

# How to...

## Contribute to an online discussion

Online Learning



The discussion forum is a shared virtual space where students and tutors can communicate online.

Like email, it allows asynchronous communication, meaning that discussions do not have to take place in real time, indeed they can extend over days or weeks, depending on the nature of the learning activity. The discussion forum in WebCT has some advantages over email in that postings can more easily be arranged into topics, subjects and threads. This makes it possible for a number of people to take part in a discussion without losing the thread.

### Where to find Discussions?

The Discussions icon is usually found on the Facilities page or the Homepage. Clicking the icon will show a complete list of Topics for discussion.

### New to WebCT?

WebCT is an Internet based online learning environment that has been adopted by Brookes to enhance its teaching and learning. The *WebCT Student Miniguide*, available online or from the Computer Services Help Desks contains further details.

### Access

You can use either Internet Explorer or Netscape to access WebCT, both on, or off, campus.

<http://webct.brookes.ac.uk>

### Help

[webct.brookes.ac.uk/help](http://webct.brookes.ac.uk/help)

### Sample Topic page

**Discussions**

[Compose message](#) ... [Search](#) [Topic settings](#)

Click on a topic name to see its messages.

Topic	Unread	Total	Status
<a href="#">Finding and evaluating web resources</a>	11	11	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Classroom assistants</a>	2	2	public, unlocked
<a href="#">eModerating</a>	23	26	public, locked
<a href="#">Feedback on training course</a>	16	17	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Archived Managing Online Discussions</a>	71	71	public, locked
<a href="#">Archived Guided Web Search</a>	99	110	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Managing online discussions</a>	4	4	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Enhanced student learning</a>	0	1	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Main</a>	49	49	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Notes</a>	7	8	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Archived Classroom Assistants</a>	33	51	public, anonymous, unlocked
<a href="#">Study group 1</a>	0	0	private, unlocked
<b>All</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>350</b>	---

Topic locked – contents may still be read but no new postings may be made.

Public, unlocked discussion, open to all course participants.

Private discussions- visible only to selected participants.

### Discussion Topics

Topics can be public or private, locked or unlocked. If a topic is public it is accessible to all students and tutors on a course. If a topic is private, it means that it is restricted to selected participants on

the course. Your tutor will advise you on whether this facility is in use in your course, if unable to access a discussion which you believe you should be able to access, contact your course tutor. A topic can also be locked by the tutor, meaning that its contents can still be read but that no further postings can be made to it. Your tutor may use this facility to set time limits on discussion activities.

## How to join in a discussion

The screenshot shows a discussion forum interface for the topic "Finding and evaluating web resources". The interface includes a navigation bar with buttons for "Compose message", "Update listing", "Search", "Mark all as read", and "Message options". Below this is a display control section with options for "All", "Unread", "Threaded", and "Unthreaded". A "Select topic" dropdown menu is set to "Finding and evaluating web resources" with a "Go" button. The main content area is a table of messages:

Status	Subject	Author	Date
▼ 5/5	Reflecting on the activit...		
✉	Reflecting on the activit...	Richard Francis	April 29, 2004 3:13pm
✉	Re: Reflecting on the act...	Paul Jenk	April 30, 2004 3:07pm
✉	Re: Reflecting on the act...	Marion Temp	April 30, 2004 3:08pm
▶ 1/1	Multi choice		
▶ 1/1	quiz on 30th		

At the bottom, there is an "Actions" section with buttons for "Compile", "Mark as read", and "Mark as unread".

Callouts in the image explain the following features:

- Ensures that the most recent postings are visible:** Points to the "Unthreaded" display option.
- Active display settings, all messages displayed in threaded view:** Points to the "Threaded" display option.
- Subject message:** Points to the "Subject" column header.
- Threaded discussion:** Points to the "Re: Reflecting on the act..." message row.
- Download and print selected messages:** Points to the "Compile" button in the Actions section.

Click on the message you wish to read. Use the **Reply** or **Quote** button to respond to a message. **Reply** gives you a blank box, within which you can write your message, **Quote** gives you the original text which you can then include as part of your reply. When you have written your message **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU CLICK Post**. (If you close the message window by mistake, before posting, the message will be lost)

*Instructions continued overleaf*



**Reply to Message: 951**

Topic: Finding and evaluating web resources

Subject: Re: Reflecting on the activity

Message:

Type your reply here

You must click Post to send your messages

Height of edit area: 12 ▾ Resize ...  Don't wrap text /  Wrap text

HTML editor ... Equation: Create equation ▾ Equation editor

Attachments:  Browse... Attach file

If you wish to attach a file to your message, use the browse button to locate

There are no files attached.

Post Preview Cancel

To view your reply as part of the thread click **Update Listing**.

## Online netiquette

- Observe standard norms of polite discourse. No 'flaming', no use of abusive or discriminatory language. Be respectful of others' beliefs
- Keep postings concise
- Make your point in your posting, not in an attachment. Attachments should only be used to give members of your group access to supporting/related information to that in your posting, or to supply information that is not text-based (e.g., graphs, charts, images, mathematical formulae, etc)
- Use the message subject header and use it wisely. The subject header should contain information that describes the content of the posting and who it is addressed to (e.g., 'to all', or 'for those with a science background' or 'for those interested in...' etc)
- Address yourself to specific people and use their names at the start of your posting. E.g., 'Tony, you said that...'
- Some things are best discussed in private, rather than 'in front of the whole class'. Use email for this

