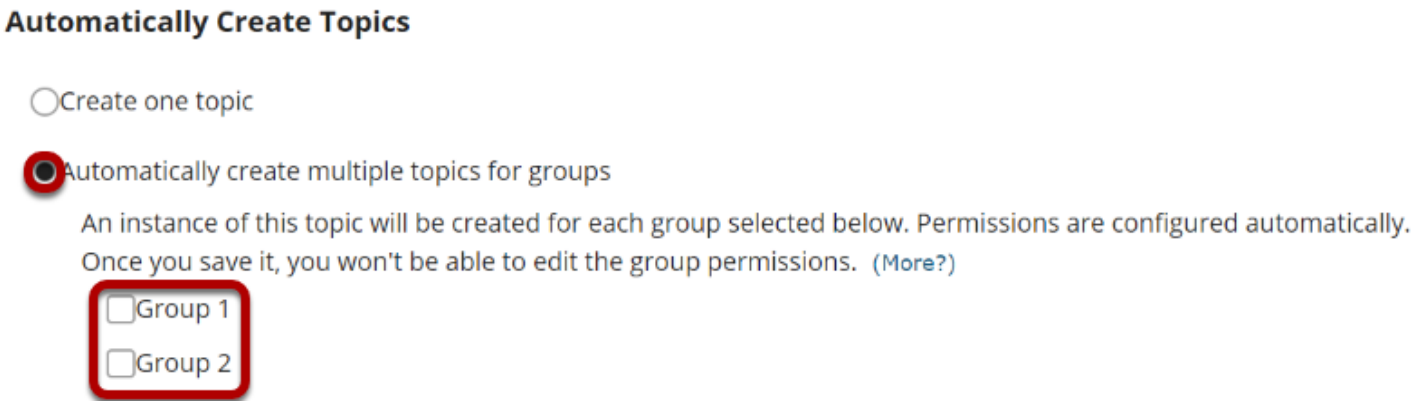
## Specify Gradebook item.




When grading topic posts, select a specific item for the grades to be included in the Gradebook calculations.

*Note: You must first create the Gradebook item in the Gradebook tool before you can select it to be associated with a topic.*

## Automatically Create Topics for groups.




If you would like to create multiple, private group topic areas, select the radio button for **Automatically create multiple topics for groups** and then check the box next to each group for which a topic should be created. Each group member will be set to "Contributor" in their group's topic and "None" in other automatically created topics. The default Student role will also automatically be set to the permission level of "None."

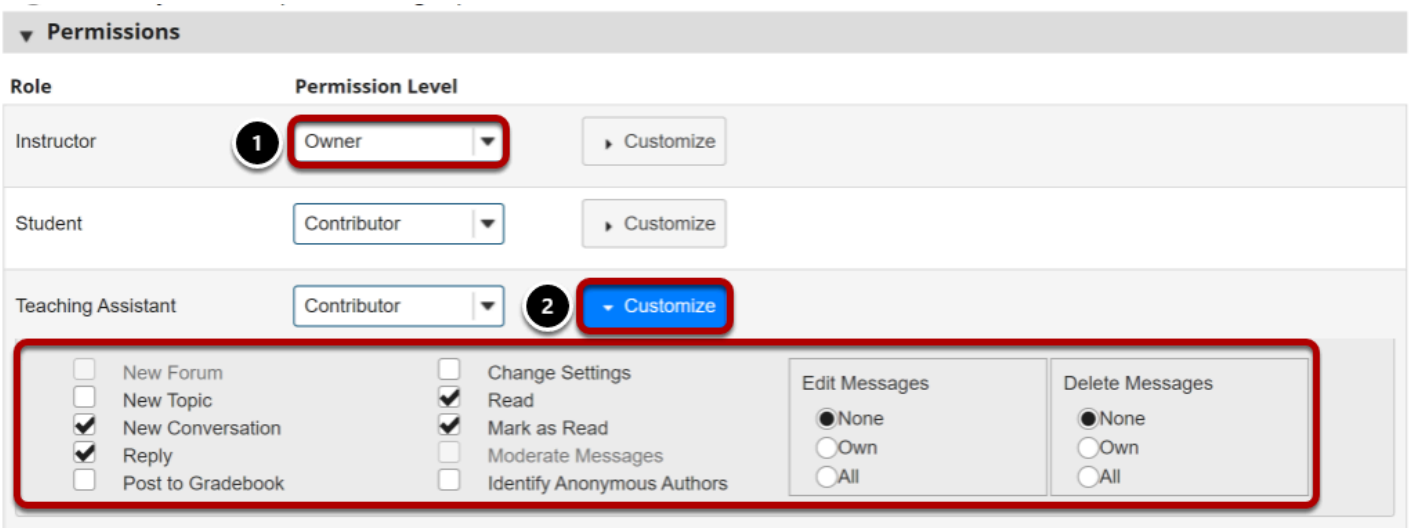
## Permissions

In most cases, the default topic permissions are appropriate. By default, instructors are discussion **Owners**, and all other site participants are **Contributors**. The topic owner may add and delete topics, modify permissions, edit the topic settings and topic descriptions, etc. Contributors may only read, post, and reply to messages.

To modify the default permissions, click **Customize** to expand the permission settings.

## Footer

## Modifying Permissions




1. Select the drop-down menu next to each role/group to choose one of the pre-configured options (i.e., Author, Contributor, None, Nonediting Author, Owner, Reviewer, or Custom).
2. Discussion permissions may be customized for different user roles, or for groups within the class. Click **Customize** to further expand the options for a particular role and define more granular custom permissions.

*Note: Groups must already exist in order for group role permissions to display.*

## Save and add topic.

Once completed, scroll to the bottom of the page and select the **Save** button. Or if you would like to add more topics to the same discussion, select the **Save Settings & Add Topic** button.

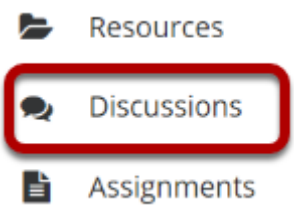
*Note: All discussions need at least one topic in order to be active.*

## Footer

# How do I organize discussions and topics?

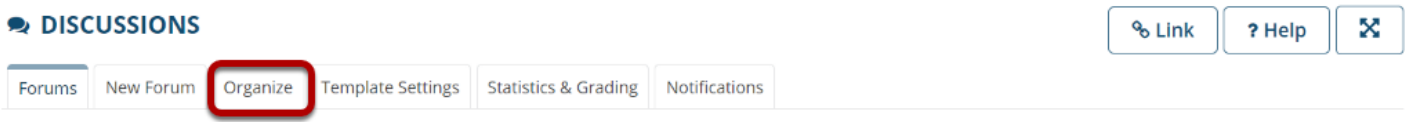
Discussions may be rearranged to change the order in which discussions are listed.

## Go to Discussions.



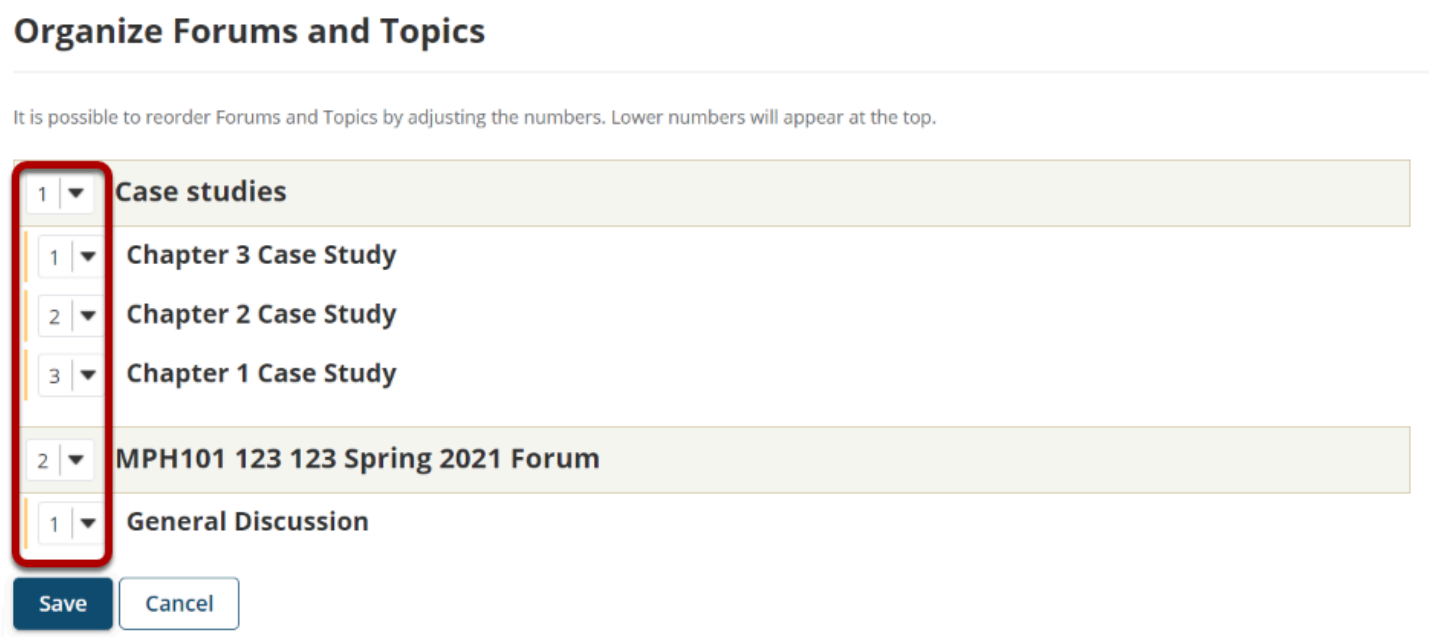

Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu of your site.

## Select the Organize button.




## Footer

## Select the appropriate number next to the Forum or Topic.




The numeric pull down menu allows for reordering the Discussions, Topic, or both. Select the appropriate number for the order in which the items should appear.

## Click Save.

After you have placed the discussions and topics in the desired order, click **Save**.

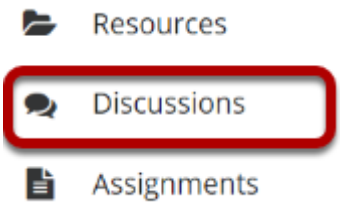
## Footer

# How do I post to a discussion topic?

Discussions are organizational units that group topics within the site. You cannot post directly to a discussion; you must first enter a topic and post your message there.

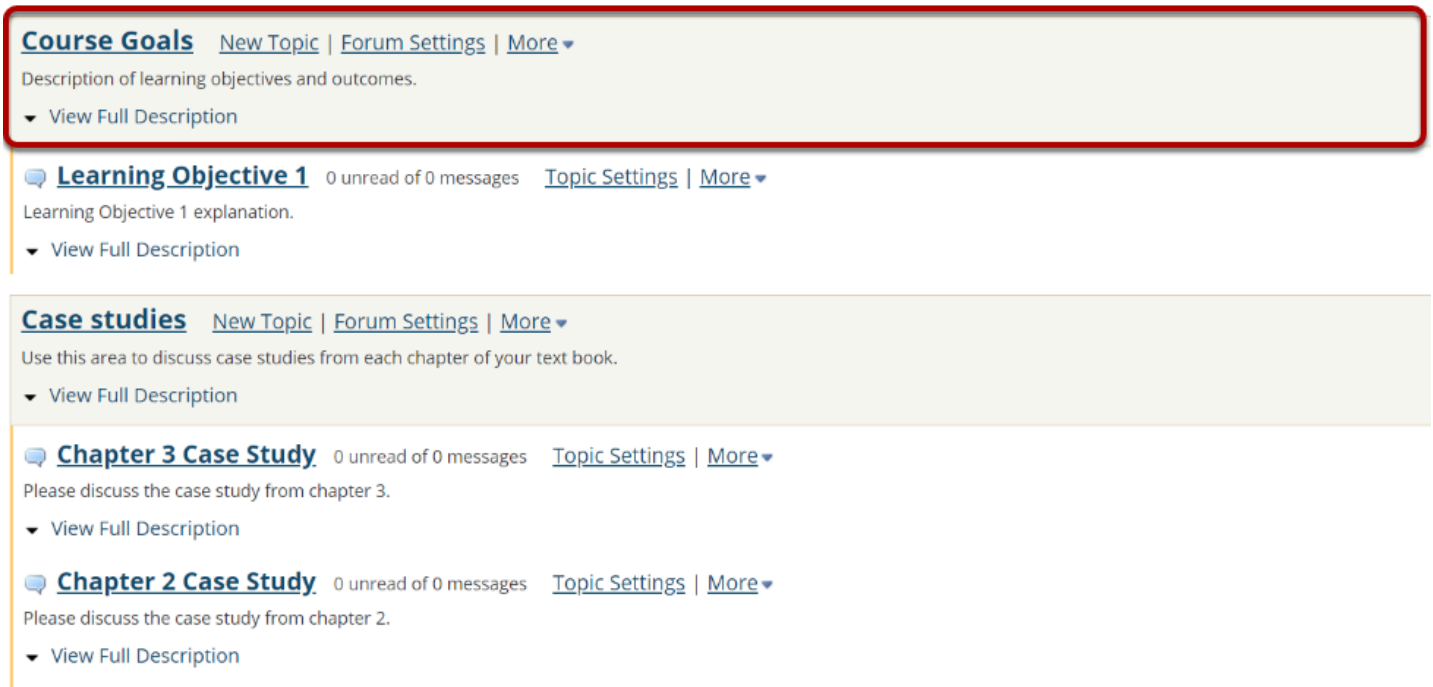
In order to post to a discussion topic, you will **Start a New Conversation** or thread.

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from Tool Menu in your site.

## Choose a Discussion.

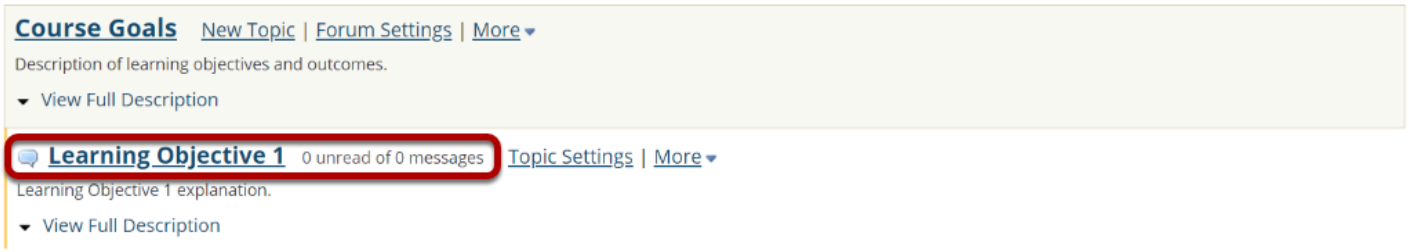



This is an example of a discussion. The discussion title will appear in bold and in a larger font than the topic titles indented beneath it. If you would like to view more information about the

## Footer

discussion, you may click **View Full Description** to view any additional information provided by the site owner.

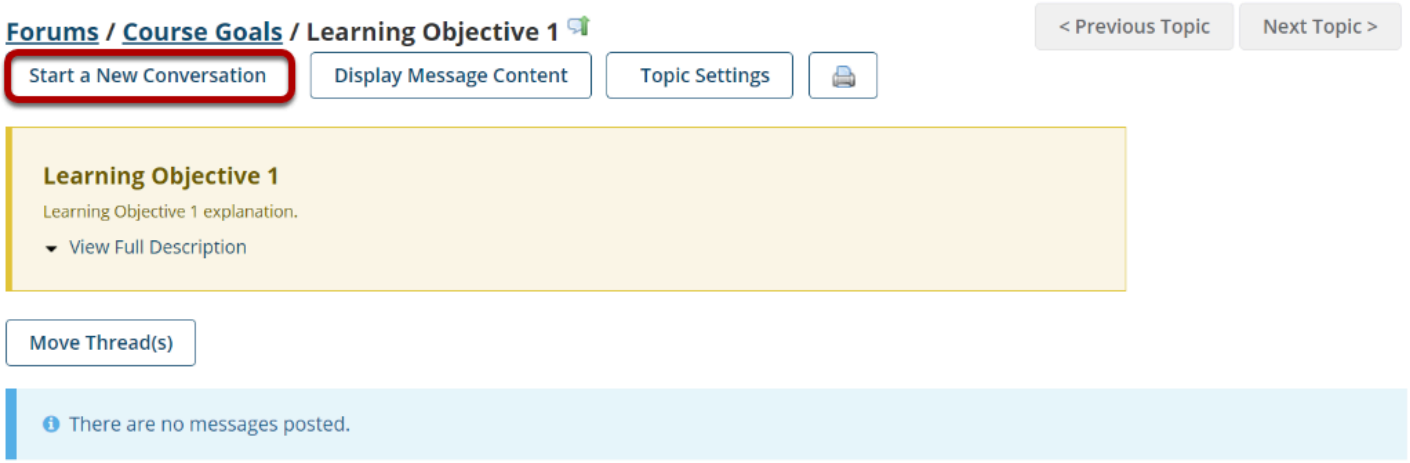
## Select a topic within the discussion.




This is an example of a discussion topic.

Click on the title of the topic to enter that topic.

## Click Start a New Conversation.



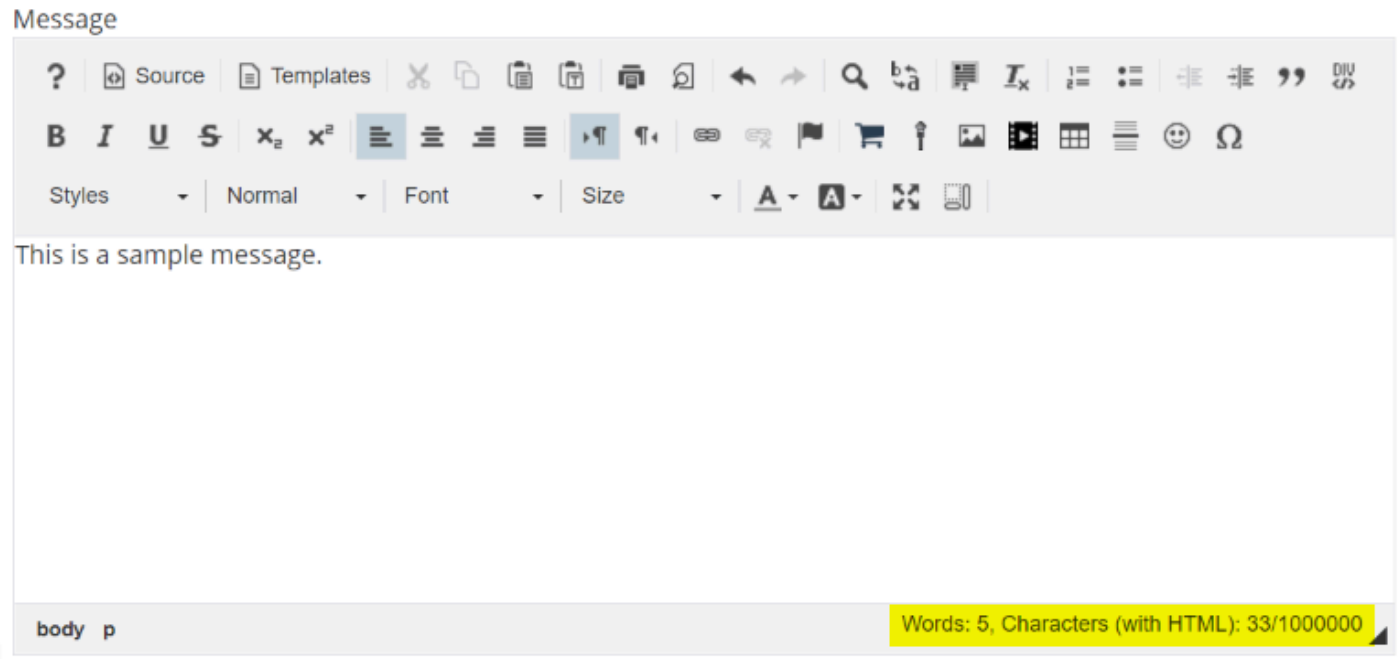

Starting a new conversation is the same thing as starting a new thread.

After you click **Start a New Conversation**, the message composition window will appear.

## Enter a Title.

## Footer

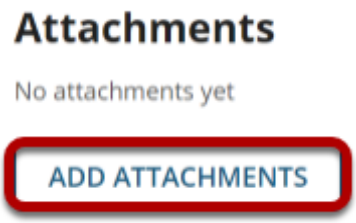
## Enter a message.




This description box allows use of the Rich Text Editor.

*Note: The message box will keep track of the word count in the lower right corner.*

## Add Attachments. (Optional)




If desired, there is an option to upload attachments to the conversation. Click **Add Attachments** to browse for and select your file.

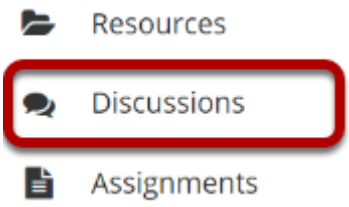
## Click Post.

After completing the conversation, click **Post** to make the conversation viewable.

## Footer

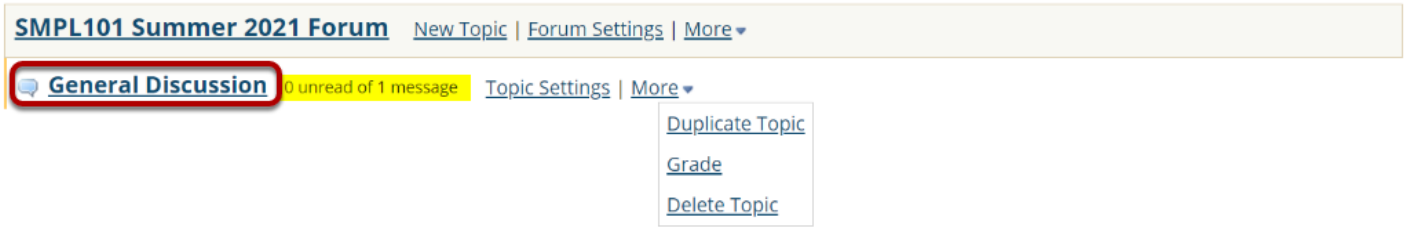
# How do I reply to a discussions post (i.e., conversation)?

## Go to Discussions.




Select the **Discussions** tool from Tool Menu in your site.

## Choose a topic within a discussion.

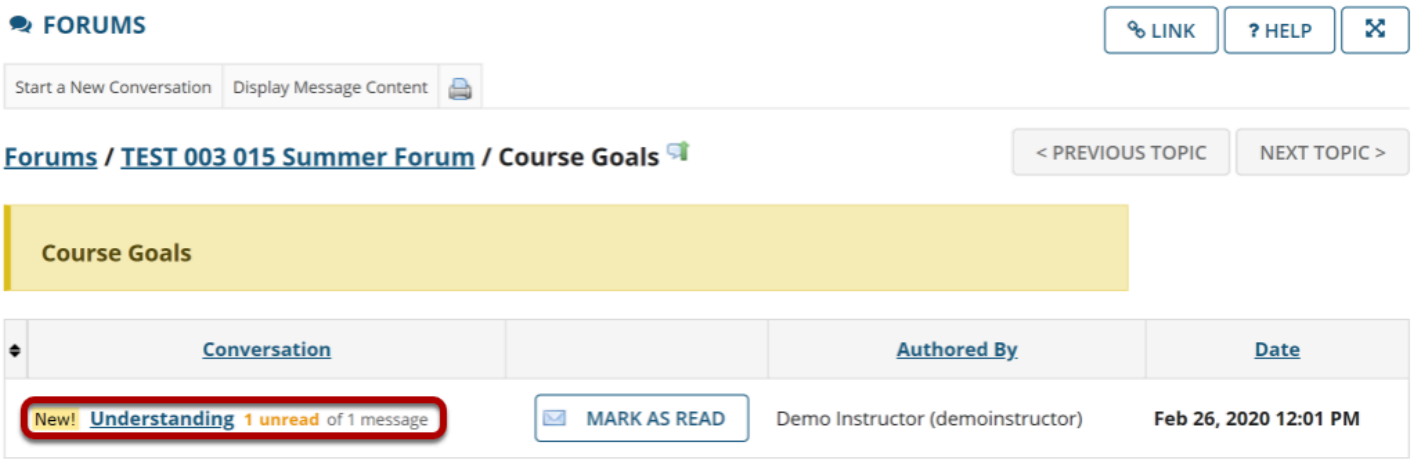



Click on the title of the topic to enter the topic.

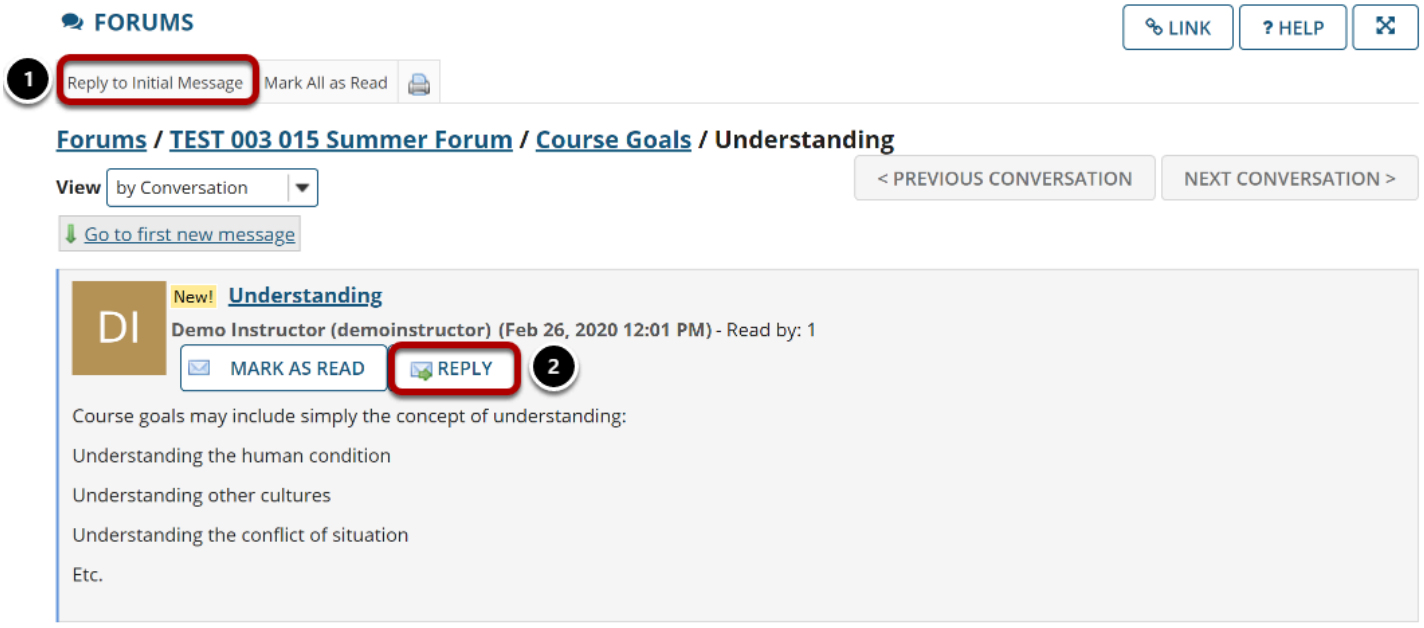
*Note: The message indicator text next to the topic title will tell you how many messages have been posted within that topic, and how many of them are new or unread.*

## Footer

# Click on the title of an existing post to view the conversation.




# Click reply.

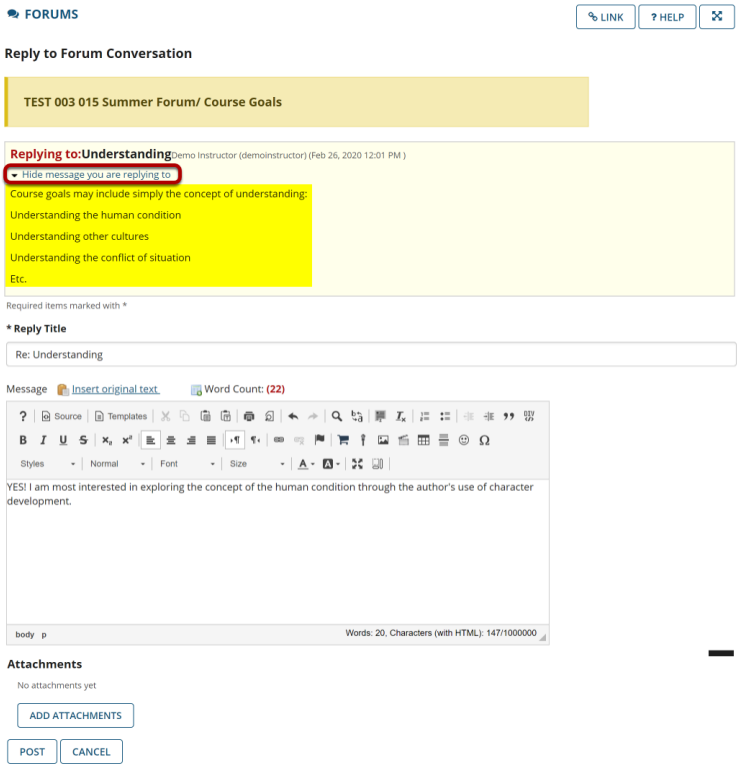



You have two different options for replying to the post within the Discussions tool:

1. Click **Reply to Initial Message** at the top of the conversation to reply to the first message in the conversation or thread.
2. Click the **Reply** link within the message itself to reply to the item you are currently viewing. This is the option you want to use if you would like to reply to someone else's reply.

## Footer

# Compose your message.



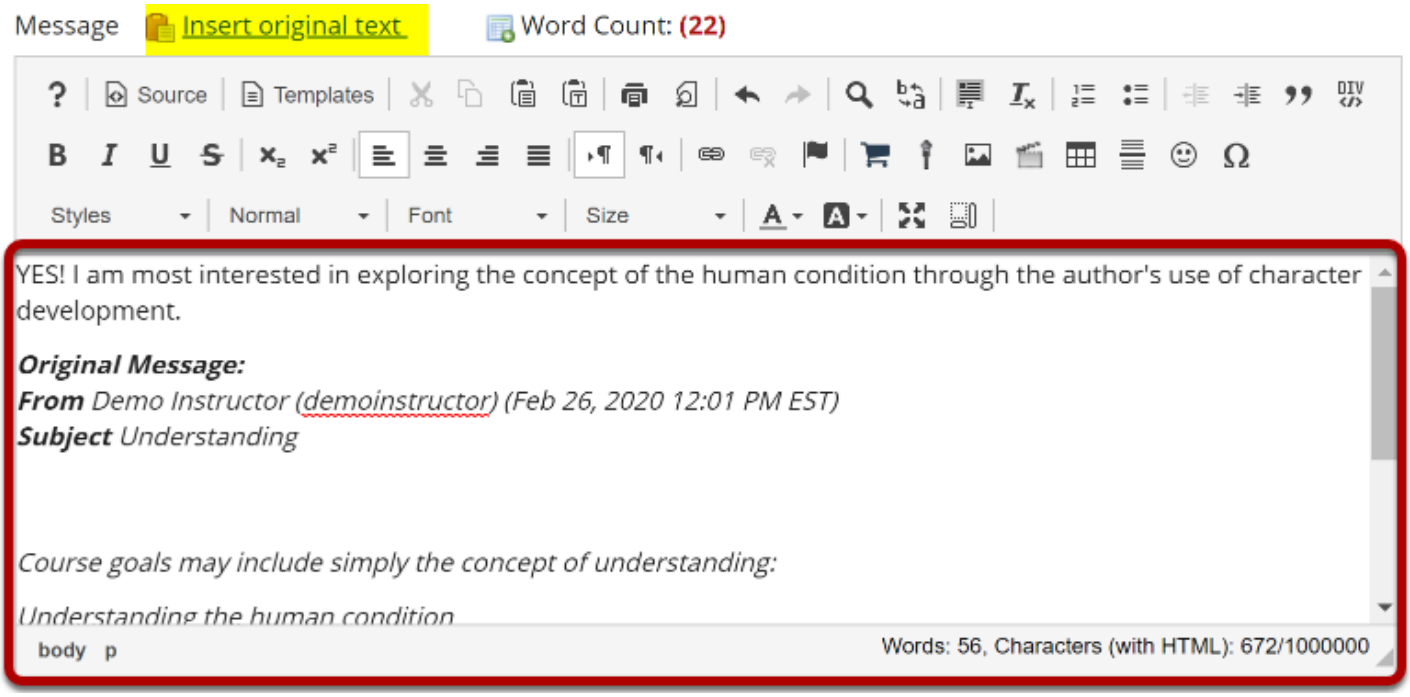

The message you are replying to will be displayed at the top. You can hide the message by clicking on the small downward arrow next to "Hide the message you are replying to."

# Edit the reply title. (Optional)

The title will be taken from the initial message and pre-filled for you, but you may modify it if you wish.

# Footer

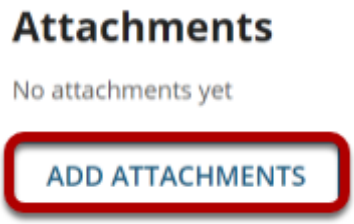
## Enter your message.




Use the Rich Text Editor to compose your response.

*Note: You may optionally click on the **Insert original text** link above the editor area to include the original message along with your reply.*

## Add Attachments. (Optional)




Click the **Add attachments** button if you would like to browse for and attach a file.

## Click Post.

## Footer

After you have finished your reply, click **Post** to add your message to the conversation.

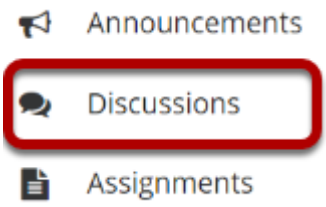
## Footer

# How do I email a discussion post author?

This outlines the process of contacting an author of a Discussions post by email. Typically, the email option is only available for instructors or site owners.

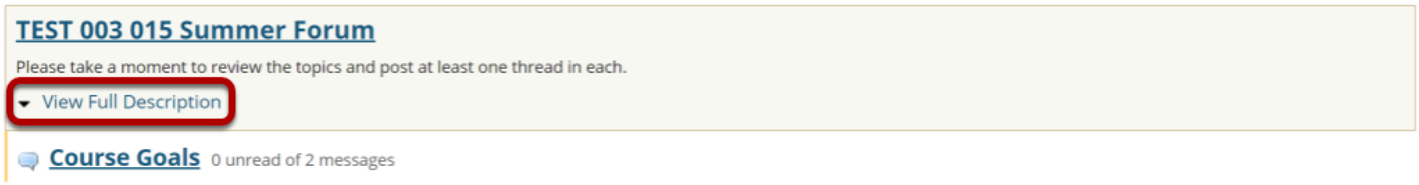
*Note: This email reply option sends a message to the author's external email address. It does not use the internal Messages tool to send the message.*

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu in your site.

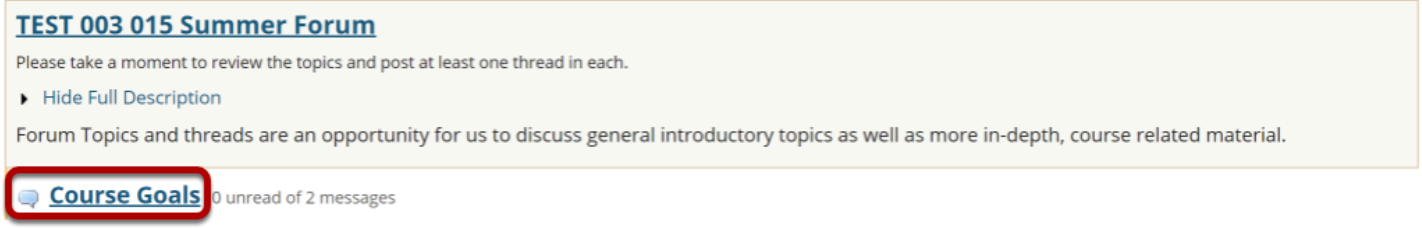
## Choose a discussion.




This is an example of a forum, bolded and in the largest comparative font.

Click **View Full Description** to view more information about the Discussion.

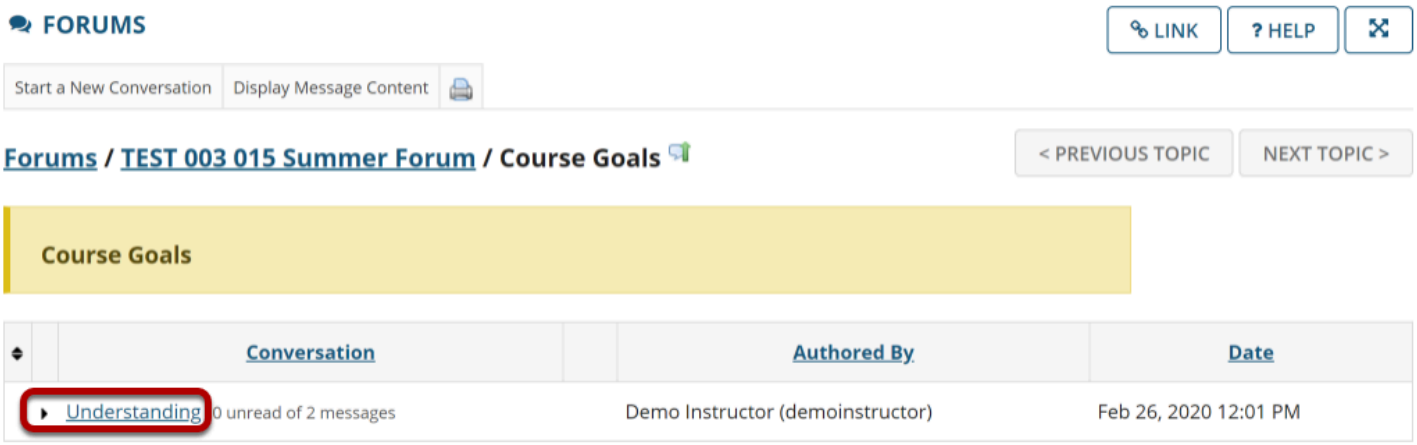
## Select the Topic within the Discussion.




## Footer

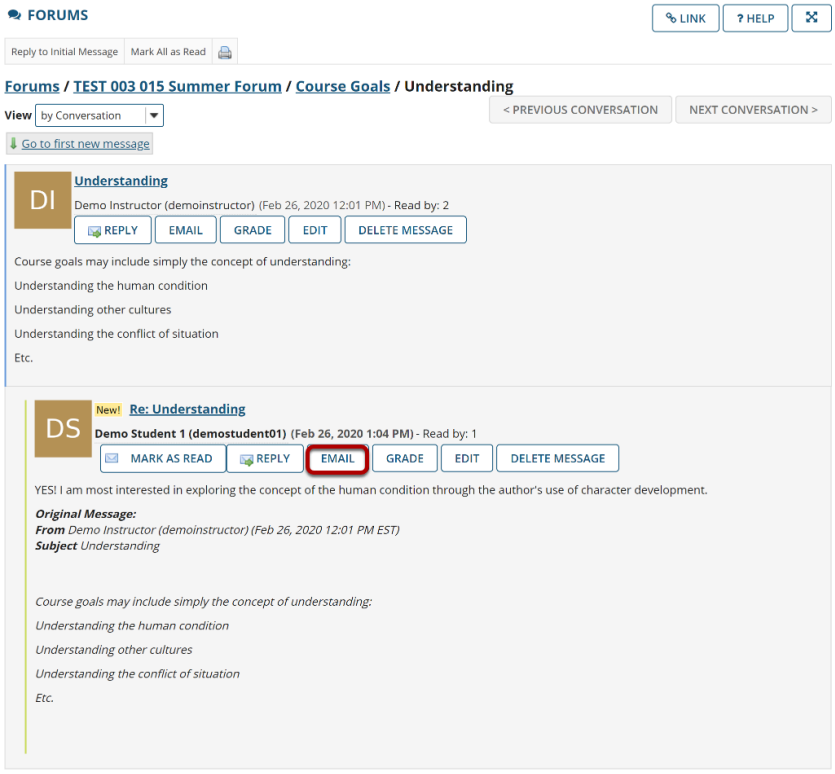
This is an example of a **Topic**. Select the Topic to view messages posted to that topic.

# Select the Conversation.




Select a **conversation**, or thread by clicking on the subject of the post.

# Click Email.

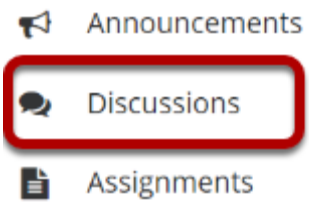



Click **Email** below the author's name in order to email the discussion post author.

# Footer

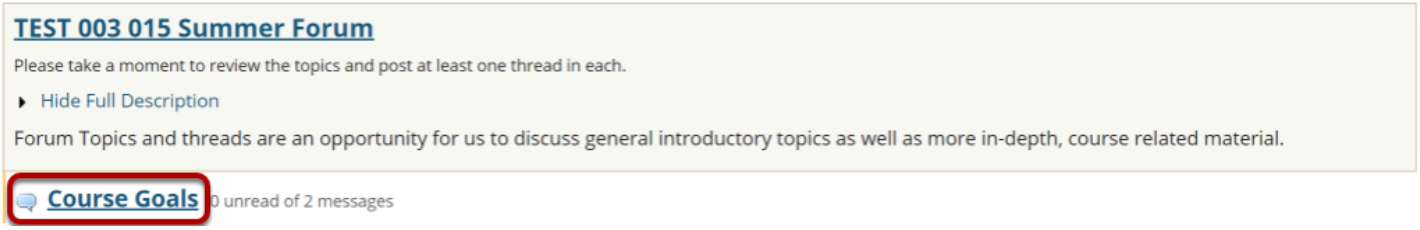
# How do I delete a discussion post (i.e., conversation)?

## Go to Discussions.



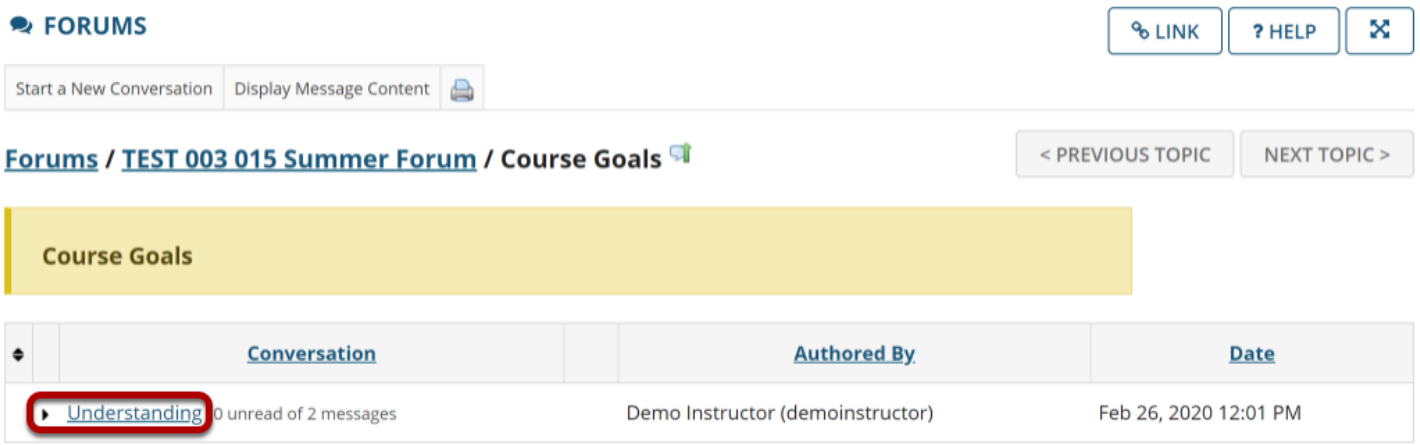

Select the Discussions tool from Tool Menu in your site.

## Choose a topic within a discussion.




Click on the title of the topic to enter the topic.

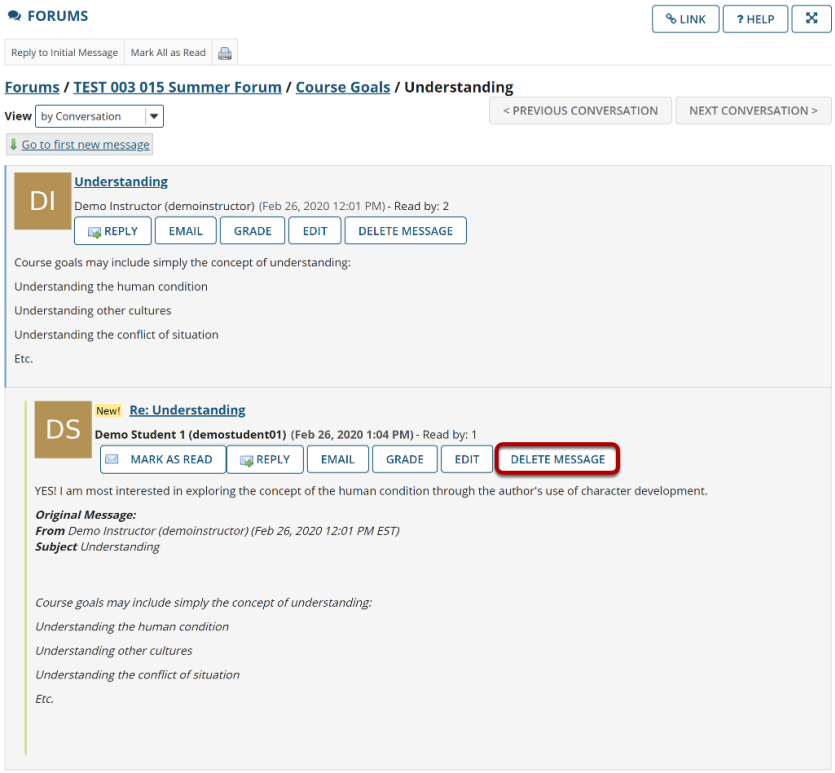
## Select a conversation from list.




Click on the title of the conversation.

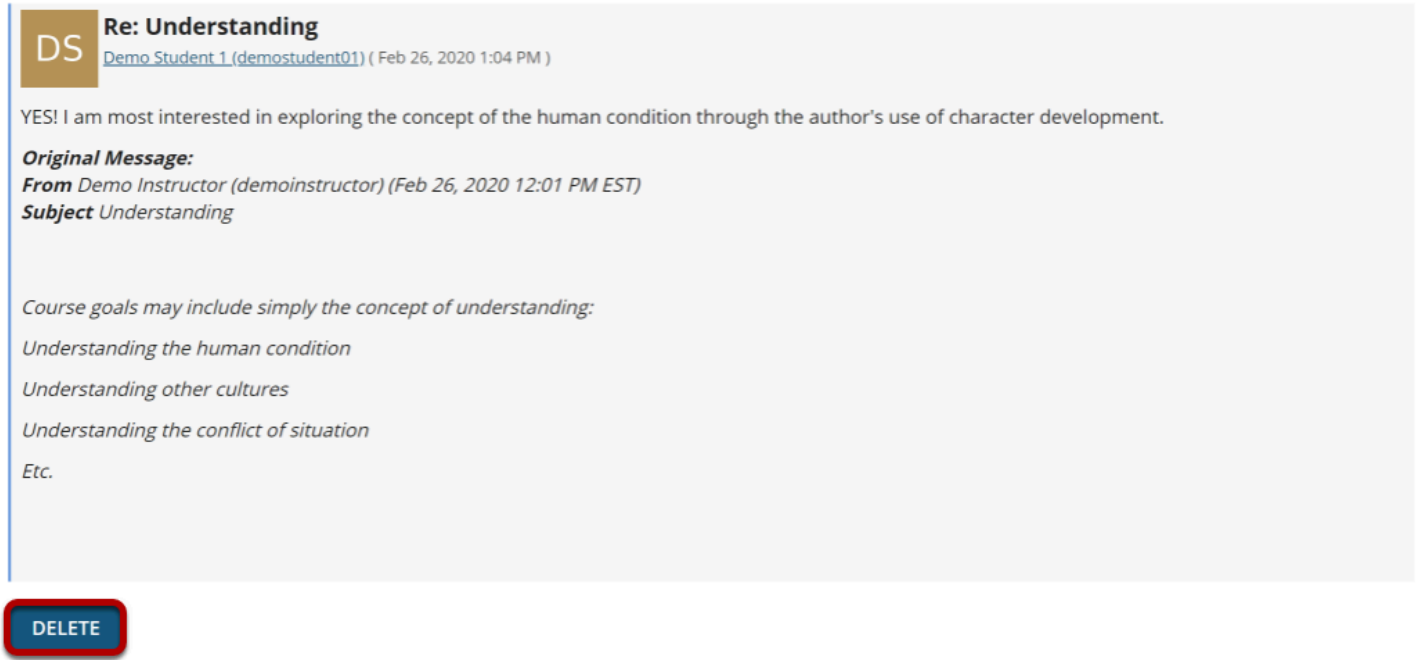
## Footer

# Click delete message.




Click **Delete Message** for the message you want to remove.

# Click Delete again to confirm.




# Footer

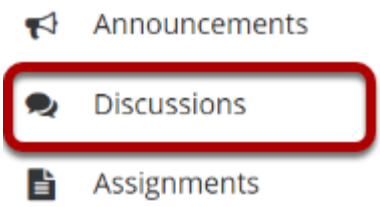
If you are sure you want to delete the message, click **Delete** again to confirm removal. The message will be permanently deleted.

## Footer

# How do I moderate a topic?

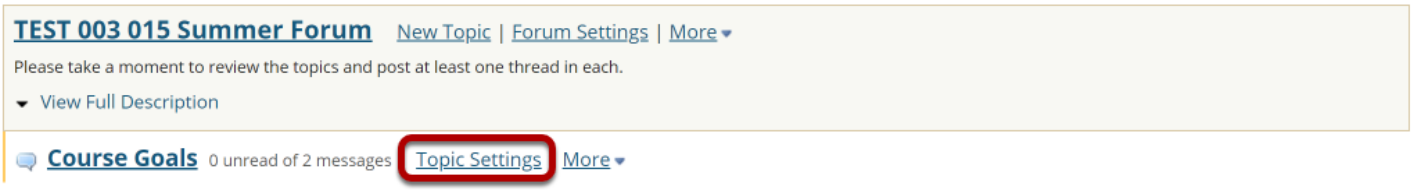
A moderated discussion allows the instructor to review and approve a discussion posting before the participants may view the post. When a discussion is moderated, each message submitted by a participant must be reviewed and approved before other participants may read them.

## Go to Forums.




Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu in your site.

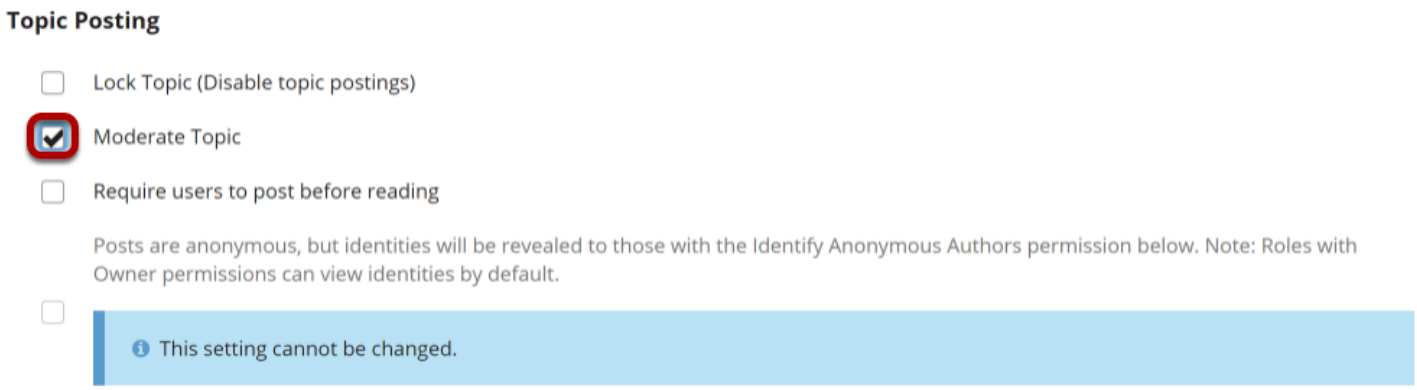
## Click Topic Settings.




Click **Topic Settings** to moderate a particular Topic.

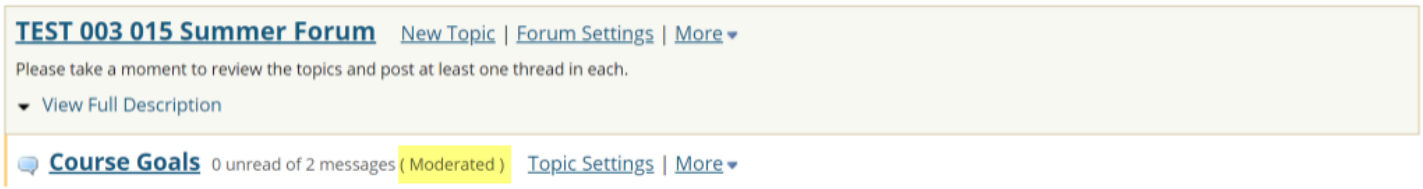
## Footer

## Check the box next to Moderate Topic.



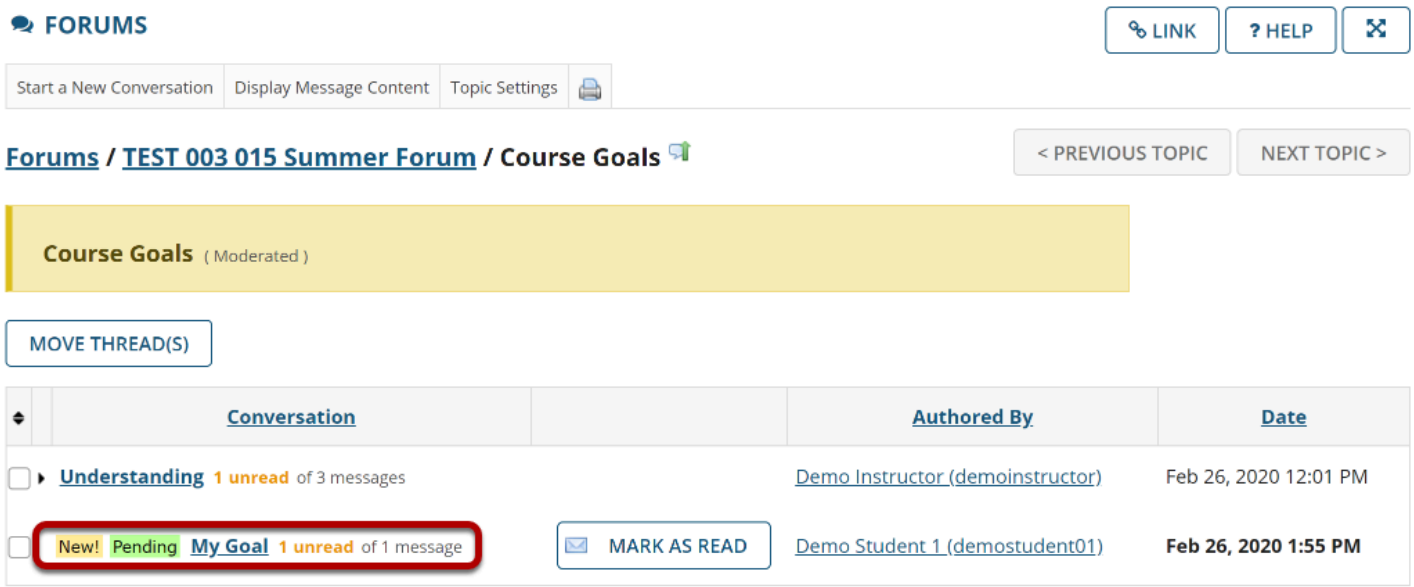

Select the **Moderate Topic** option in the settings and then scroll down and click **Save**.

## View moderated topic in forums list.




Moderated topics will have the text **(Moderated)** shown next to the title of the topic.

## View Pending messages.

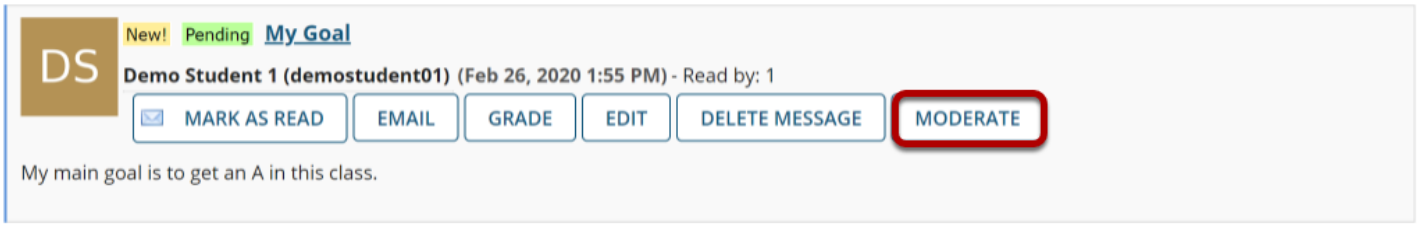



## Footer

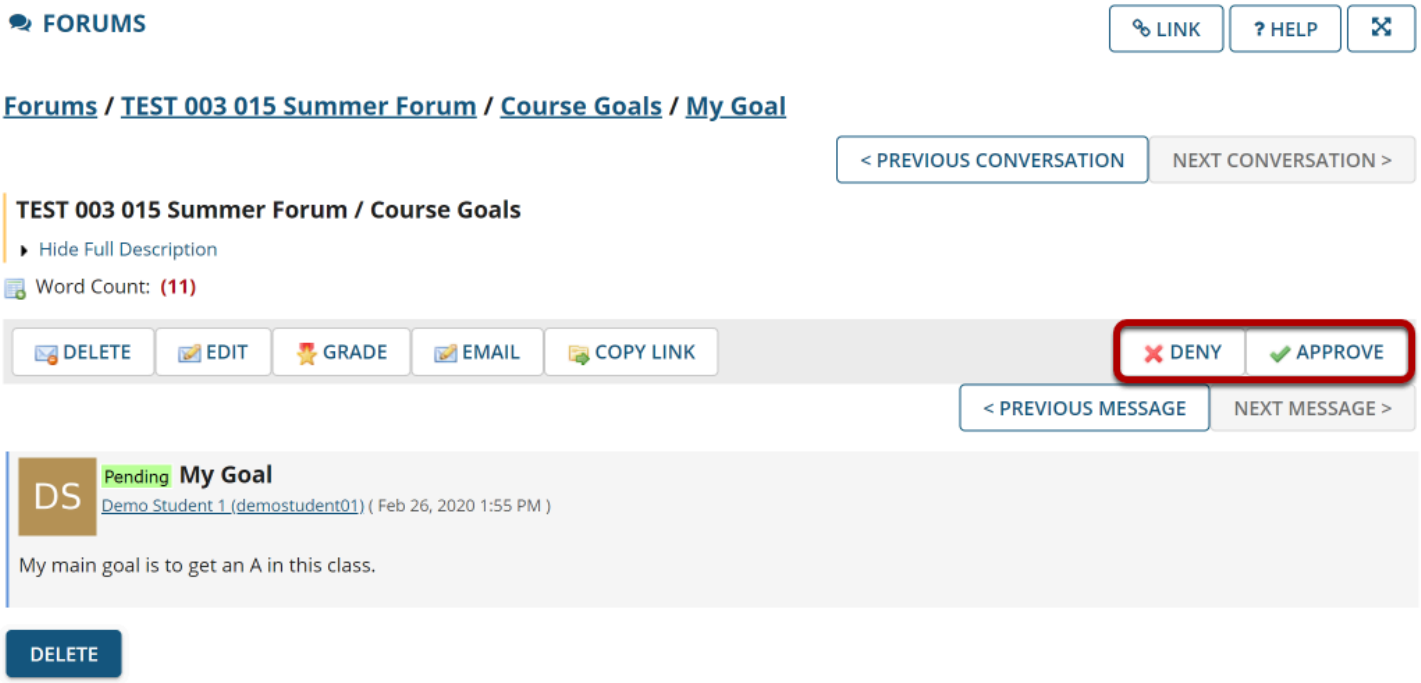
All messages pending approval will display Pending highlighted in green next to the message.

Click on the title of the message to view it.

## Click Moderate.




## Approve or Deny pending posts.



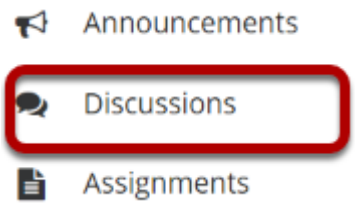

Click either **Deny** or **Approve** to moderate the message. Approved messages will be visible to the rest of the site participants. Denied messages remain visible to the instructor only.

## Footer

# How do I grade discussion forums?

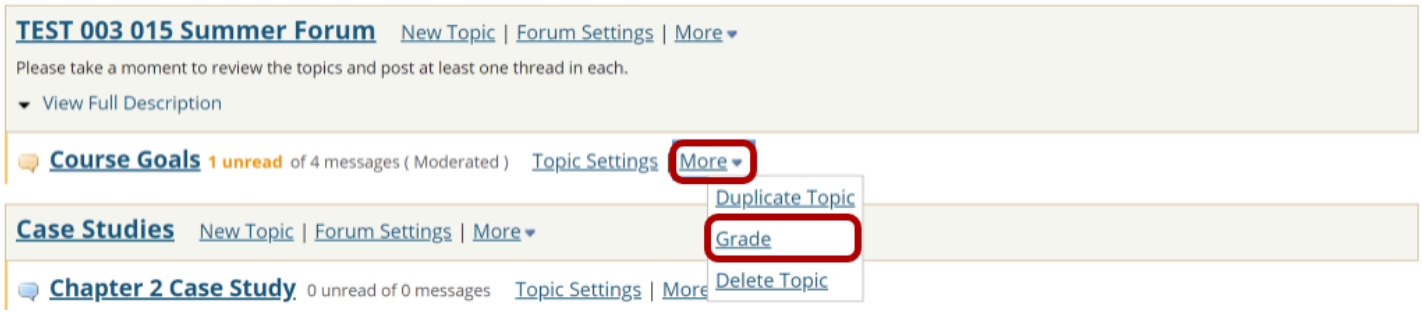
*Note: You must create the Gradebook item in the Gradebook BEFORE you can associate a Discussion or Topic with the item for grading.*

## Go to Discussion.




Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu in your site.

## Select the Topic you want to grade.

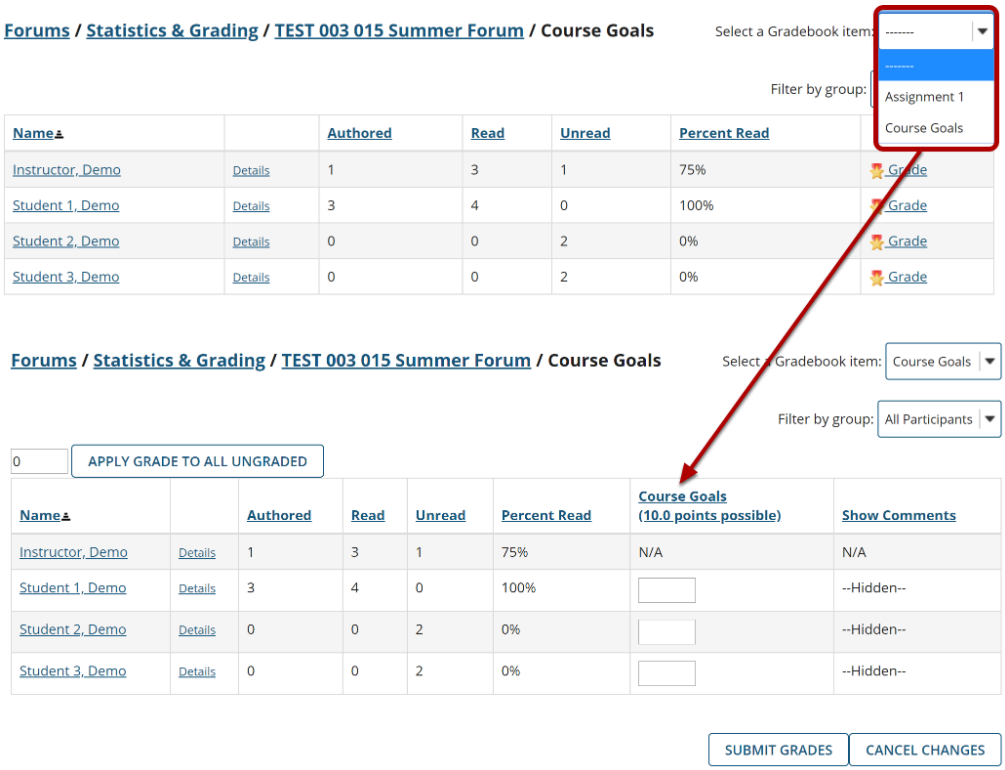



Click on the **More** link for the Topic you want to grade, and then select **Grade** from the list of expanded options.

*Note: You may grade by either Discussion or Topic. The grading process is very similar. However, most faculty prefer to grade by Topic, since a Discussion may contain several different Topics and each Topic may represent a separate Gradebook item or score.*

## Footer

# Select a Gradebook item.



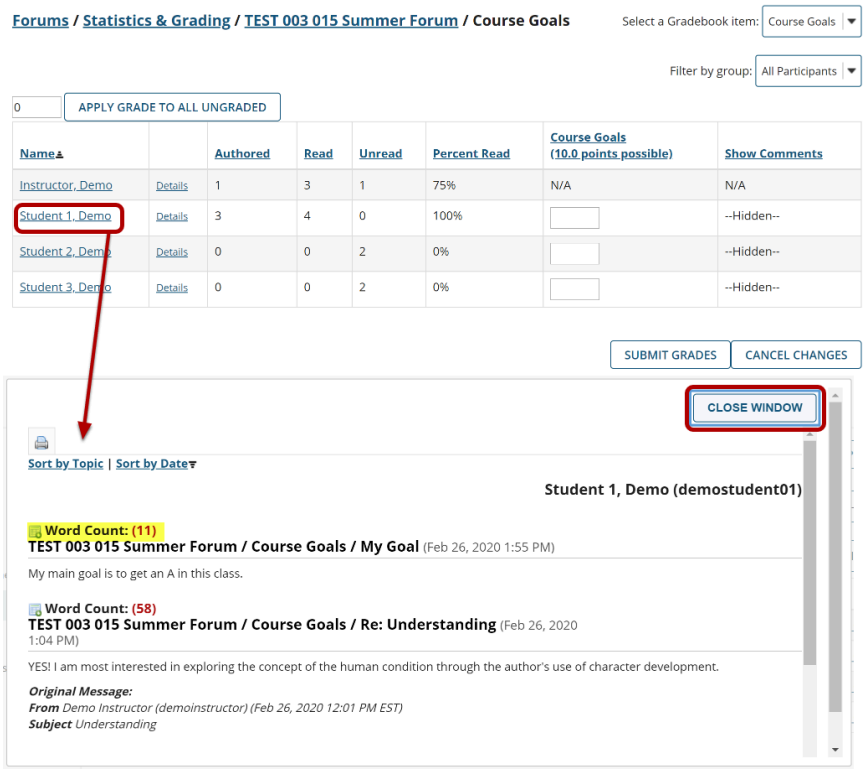

You will see a list of site participants along with summary statistics for each user on number of posts authored, read, unread, and percent read in the current topic. You may sort the list by any of those columns by clicking on the column title if you choose.

Select the Gradebook item where you would like to record the scores for this topic from the drop-down menu in the upper right corner. Once you select a Gradebook item, the screen will change to display a grade entry column where you may enter points.

*Note: If you already associated your Topic with a Gradebook item, then you do not need to complete this step. You should have been taken directly to the grade entry screen.*

# Footer

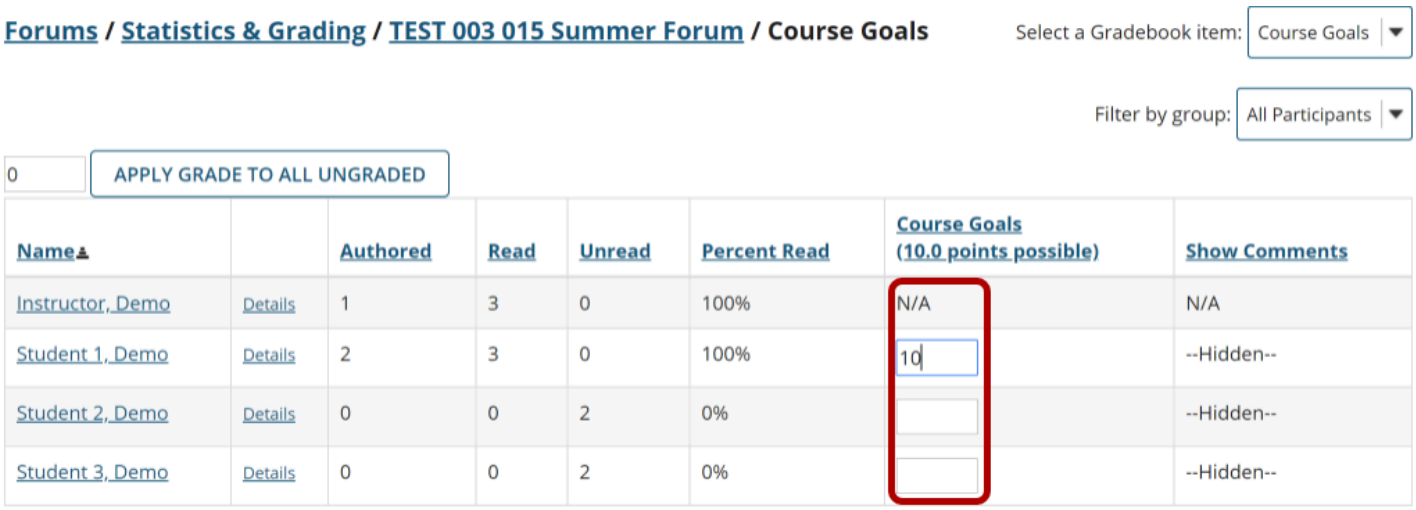
# View posts.




To view posts, click on the author's name. A window will open showing the message/s posted by that author. Notice that the Word Count in each post is also shown.

Click the **Close Window** button to close the window and return to the grade entry screen.

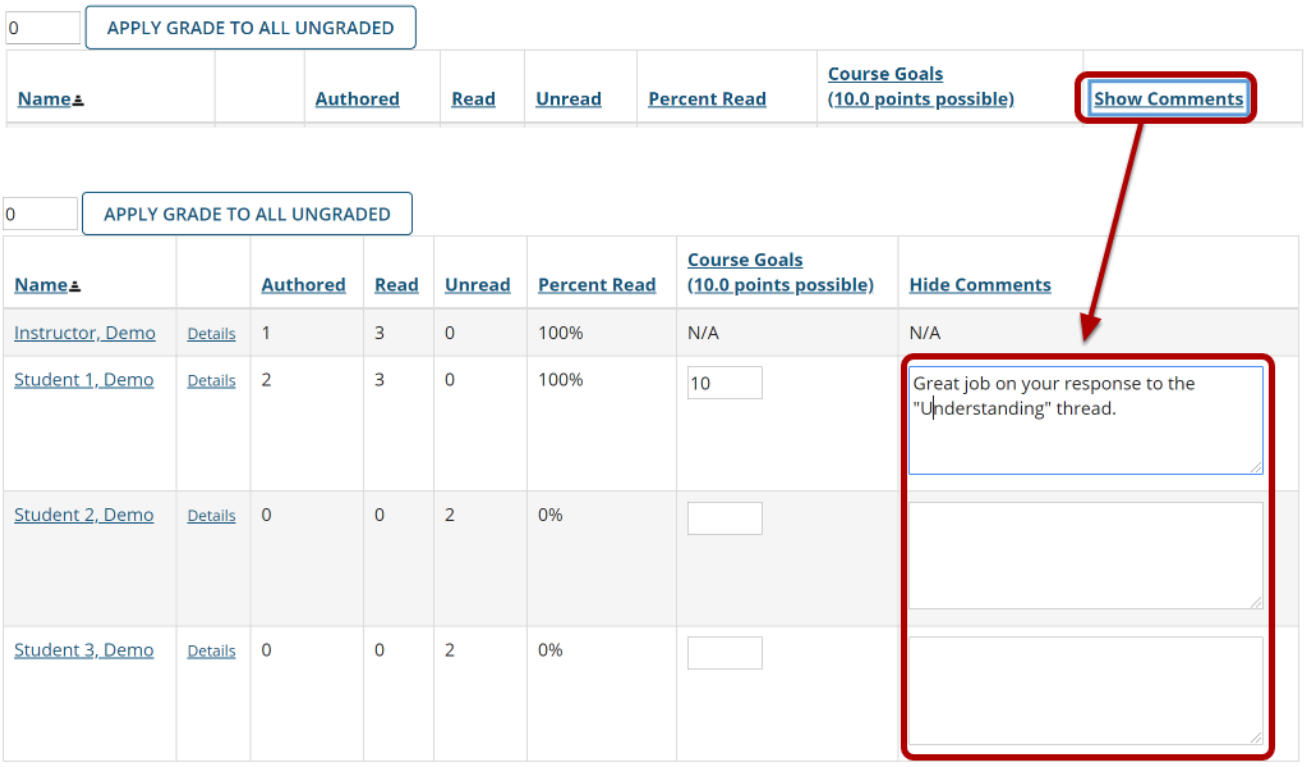
# Enter points.




Enter points into the grade entry column.

# Footer

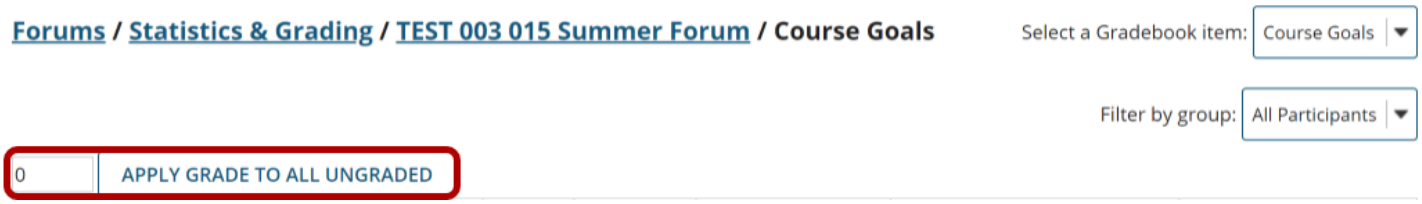
# Add Comments.




If you would like to add comments, click on the **Show Comments** link to expand the comment column.

Enter your comments into the text boxes provided.

# Apply a grade to all ungraded.




If you would like to apply a single score to all ungraded items, enter the score to be applied and then click the **Apply Grade to all Ungraded** button.

*Tip: This is a useful option if, for example, you would like to apply zeros to all students that did not post.*

# Footer

## Submit grades.

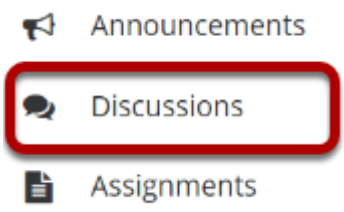
After you have entered all of the grades and/or comments, scroll down to the bottom of the list and click the **Submit Grades** button to save your changes and send the grades to the Gradebook.

## Footer

# How do I move a thread to a different topic?

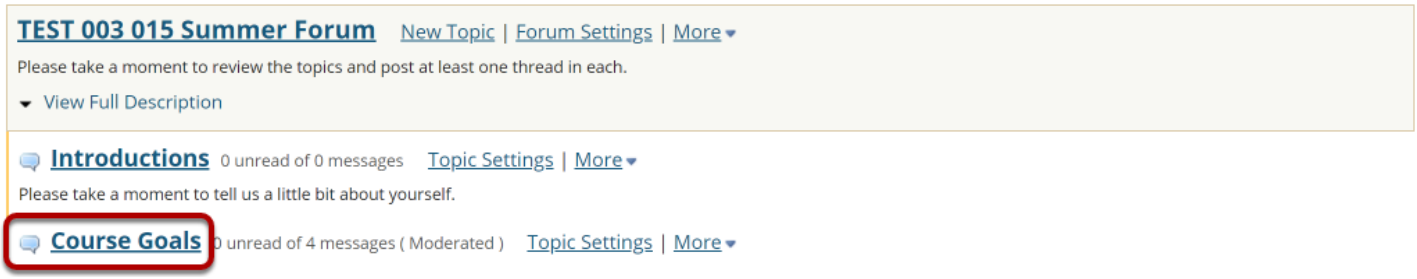
This option allows for a thread or conversation to be moved to a different topic.

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from Tool Menu in your site.

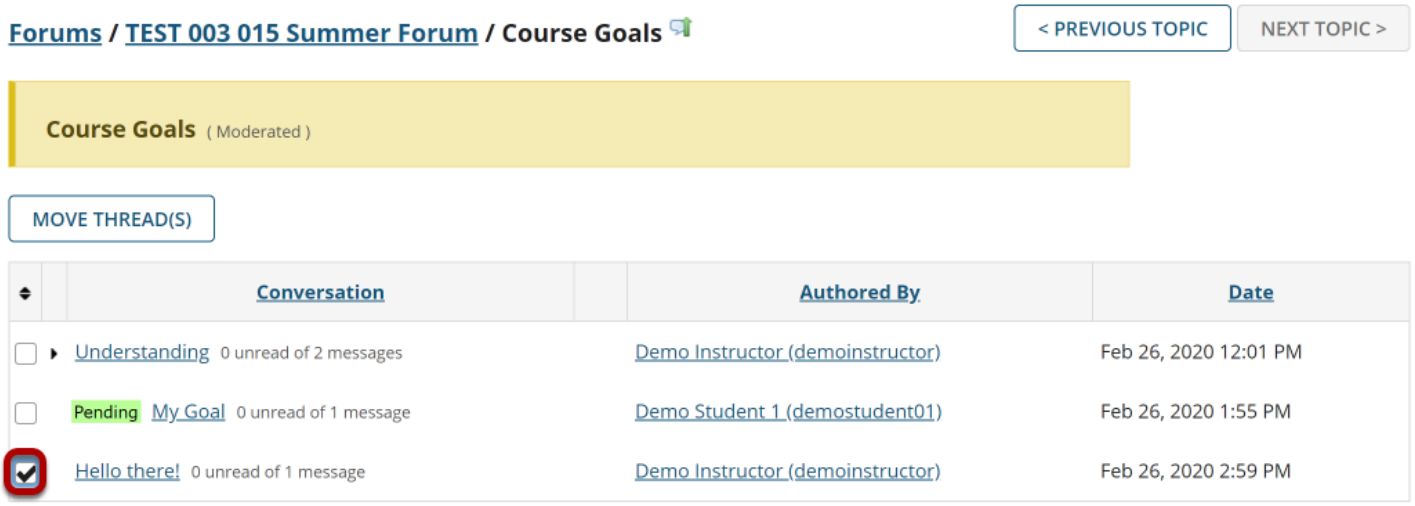
## Select a discussion topic.




The topics will be listed underneath the corresponding discussion in smaller, bold font. Click on the topic containing the item to be moved.

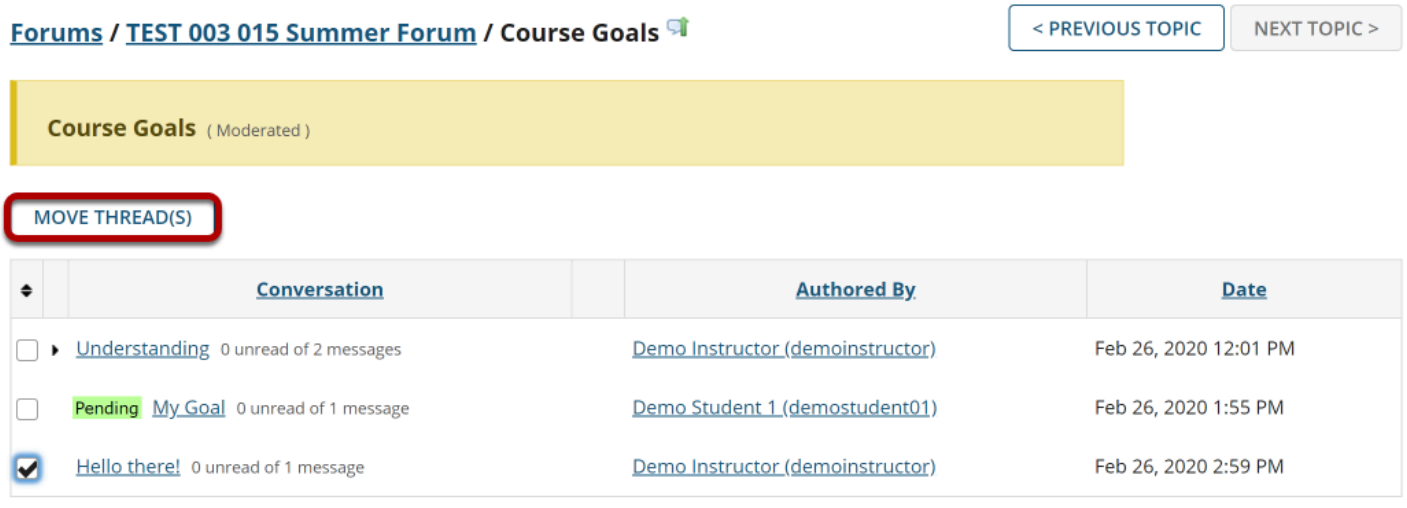
## Footer

## Check the box next to the conversation to be moved.




All conversations, or threads, will be listed.

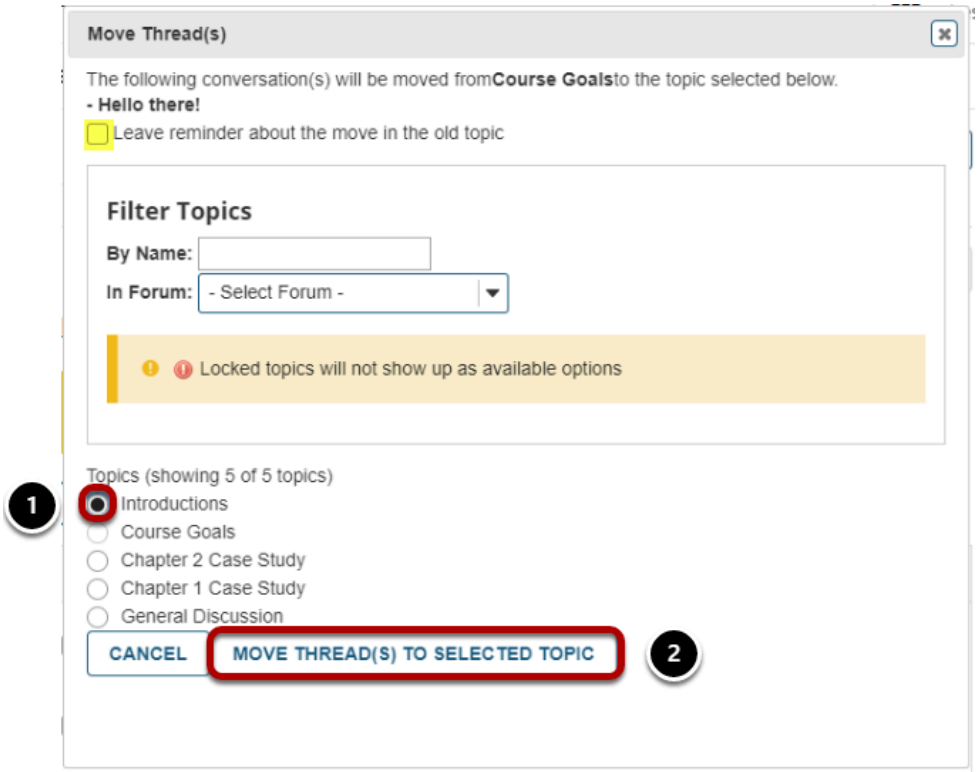
## Select Move Thread(s).




After selecting Move Threads, a box will open with options pertaining to the thread and where it will be moved.

## Footer

# Select options and click Move Thread(s) to Selected Topic.




The available topics will be shown.

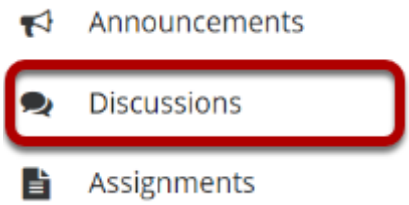
1. Select the topic where you would like to move the thread.
2. Click **Move Thread(s) to Selected Topic** to continue.

*Tip: You may optionally select the check box to leave a reminder about the move in the old topic.*

## Footer

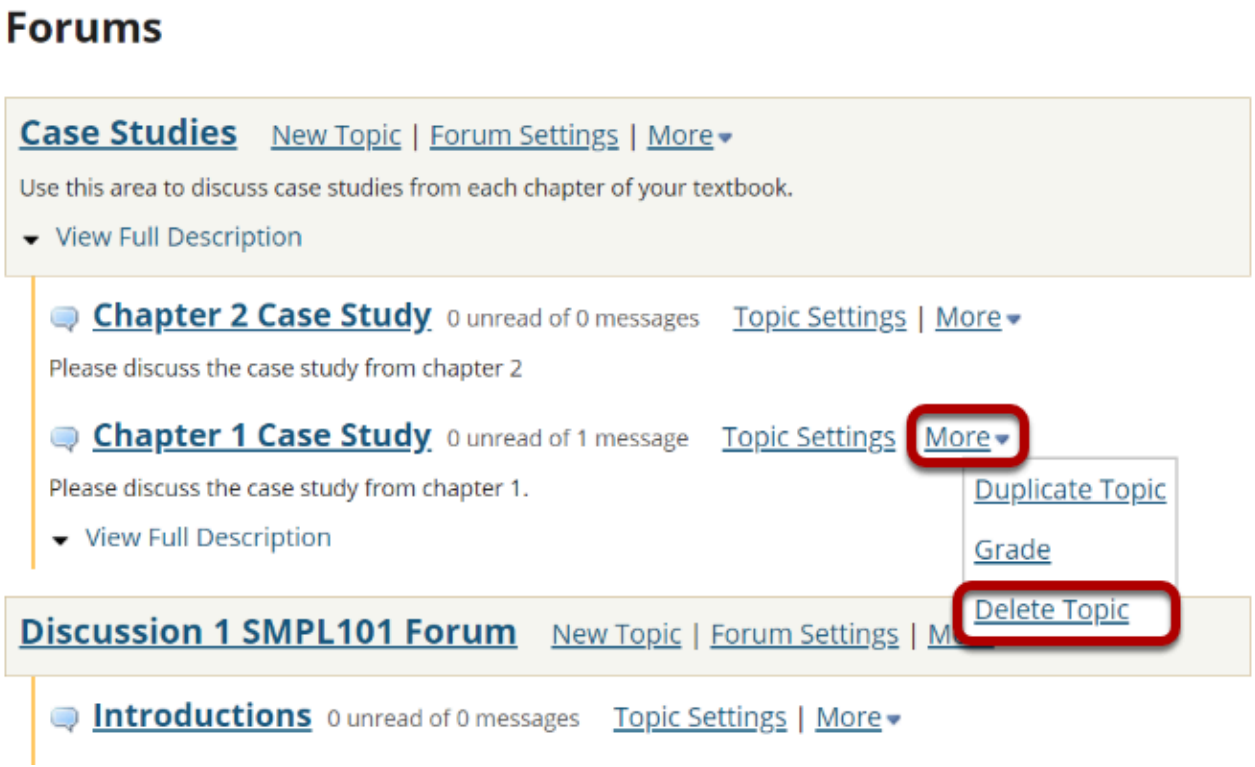
# How do I delete a topic?

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu of your site.

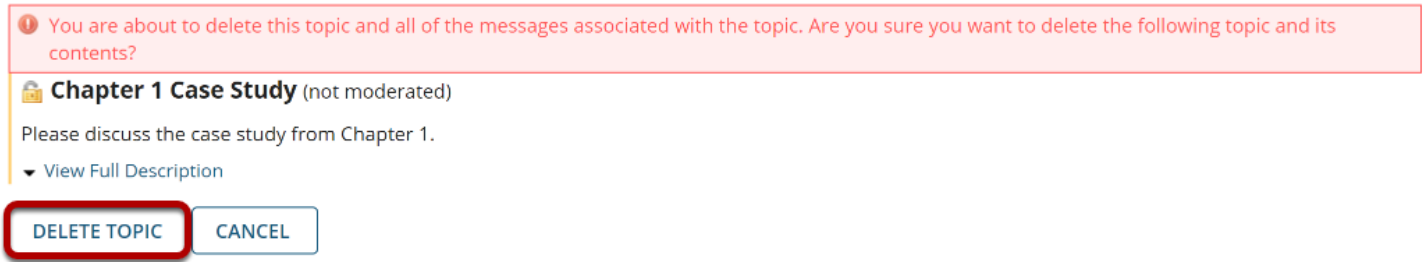
## Select Delete Topic from the More drop-down menu.




Click the **More** link next to the topic you want to delete, then chose the **Delete Topic** option from the drop-down menu.

## Footer

## Confirm deletion.

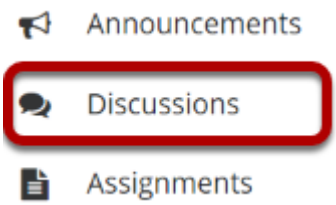



You will be prompted to confirm the deletion. If you are sure that you want to delete the topic and all of the messages within it, click the **Delete Topic** button.

## Footer

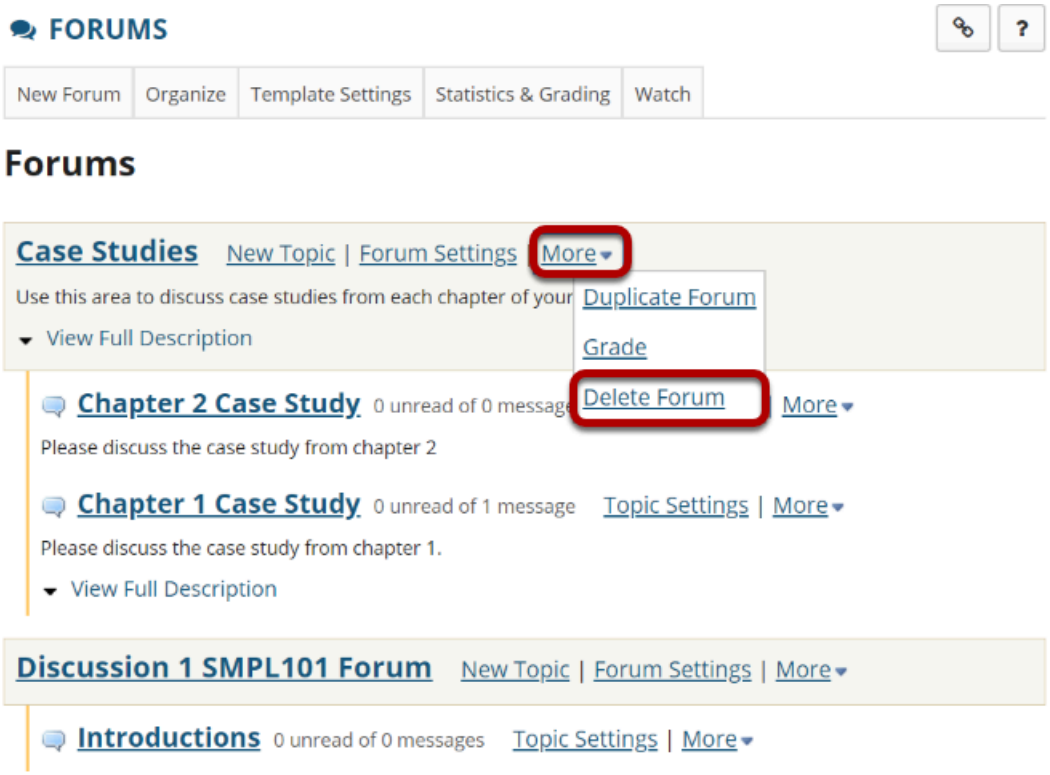
# How do I delete a discussion?

## Go to Discussions.




Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu of your site.

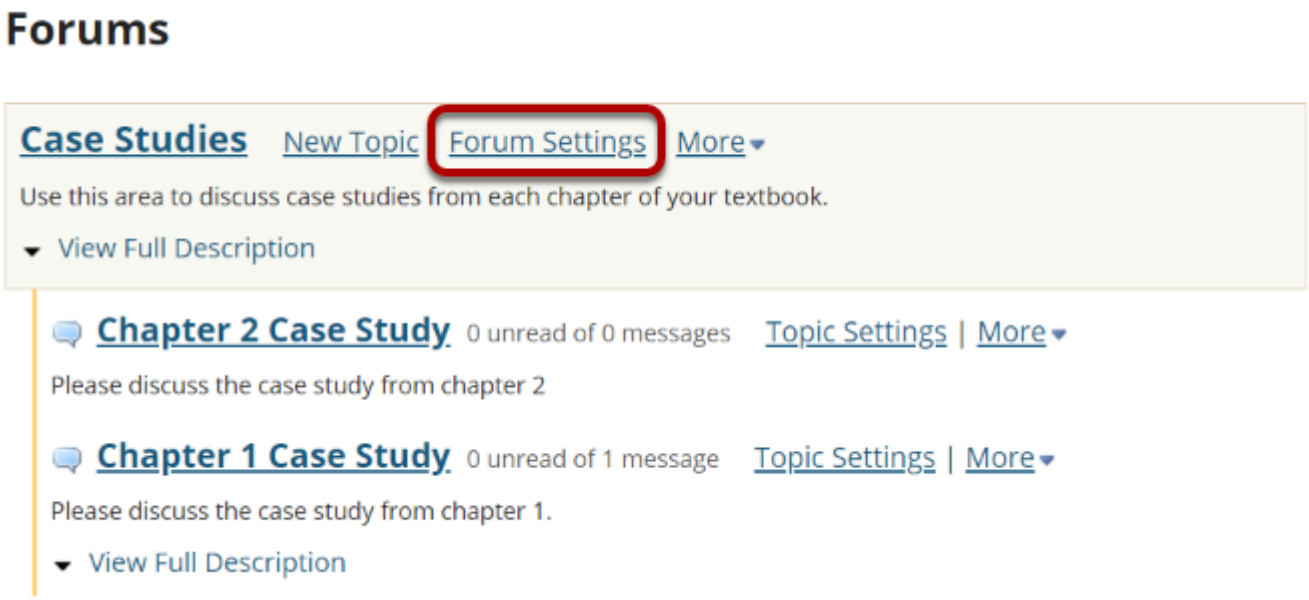
## Select Delete discussion from the More drop-down menu.




Click the **More** link next to the discussion you want to delete, then chose the **Delete Forum** option from the drop-down menu.

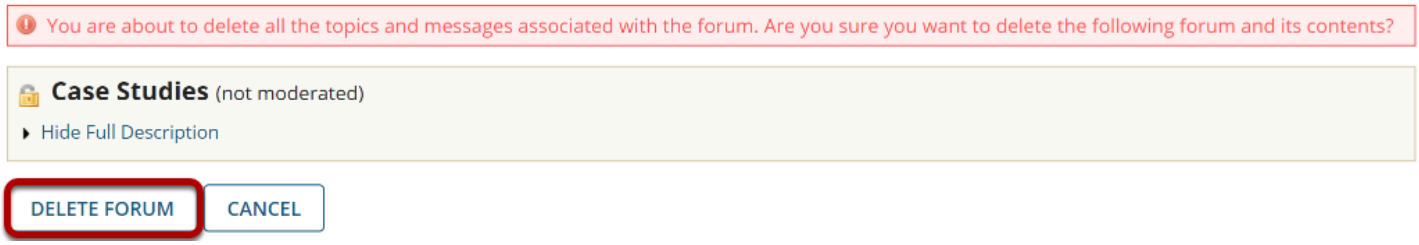
## Footer

**You can also click Forum Settings next to the discussion you want to delete.**




**Then scroll down to bottom of page and click Delete Forum.**

## Confirm deletion.



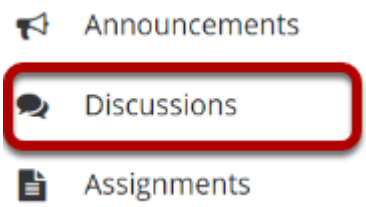

Deleting a discussion will remove the discussion and everything associated with it, including all topics and conversations. If you are sure you want to delete the discussion, click **Delete Forum** to remove it from the site.

## Footer

# How do I modify discussion template settings?

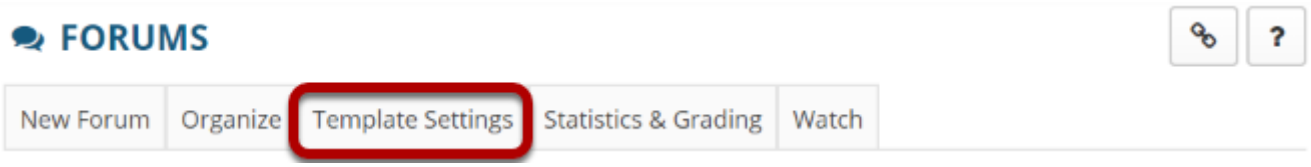
**Template Settings** control the default settings of each created discussion. These settings can be overridden for a specific discussion or topic, but must be manually changed after the default settings template is created.

## Go to Discussions.

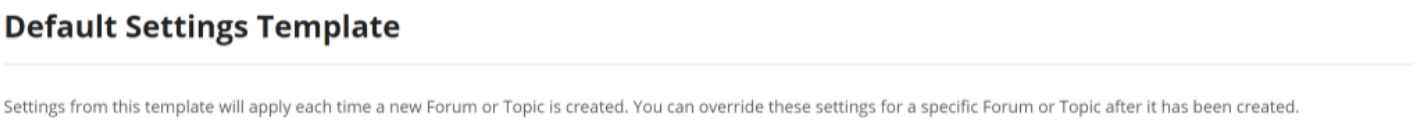



Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu of your site.

## Click Template Settings.



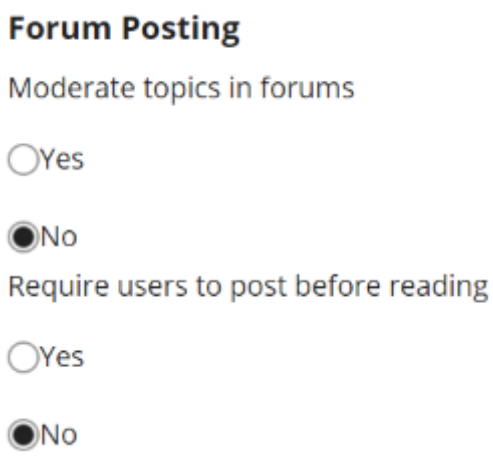

## Configure default settings.




The default settings template allows you configure the default settings for all new Discussion and Topics in this site.

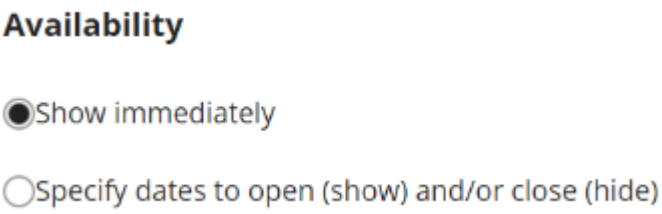
## Footer

## Choose Discussion Posting settings.



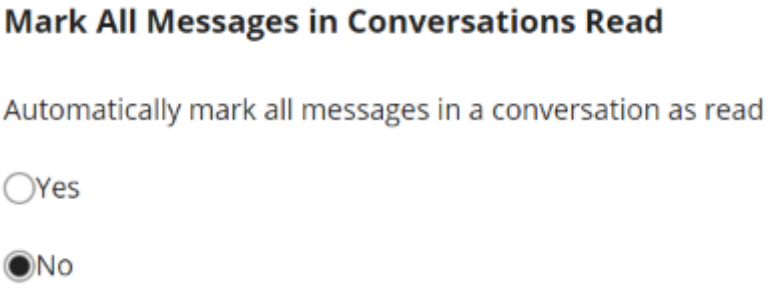

Template Settings allow the option for all topics in Discussions to be moderated. There is also an option that requires users to post before reading.

## Choose Availability settings.




Template Settings allow the option for all Discussions to be shown immediately after they are created or based on specified open (show) and close (hide) dates.

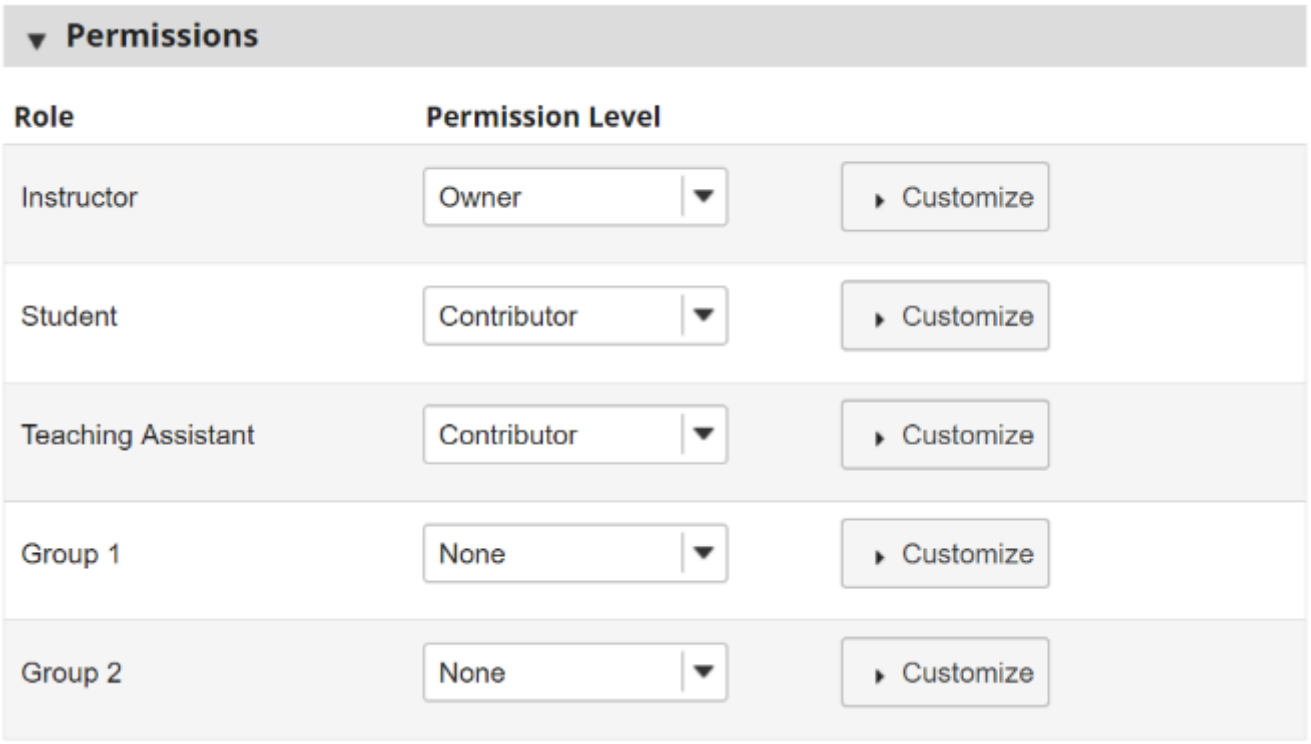
## Choose if messages are marked "read."




Template Settings allow the option for conversations to be marked read automatically.

## Footer

## Select role permissions.




Template Settings allow the option to select permission levels within Discussions based on user roles or groups within the site. User roles can be given the title of Author, Contributor, None, Nonediting Author, Owner, Reviewer, and Custom. In the Customize drop-down menu, the check boxes are automatically selected based on the permission level selected. If the check boxes are manually chosen, this fulfills the Custom Permission Level.

*Note: You may see different roles depending on whether your site is a course site or a project site, and whether or not there are any groups or custom roles in your site.*

## Click Save.

Click **Save** to save your settings (or **Cancel** to continue without saving).

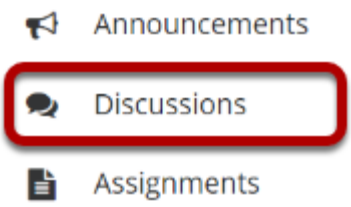
## Footer

# How do I watch or subscribe to Discussions?

In order to stay notified of recent posts on a discussion, the Notifications option is helpful.

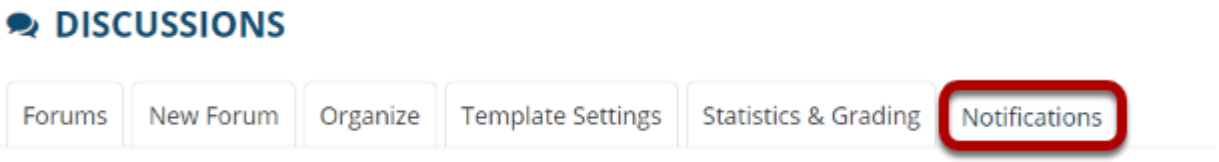
*Note: New post notifications will be sent to the user's external/institutional email address, not via the Messages tool.*

## Go to Discussion.

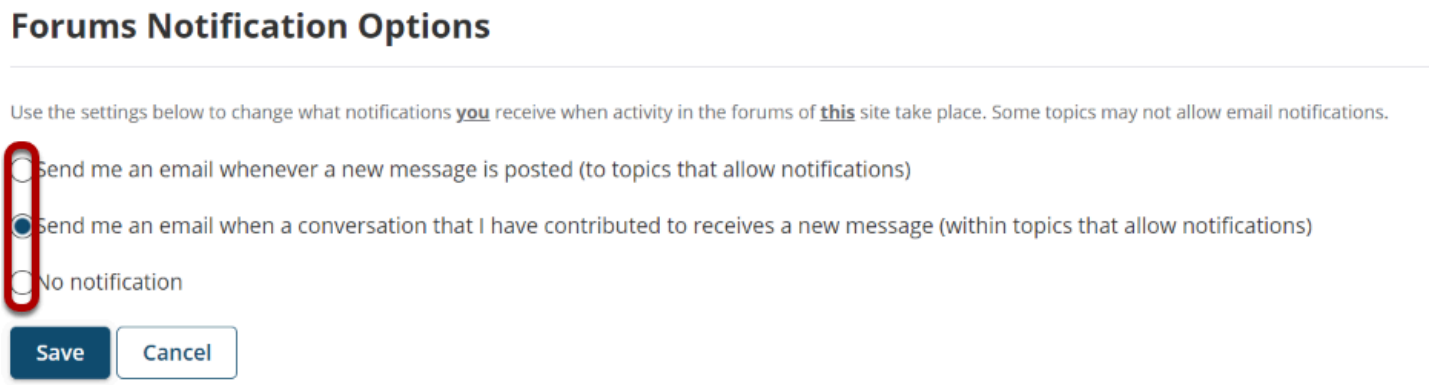



Select the Discussions tool from the Tool Menu of your site.

## Click Notifications.




## Choose your notification preference.




## Footer

Select whether an email is desired for **whenever a new message is posted** on the Discussion, for **every new message posted on a conversation that the user has contributed to**, or to simply **turn off all notifications**.

## Click Save.

## Footer