

University of Sydney Online Learning Guide

Communication tools

There are three types of communication tools in the LMS. In this document, we'll explain how to participate in each of them:



Threaded topics: A traditional online discussion where you can post and reply to messages. Replies that are associated with the same post are grouped together, creating message threads that can be expanded and collapsed. This is like a conversation.



Class blogs: A more collaborative space, where class members post a chronological series of entries on a particular topic. They can then add comments to any blog entry. This is like class members giving presentations which other class members can respond.



Journal entries: A place for your own writing. Journals can be kept private between you and your Lecturer or shared with the class, depending on the settings the lecturer has used. If shared, comments from readers may or may not be possible depending on these settings.

There's also a section on [Troubleshooting](#) any problems you may have while undertaking any of these tasks.

Before you begin

Preparing to participate in a discussion

[Find an appropriate workspace and/or computer](#)

When you want to take part in a discussion, find a computer where you will be able to post your discussion message from and log in to USYD eLearning. To ensure that your browser is properly configured for using the LMS:

- Login to USYD eLearning and go to your My eLearning sites page.
- In the top-right corner, you'll see a "Check Browser" link.
- Click on this link and follow the instructions.

[Check your browser](#)

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[Check pop-up blockers](#)

Ensure that all popup blockers have been turned off. For more information see Troubleshooting: Popup blocking software.

Problems?

If you are having any difficulties, consult the section on [Troubleshooting](#) at the end of this document.

Locating, reading and navigating messages

To find all the discussion topics for your unit of study, click on the link called 'Discussions' in the course menu on the left-hand side of the screen. The next screen you see will list the titles of all the discussion topics that are open to you. These may be organised into three different types of discussions: Threaded, Blog or Journal.

Locating messages

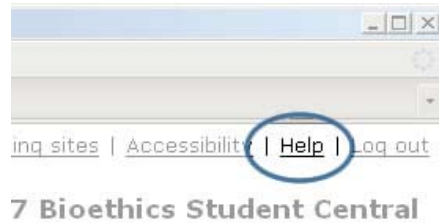
You can use either of the two buttons at the top of the screen to see messages: 'All topics' will show you a listing of all the topics you can read, and 'All my posts' will show you all the messages you have sent to the discussion forum. Alternatively, you can click on the name of the topic you want to read or post to, and see the posts that are there already.

It is a good idea to take some time to look through the different screens and become familiar with the different ways the posts in the topics can be displayed..

There are quite a few different settings that your lecturer can use when setting up discussion topics. When you click on the title of a topic, the details of how this particular topic works are listed on the right-hand side at the top of the screen:

- The topic type
- Whether it is graded
- Whether there a peer review function enabled
- Any posting restrictions on the topic
- Who has access to the topic
- Whether users are named or anonymous in this topic

If it isn't clear what any of these mean you can check them in the help at the top right-hand corner of your screen.



To locate messages

- To locate all messages for a particular topic, click the topic title.
- To locate all the messages that you have posted, click **All My Posts**. Note this will include the messages that you posted, as well as your threaded replies and your blog comments.
- To locate all messages for all topics, click **All Topics**.

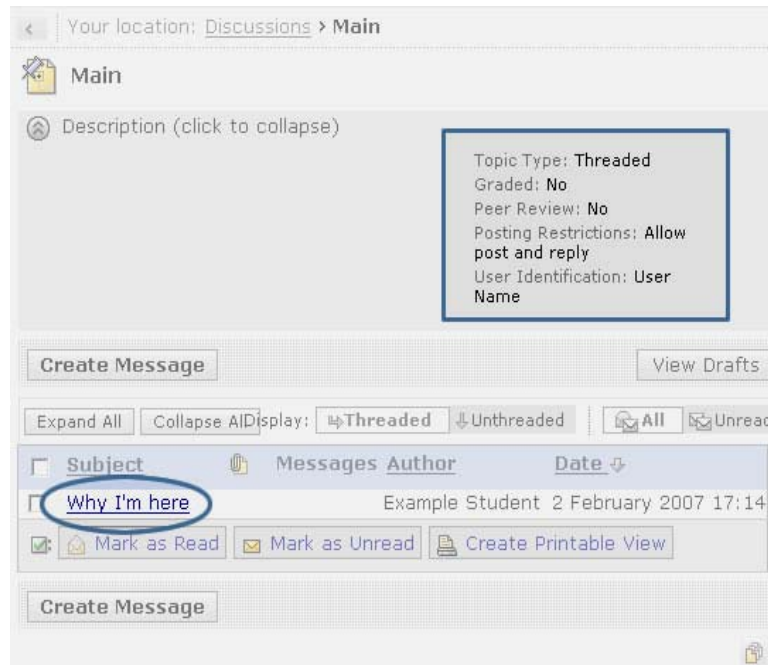
To locate new messages

- To locate new messages for a particular topic, next to the topic title, click **New**.
- To locate new messages for all topics, next to *All Topics*, click **New**.
- To locate new messages posted in reply to your messages, next to *All My Posts*, click **New Replies**. Both comments and replies are included.

Reading and writing messages

1. Threaded messages

In a threaded discussion messages are organised by their subject lines. There are many different ways to navigate though threaded messages. You can choose which view you prefer. To read the initial message, click the message subject (marked with an oval in the image below).



Note the list on the top right of the screen which shows the settings and instructions for the way you are to use this discussion tool that your lecturer has selected. You can get more help with these by clicking on the help function on the top right of the screen.

[Reading messages](#)

To read the individual messages click on the title of each message (eg 'why I'm here' in the screen above), and the message will appear in a popup window. Any replies that have been made to the message will appear below it, and clicking on the titles will show the replies one at a time. You may prefer to click the button called 'Display complete thread', which will compile the messages and make them all available in one screen.

Clicking on the small plus sign to the left of the message subject will display all the messages in that thread.

Clicking on the small yellow plus sign to the right of the message subject will compile all the messages in that thread.

Writing messages

- To reply to an existing message, click on the message title (eg 'why I'm here' in the screen above, and then on 'Reply' in the pop-up window.
- To post a new message on this subject click on the 'Create message' button.
 - If you click on 'Enable html creator' in the top left-hand corner of the little box you will get the option to create formatted text, add links, and insert equations
 - You can add an attachment to send with your message by clicking on 'add attachments' and browsing to find a file on your own computer.
- You have the option to '**save** as draft' any message or reply that you create using the button on the bottom right of the creation screen. This means that you can come back and edit it before it becomes visible to anyone else.

Editing messages

If you saved a message as a draft, you can edit it and then post it to the topic.

- From the topic that contains the draft message, click **View Drafts**.
- Under **Name**, click the subject line.
- You can edit the subject and message, insert an equation, and/or add attachments. For more information, see *Writing Messages above*.
- If you want to preview your message, click **Preview**.
- Do one of the following:
 - To save the message again as a draft, click **Save**.
 - To post the message, click **Post Now**.

Your lecturer may also have given you the option of editing any of your own messages that have been already posted. If you have this option you will see an 'Edit message' button when you open a message that you have created. When you have edited it, click on 'post' and the new message will replace the old one.

There are several other functions that may or may not be available in a threaded discussion, including peer reviews. To rate a message from another student, read the message then click on 'Review this message', select a rating and Save. To view all ratings for a message (if these have been made available by your lecturer), click **View All Peer Reviews**. For more information, see [Using Peer Review](#).

Forwarding threaded messages

If your lecturer has set up the email tool in the site you may have the option to forward a threaded message to other course members, thus continuing the discussion with selected course members. The messages are forwarded using the Mail tool, which is where the messages will be viewed by the recipients.

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Note: If a message is locked, you can view it, but you cannot forward it.

- From the message, click Forward.
 - Select the recipients of the message by doing one of the following. Use the To field for your primary recipients, the CC field for those who you want to forward a copy of the message to, and the BCC field for those who you want to forward the message to but hide their names from other recipients.
 - To enter recipient names manually, enter the name in the To, CC, or BCC text box. Use a semicolon to separate names.
 - To browse for recipients:
 - Click Browse for Recipients.
 - Locate the recipients and select the text box under the To, CC, or BCC column.
 - If you need to navigate to the next page of recipients, click the Next Page icon.
 - Click Save.
- If you want to mark your message as high priority, select High priority.
- If you want to make changes to the message, you can edit the subject and message, insert an equation or add an attachment. For more information, see Posting Messages.
- If you want to preview the message, click Preview.
- Do one of the following:
 - If you are not ready to forward the message, but you have made changes that you want to save, click Save as Draft.
 - To forward the message, click Send.

2. [Blog messages](#)

Blogs in WebCT are provided as a way for the class to have more in-depth discussions. If your lecturer has set some discussion topics as blog topics they will operate in a slightly different way from usual discussion forums: there is a space to make a post and then there is a space where other people can comment on that post. It is like someone giving a presentation and others replying, rather than a threaded discussion which is more like a general conversation.

How this works depends on the settings your lecturer has used, and you can view these by clicking on 'discussions' in the course menu on the left, and then on the title of the blog. Note the list on the top right of the screen which shows the settings and instructions for the way you are to use this discussion tool that your lecturer has selected. You can get more help with these by clicking on the help function on the top right of the screen.

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Reading a blog topic

- To read the individual messages click on the title of each blog, and the messages will appear.
- Any comments that that have been made on each message can be read by clicking on the button called 'Comments', and they will appear in a pop-up window.
- You may prefer to select at least one message and click the button called 'Create printable view', which will compile the messages with the comments, and make them all available in one screen.

Writing to a blog topic

- To post a new message on a blog click on the 'Create message' button.
- To reply to an existing message, click on the message title
 - Click on 'Reply' in the pop-up window.

Your lecturer may have allowed Peer review of a blog. For more information, see [Using Peer Review](#).

3. Journal entries

If there is a Journal topic visible on your screen this is for you to keep your own diary-style record. If you click on the topic it will show you which journals you have access to. Journals are commonly kept private so you may only be able to see your own, but the settings that the lecturer has decided on and instructions for the way you are to use this communication tool will be visible in the top right-hand side of the screen when you click on the title of the journal. You can get more help with these by clicking on the help function on the top right of the screen.

Your own journal

- To read your journal simply click on the title of your journal.
- To write a new entry, then click on the button called 'Create new entry'.

Reading other journals

Depending on your lecturer's settings, you may be able to see the journals of other students and may be able to comment on them or rate them. To read another Student's journal, under **Name**, click the name of the student. To return to your journal, click **My Journal** at the top of the list.

To rate a journal entry from another student, read the entry then click on 'Review this message', select a rating and Save. To view all ratings for a message (if this has been made available by your lecturer), click **View All Peer Reviews**. For more information, see [Using Peer Review](#).

Viewing and downloading attachments

If the message includes an attached file that you want to view or download, you will be able to do that by clicking the file name next to the word 'Attachments'; below the body of the message.

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Problems?

If you are having any difficulties, consult the section on [Troubleshooting](#) at the end of this document.

Managing messages

[Navigating multiple pages](#)

If there are a lot of posts, you may need to use the arrows at the bottom of the screen to navigate between pages.

[Marking threaded messages as Unread or Read](#)

From the threaded messages, select the messages you want to mark as unread or read:

- To mark selected messages, select the check box next to each message.
- To mark all messages on the page, in the table heading row, select the check box next to Subject.
- To select messages on several pages, click the Paging Preferences icon and change the number of messages per page to display all the messages on one page.
- Click 'Mark as Unread' or 'Mark as Read'.

[Sorting messages](#)

You can sort messages in ascending order (A to Z, or 1 to 9) or descending order (Z to A, or 9 to 1). An up-arrow next to the sort criterion indicates that items are currently sorted in ascending order. A down-arrow next to the column title indicates that items are currently sorted in descending order.

Note: Items remain in the specified sort order until you go to another screen.

From the messages screen, do one of the following:

- To sort threaded messages, click the title of the column by which you want to sort items.
- To sort blog messages, next to Sort by, click Date, Author, or Rating.
- To sort journal entries, next to Sort by, click Date or Rating.

If the items were not previously sorted by that criterion, they are now sorted in ascending order. If the items were previously sorted by that column, they are now sorted in descending order. To reverse the sort order, click the column title again.

Problems?

If you are having any difficulties, consult the section on [Troubleshooting](#) at the end of this document.

Printing single messages

- From the messages screen, click the subject line of the message you want to print.
- Click Print.

Printing and Saving several Messages

You can compile messages and then print or save them. You can also use the compiled list to read and respond to the messages. After you have compiled messages, they are marked as read.

1. Locate the messages.
2. Select the messages that you want to print or save:

For threaded messages:

- To select specific messages, select the check box next to each message.
- To select all messages on the current page, in the table heading row, select the check box.

For blog messages and journal entries:

- To select specific messages or entries, select the check box next to the subject.
- To select all messages on the current page, click Select All.

3. Click Create Printable View.

4. If you want to print the compiled messages, click Print.

5. If you want to download the compiled messages, click Save as File.

6. If you want to reply to a message, click Reply. For more information, see [Replying and Commenting on Messages](#).

7. When you are finished viewing the compiled messages, click Close this window.

Problems?

If you are having any difficulties, consult the section on [Troubleshooting](#) at the end of this document.

Using peer review (rating)

Discussion topics can be set by the lecturer to allow peer review. If you are asked to peer review a discussion posting, you will see a button next to the posting called 'review message'. Clicking on it will give you the opportunity to grade the message according to the criteria set by your lecturer. You may also have the opportunity to add a comment that the author of the message can see.

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Reviews may or may not display your name; your lecturer will already have set this.

Problems?

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Troubleshooting

What to do if you have trouble

1. Browser configuration issues

See the section on "[Check Your Browser](#)" at the start of this document.

2. Javascript errors

If you encounter a JavaScript error, close down your browser completely, and restart it.

3. Pop-up blocking software

If you have pop-up blocking software installed on your computer, you may not be able to create a reply to a message or compile messages as these appear in a new window. (Pop-up blocking applications prevent new windows from opening.)

For the latest information on identifying and disabling pop-up blockers, go to http://www.usyd.edu.au/elearning/student/trouble/popup_blockers.shtml