**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.

Click New Forum to open the Forum Settings screen.

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

Optional – up to 255 characters.

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

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.

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).

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

Attachments

Attach any associated information or resources.

Availability

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

Mark Threads Read

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).

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

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

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.

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).
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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thread</th>
<th>Authored By</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This message has been deleted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

- **Click here for help with the WYSIWYG editor.**
- **Click here to maximise the editor window, and again to minimise it.**

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

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.

Click Post New Thread. The Compose Forum Message screen will open.

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

**Message**  

Word Count: (16)

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

- **Attachments**
  
  No attachments have been made
  
  Add attachments
  
  Post Message  Cancel

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

---

**Forums / 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thread</th>
<th>Author By</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assaultination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria</td>
<td>[User name]</td>
<td>06-06-20 12:12 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory in the Balkans</td>
<td>[User name]</td>
<td>06-06-20 12:12 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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.
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.

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**:

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):

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 **Copy link**. 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.
**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:

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:

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:

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:

![Permission Table]

**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: [access]

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.

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.
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**.

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

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.