



Purpose: Forums is a communication tool that can be used to facilitate asynchronous discussion amongst site members. WebLearn sites that use the **Forums** tool show a synoptic **Forums** window on the site's Home page; participants can see how many unread discussion forum messages they have.

Default permissions: Site members with an **access** role are able to read forums and topics, and can post and reply to messages; those with a **maintain** or **contribute** role are also able to create, edit and delete forums, topics and messages.

Typical use & good practice tips: The **Forums** tool is used to support discussion and collaboration within a site. Make sure that site members know what the tool is to be used for and how it will be used. A forum needs to be "seeded" with at least one topic and a posting within the topic to begin discussion. In general, tutors need to be actively present in discussion fora. Consider setting clear guidelines on behaviour when using **Forums**. The tool can be used to support group work by enabling each group within the site to have its own forum that is not visible to other groups.

If the **Forums** tool is not currently visible in your site, see the guide '**Adding tools to a WebLearn site**' to learn how to turn it on.

This guide will define basic terms, and then show how to create forums, topics and messages.

Other useful step-by-step guides to read in conjunction with this one:

- Using the WYSIWYG HTML editor
- My Workspace – Profile tool
- Site Management – the Site Info tool
- Site Stats

All step-by-step guides are available from weblearn.ox.ac.uk/info

Terminology: Forums, Topics, Threads and Messages

The **Forums** tool can contain any number of separate fora. Each of these fora may in turn contain multiple topics; each topic may have multiple threads. Posting a new thread enables users to contribute messages to that thread.

For example, 'The Great War' and 'The Space Race' could be fora within a WebLearn site dealing with twentieth century events. 'Causes of the Great War', or 'Life in the Trenches' could be topics within 'The Great War' forum. 'Imperialism' and 'Economics' could be two threads under the topic 'Causes of the Great War'.

When fora and topics are being established, a description should be given so that their focus is clear to participants; supporting material such as documents, movies or audio files may be attached for stimulus or for background information. At least one message should be posted in each topic to begin the discussion. Messages can also have attachments. Different fora, topics and threads of discussion can be run concurrently.

The first time the **Forum** tool is turned on it will appear to those with a **maintain** or **contribute** role as shown below, with the following five main links:



Creating a forum

By default, only site members with a **maintain** or **contribute** role are able to create new fora. There are no default forums in the **Forums** tool - nothing will appear in the tool to **access** site members until at least one forum and one topic have been created.

Reset button. Click this if the **Forums** tool needs to be refreshed, but be aware that any unsaved data will be lost.

Click **New Forum** to open the **Forum Settings** screen.



Forum Settings

Required items marked with *

* Forum Title

The Great War

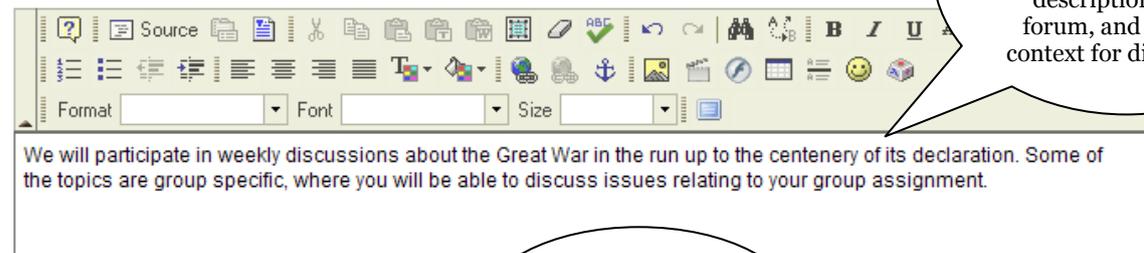
The forum must have a title (up to 75 characters).

Short Description (255 characters max) 170 chars remain

This discussion forum is divided into various topics about the Great War of 1914-1918

Optional - up to 255 characters.

Description



A Description is optional, but recommended in order to provide an in-depth description of the forum, and create a context for discussion.

Attachments

No attachments have been made

Add attachments

Attach any associated information or resources.

If a forum is moderated, postings are approved or denied by the moderator before appearing on the forum page.

Forum Posting

Lock Forum (Disable forum postings) Yes No

Moderate Topics in Forum Yes No

Text Only Forum Yes No

A form can be locked at any time (change this setting to **Yes**), for example if discussion time has expired but you want to allow site members to view the discussion.

Availability

Show - display immediately with no time restriction

Specify Dates - begin display on (optionally) specified Beginning Date/Time; hide display after (optionally) specified Ending Date/Time

Open Date: 5/1/2012 09:00 AM

Close Date: 5/31/2012 12:00 PM

You can choose to have the forum begin and end on specified dates.

Mark Threads Read

Automatically Mark All Messages in a Thread as Read Yes No

If you change this default **No** setting to **Yes**, each time you open the first message in a thread, all messages within that thread are automatically marked as read. (Within a thread itself, there is a manual setting to **Mark All as Read**).

The permissions settings that follow apply to the highlighted role – in this case they are the permission settings for those with an **access** role. If the **maintain** role is selected a different set of permissions will be displayed.

This list contains predefined permission levels. Choose **Custom** from the list to create your own combination of settings if necessary.

We recommend that participants should be allowed to EDIT and DELETE their own postings. Select **Own** in both these columns. (This will change the permission level above to **Custom**)

Permission settings include:

New Forum: Create a new forum.

New Topic: Create a new topic within a forum.

New Response: Post a new message within a topic.

Response to Response: Send a response to a message.

Change Settings: Change the topic settings.

Read: Read topic responses.

Mark as Read: Mark messages as read.

Moderate Postings: Moderate messages posted to forum (only available if **Moderate Topics in Forum** option is also selected). It is not recommended that this right is assigned to the **access** role.

Edit Postings: Use the radio buttons to indicate which postings participants with the permission level can revise (none, their own, or all postings). Take care when assigning this right to the **access** role; it is recommended that all users should at least be able to edit their own postings.

Delete Postings: Use the radio buttons to indicate which postings participants with the permission level can delete (none, their own, or all postings). Take care when assigning this right to the **access** role. When a message has been deleted the following text is displayed, indicating that there has been a deletion (this cannot be removed):

Thread	Authored By	Date
This message has been deleted		



Note: Forum permission settings apply to all subsequently created topics in that forum, but if you modify forum permission settings after topics have been created, you must change the topic permission settings separately.

When finished, click one of the following:

Save: Save your changes.

Save Settings & Add Topic: Save your changes and add a topic to the forum. You will need to add at least one topic so that site members are able to post messages.

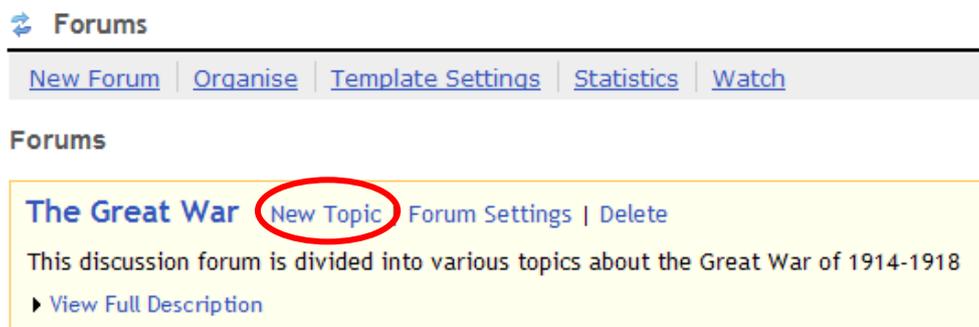
Save Draft: Save your forum as a draft. Forums saved as draft will not be available to site participants. Use this feature frequently if you are adding a lot of text and are not ready to release the posting to the forum.

Cancel: Cancel your changes. Return to the **Forums** screen.

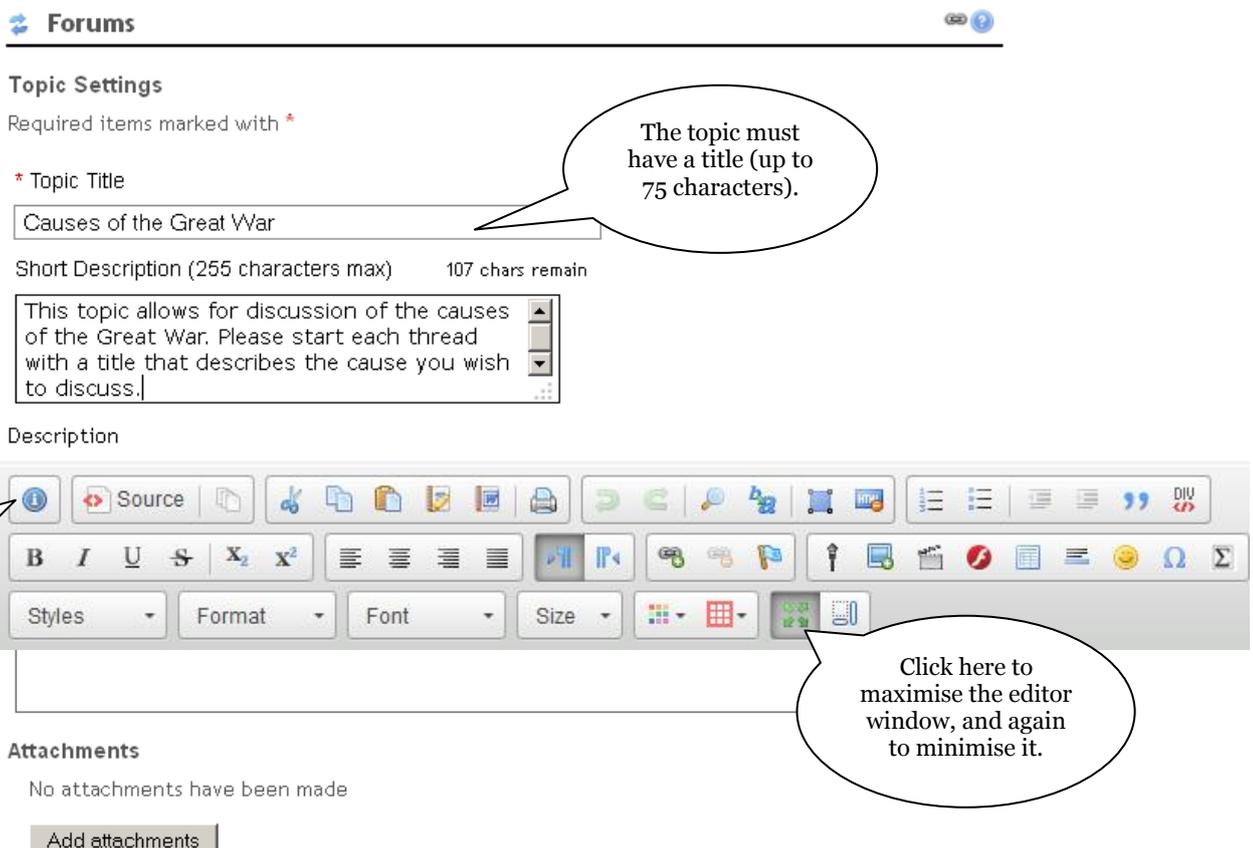
Creating a topic

A forum will not be visible to participants until at least one topic has been added.

To add a topic immediately after creating a forum, click **Save Settings & Add Topic**, or from the Forums page, click **New Topic**.



Either of the above methods displays the **Topics Settings** screen, which is very similar to the **Forum Settings** screen.



The screenshot shows the 'Topics Settings' screen. At the top, there are navigation links: 'New Forum', 'Organise', 'Template Settings', 'Statistics', and 'Watch'. Below this, the 'Topics Settings' section is displayed. The 'Topic Title' field is required and contains the text 'Causes of the Great War'. A callout bubble points to this field with the text: 'The topic must have a title (up to 75 characters)'. The 'Short Description' field is also required and contains the text: 'This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss.' Below this is the 'Description' field, which is a WYSIWYG editor. A callout bubble points to the editor with the text: 'Click here for help with the WYSIWYG editor.' Another callout bubble points to the 'Maximize' button in the editor toolbar with the text: 'Click here to maximise the editor window, and again to minimise it.' At the bottom, there is an 'Attachments' section with the text 'No attachments have been made' and a button to 'Add attachments'.

Topic Posting

Lock Topic (Disable topic postings) Yes No

Moderate Topic Yes No

Availability

Show - display immediately with no time restriction

Specify Dates - begin display on (optionally) specified Beginning Date/Time; hide display after (optionally) specified Ending Date/Time

As with the forum, you can choose to have the topic begin and end on specified dates.

When the full text of a message is displayed to the student, regardless of whether it's in a topic view, conversation view or message view, the message will be marked as read

Mark All Messages in Conversations Read

Automatically mark all messages in a conversation as read

Permissions

This site role:

gets this permission level:

which you can customize below:

<input type="checkbox"/> New Forum	<input type="checkbox"/> Change Settings
<input type="checkbox"/> New Topic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Read
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Response	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mark as Read
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Response to Response	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Postings
Edit Postings	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> None	Delete Postings
<input type="radio"/> Own	<input checked="" type="radio"/> None
<input type="radio"/> All	<input type="radio"/> Own
	<input type="radio"/> All

The permissions displayed for a new topic are copied from those in the parent forum; permissions for topics can be changed on a topic-by-topic basis if desired.

Marking Assignment:

Select a previously-created **Markbook** item, if you want to mark this topic, in which case marks will be automatically stored in the **Markbook**.

When finished, click one of the following:

Save: Save your changes, post the topic, and exit the **Forum Settings** screen. You'll see your newly posted topic within your forum on the **Forums** screen.

Save Draft: Save the topic as a draft. Return to the **Forums** screen.

Save Settings & Add Topic: Save changes, and add another topic to the forum. This opens another **Topic Settings** screen, and allows you to create an additional topic without returning to the **Forums** screen.

Cancel: Cancel your changes. Return to the **Forums** screen.

You now have a forum, containing one topic.

The screenshot shows a forum interface. At the top, there's a 'Forums' header with navigation links: 'New Forum', 'Organise', 'Template Settings', 'Statistics', and 'Watch'. Below this, the forum name 'The Great War' is displayed with a 'New Topic | Forum Settings | Delete' link. A callout bubble points to the forum title, saying 'Open and close dates have been specified.' Another callout bubble points to the forum name, saying 'Forum'. Below the forum title, there's a description: 'This discussion forum is divided into various topics about the Great War of 1914-1918' and a 'View Full Description' link. A callout bubble points to the word 'topics', saying 'Topic'. Below the forum description, there's a topic titled 'Causes of the Great War' with '(0 messages - 0 unread)' and 'Topic Settings | Delete' links. A description for the topic follows: 'This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss.'

Creating a thread

Click the title of the topic for which you'd like to create a thread of discussion. The thread is initiated by a message which is created in the text editor window.

The screenshot shows a forum topic page. At the top, there's a 'Forums' header with a 'Display Entire Message' link and a printer icon. A callout bubble points to the word 'Topic' in the breadcrumb trail, saying 'Topic'. Another callout bubble points to the 'Post New Thread' link, saying 'Click Post New Thread. The Compose Forum Message screen will open.' Below the breadcrumb trail, the topic title 'Causes of the Great War' is displayed with '(0 messages - 0 unread)' and 'Post New Thread | Topic Settings | Delete' links. A description for the topic follows: 'Each group will discuss a different cause that contributed to the declaration of war.' At the bottom, it says 'There are no messages posted.'

Compose Forum Message

The Great War / Causes of the Great War

This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss.

Required items marked with *

* Title

Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria

A title is required. This will become the title of the thread.

Message

Word Count: (16)



Click here for help with the WYSIWYG editor.

Discuss the details of this particular issue and how it contributed to causing the Great War.

Compose the message and add any attachments.

Attachments

No attachments have been made

Add attachments

Post Message

Cancel

Click Post Message when finished, or Cancel to cancel the message without saving it.

Note: If the forum or topic is moderated, the message will appear as Pending until approved by a moderator.

Display Entire Message

Forums / The Great War / Causes of the Great War

< Previous Topic | Next Topic >

Causes of the Great War (2 messages - 0 unread)

This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss.

Click on any column heading to sort the threads in ascending or descending order.

Thread	Authored By	Date
Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria (1 message - 0 unread)	IT Team (IT Team)	06-06-2012 4:12 PM
Territory in the Balkans (1 message - 0 unread)	IT Team (IT Team)	06-06-2012 4:12 PM

The thread will be listed under the topic. Topics may have more than one thread.

Posting a response

1. Click the title of the relevant topic.
2. Find and click the subject of the relevant message.

Unread messages appear in the summary **Forums** window on the site's Home page. **Mark All as Read** if you wish to clear the summary view.

The **Profile** photo of the person posting the message is displayed automatically.

The number of people who have read this message

Forums

[Reply to Thread](#) [Mark All as Read](#)

Forums / The Great War / Causes of the Great War / Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria

View

Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria
 Jill Fresen (oucs0084) (06-06-2012 4:12 PM) [Read by: 3](#) [Reply](#)

[Email](#) | [Mark](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

Discuss the details of this particular issue and how it contributed to causing the Great War.

3. Click **Reply to Thread** (to reply to the first message in the thread) or **Reply** (to reply to this particular message).
4. In the **Message** box, use the WYSIWYG editor to compose your reply.

Forums

Reply to Forum Thread

The Great War / Causes of the Great War

This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss.

Replying to: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria Jill Fresen (oucs0084) (06-06-2012 4:12 PM)

[Hide message you are replying to](#)

Discuss the details of this particular issue and how it contributed to causing the Great War.

Required items marked with *

* Reply Title
 Re: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria

Message Word Count: (0)

Attachments

No attachments have been made

[Add attachments](#)

[Post Message](#) [Cancel](#)

This button allows you to insert a quote of the original message.

Click here for help with the WYSIWYG editor.

Click **Post Message** when finished, or **Cancel** to cancel the message without saving it.

Notes:

- If the forum or topic is moderated, the message will appear as **Pending** until approved by a moderator.
- Notification of a forum posting will be sent via email if your intended recipients (site members) have enabled the **Forums** > [Watch](#) option (see later in this guide).

Deleting a message

By default, only those with a **maintain** or **contribute** role are able to delete messages. If you do not see the options shown in the following figures, you do not have deletion rights.

To delete a message (if you have the required permission), open the message and click on Delete:



The screenshot shows a forum interface. At the top, it says "Forums". Below that, the breadcrumb trail is "Forums / The Great War / Causes of the Great War / Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria". There are navigation links for "< Previous Thread" and "Next Thread >". A description of the topic is provided: "This topic allows for discussion of the causes of the Great War. Please start each thread with a title that describes the cause you wish to discuss." Below the description is a toolbar with buttons for "Reply to Message", "Reply to Thread", "Delete", "Edit", "Mark", "Email", and "Copy link". The "Delete" button is circled in red. Below the toolbar is a message header for "Re: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria" by Jill Fresen (oucs0084) on 06-06-2012 at 4:19 PM. The message content begins with "In my opinion this was the main cause of the war for the following reasons..."

When a message has been deleted the following text is displayed, indicating that there has been a deletion (it is not possible to remove this placeholder text):

Thread	Authored By	Date
This message has been deleted		

By default, those with the **maintain** or **contribute** role are also able to delete a forum or topic entirely, which will remove all associated messages.

Linking to a message

At the message level, you can find the URL of the message, by clicking on



The URL for this message will appear. You can copy this and paste it into another application in order to link directly to this message, for example from an email message.



The screenshot shows the same forum thread as before. The "Copy link" button in the toolbar is circled in red. A tooltip is visible over the button, titled "Copy link for pasting into email", which contains the URL "https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/portal/site/feff0f2...". A red arrow points to the URL in the tooltip. The message content below the header is "Discuss the details of this particular issue and how it contributed to causing the Great War."

E-mail notifications

The **Forums** tool has a [Watch](#) facility which can be set by the user, to specify what sort of notifications they would like to receive when new messages are posted:



The screenshot shows the Forums tool interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for [New Forum](#), [Organise](#), [Template Settings](#), [Statistics](#), and [Watch](#). The [Watch](#) link is circled in red. Below the navigation bar, the Forums section is displayed, showing a forum titled "The Great War" and a topic titled "Causes of the Great War". Below the topic, there are "Watch Forums Options" with three radio buttons: "Notify me by email whenever a new message is posted", "Notify me by email when a thread that I have contributed to receives a new message" (which is selected), and "No notification". There are "Save Settings" and "Cancel" buttons at the bottom. A speech bubble points to the selected option, stating: "This is the default, which the user can change for the forums tool in a particular site".

Group work

It is possible to establish fora or topics for group discussion. For example, if there were three groups within the site, a discussion area could be established for each group to develop their ideas before sharing them with the rest of the class. Somebody who was a member of Group 3 would see a screen similar to that shown below. Topics created for Groups 1 and 2 are not visible to this person.



The screenshot shows the Forums tool interface for a user in Group 3. It displays the same "The Great War" forum and "Causes of the Great War" topic as the previous screenshot. Below the topic, there is a new topic titled "Group 3" with 0 messages and 0 unread. The description for this topic is "This topic is for members of Group 3 only." The "Group 3" topic is highlighted in yellow.

To do this, follow these steps:

1. Create **Subgroups** as described in the *WebLearn* step-by-step guide entitled **Site Management: the Site Info tool**. You need to create the subgroups first, before they will appear on the list of roles to which to allocate permissions in the **Topic Settings**.
2. Create the required **Topics** intended for the groups (as described earlier in this guide).
3. In each topic, set the required permissions for **all roles** on the **Topic Settings** screen.



Important Note:

Not only do you need to allocate the required permissions to the relevant group, you also need to **remove permissions from all other roles** that should **not** be able to access this group discussion. This is done by allocating those roles the permission level: **None**.

On the **Topic Settings** screen, select each role in turn and apply the permissions as shown:

The screenshot shows the 'Permissions' section of the Topic Settings interface. It includes a dropdown menu for selecting a group, a list of permissions with checkboxes, and radio buttons for 'Edit Postings' and 'Delete Postings'. A 'Marking Assignment' dropdown and several action buttons are at the bottom.

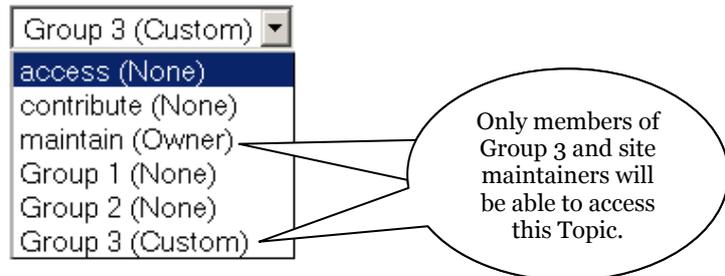
Callout 1: Choose the Group that you wish to be able to see this topic.

Callout 2: Tick the permissions that you wish to grant to the Group. The ones shown here are recommended.

Before you click **Save**, apply the **None** permission to **all other roles** that should **not** have access to this group discussion (with the exception of the **maintain** role – so that you can still facilitate discussions in each group). Do this one at a time, by selecting each site role and the required level of permission:

The screenshot displays five dropdown menus for site roles: 'access (Participant)', 'contribute (Owner)', 'maintain (Owner)', 'Group 1 (Participant)', and 'Group 2 (Participant)'. Below each role name is a list of roles with a selected permission level. For 'access (Participant)', 'contribute (Owner)', 'Group 1 (Participant)', and 'Group 2 (Participant)', the 'None' permission is selected for all roles in the list. For 'maintain (Owner)', the 'None' permission is also selected for all roles in the list.

If it is necessary for the separate groups to see each other's discussion at a later stage, permissions can be adjusted accordingly when required. Check that your final list of roles and permissions looks something like this:



When you are satisfied with the permissions for each role, click the relevant Save button:



Making forum discussions available to a wider audience

You may want to make a forum discussion available to a wider audience which is not pre-defined. For example:

- an essay-writing competition, and you don't know which Oxford users might want to enter; or
- a discussion on a topic of broad interest, such as 'Green Impact' – a university-wide initiative covering all departments, divisions, staff and students.

Normally, you might consider making the entire site available to **All Oxford Users**. However, unlike other tools in *WebLearn*, the **Forums** tool does not provide the option to assign special permissions to such broader groups.

Permissions in the **Forums** tool are restricted to site members with the **access**, **contribute** or **maintain** roles. Thus you would have to make the site '**joinable**'... this will allow logged-in *WebLearn* users to join the site and automatically become a member with the **access** role. The default permission level for the **access** role (i.e. **Participant**) would be sufficient to enable all **access** users to see and participate in the discussions.

To make a site joinable, go to **Site Info > Manage Access** and select the relevant option under **Joinability**:

Joinability

As well as adding members explicitly to your site you can allow users to register themselves onto it (join the site).

- Limited to whom I add manually, or via participant groups
- Can be joined by anyone with authorization to log in

* Role for people that join site:

This blog post provides more information about joinable sites and how they work:

<http://blogs.it.ox.ac.uk/adamweblearn/2013/11/joinable-sites-in-weblearn/>

Template Settings

Template Settings control the default settings that appear when a new forum is created (see page 2 of this guide). These settings can either be changed for individual fora, as described on pages 2 and 3, or changed for all subsequent fora via Template Settings. Settings only need to be changed if the default settings allocated to a role are deemed to be inadequate for that role.

Settings from the template will apply each time a new Forum or Topic is created. You can override the settings for a specific Forum or Topic after it has been created.

The screenshot shows the 'Forums' management interface. The top navigation bar includes 'New Forum', 'Organise', 'Template Settings', 'Statistics', and 'Watch'. The 'Template Settings' page is active, displaying various configuration options. Three callouts provide additional context:

- Template Settings opens the Default Template Settings screen.** (Points to the 'Template Settings' link in the navigation bar)
- Choose Yes if moderation of forum postings is required. If a forum is moderated, postings are approved or denied by the moderator before appearing on the forum page.** (Points to the 'Moderate Topics in Forum' setting)
- The settings shown apply to the participant role highlighted here. Select another role from the drop-down list to adjust its default settings.** (Points to the role selection dropdown menu)

The 'Template Settings' page includes the following sections and options:

- Forum Posting:**
 - Lock Forum (Disable forum postings): Yes, No
 - Moderate Topics in Forum: Yes, No
- Permissions:**
 - Role: access (Participant) (highlighted), contribute (Owner), maintain (Owner), Group 1 (None)
 - Permission Level: Participant
 - Change Settings
 - Read
 - Mark as Read
 - Moderate Postings
- Edit Postings:** None, Own, All
- Delete Postings:** None, Own, All
- Marking Assignment:** Select a gradebook item

Buttons at the bottom: Save Draft, Save Settings & Add Topic, Cancel

Statistics

People with a **maintain** or **contribute** role are able to view statistics for individual site participants, including the number of authored, read and unread posts. You can also see the full text of all posts by a particular participant.



Click [Statistics](#) to see the participant list followed by columns labelled **Authored**, **Read**, **Unread**, and **Percent Read**.

Forums / Statistics

Name	Authored	Read	Unread	Percent Read
Fresen, Jill (sucs0084)	8	8	0	100%



Click a participant's name to see the following individual statistics (see next screenshot):

- **Messages Authored:** Lists the titles of the topics of posts authored by the participant, the date and time they were created, and the subject
- **Messages Read:** Lists the titles of the topics of posts read, the date and time they were read, and the subject

The screenshot shows the individual statistics page for 'Fresen, Jill (sucs0084)'. It includes navigation buttons for '< Previous Participant' and 'Next Participant >', and a button for 'Show Full Text for All Authored Messages'. A speech bubble points to the 'Date' column heading in the 'Messages Authored' table, stating: 'Click on any column heading to sort the messages in ascending or descending order.' The 'Messages Authored' table has columns for Forum Title, Topic Title, Date, Subject, and a [display in thread] link. The 'Messages Read' table has columns for Forum Title, Topic Title, Date, and Subject.

Forum Title	Topic Title	Date	Subject	
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:19 PM	Re: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria	[display in thread]
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:12 PM	Territory in the Balkans	[display in thread]
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:12 PM	Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria	[display in thread]

Forum Title	Topic Title	Date	Subject
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:19 PM	Re: Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:12 PM	Territory in the Balkans
The Great War	Causes of the Great War	06-06-2012 4:12 PM	Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria

To review the content of all of a particular participant's posts at once, from the list of messages authored, click [Show Full Text for All Authored Messages](#).

You can also see an individual posting in context by clicking [\[display in thread\]](#).

Click [Forums](#) to return to the **Forums** page.

Note that this information is also available in the **Site Stats** tool. See the *WebLearn* guide entitled **Site Stats** for more information.