DURHAM COLLEGE | **DCCONNECT**
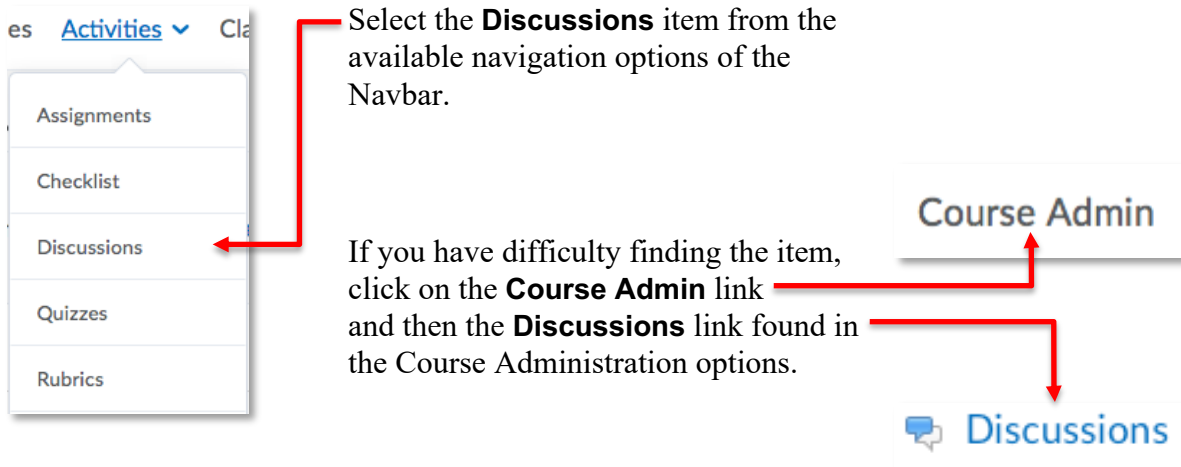
Unit Topic: Discussions

Introduction

The Discussions tool allows you to create a collaboration space where students can post, read, and reply to messages on different topics, share thoughts about course materials, ask questions, share files, or work with peers on assignments and homework.

Content

This document covers the following topics:

- How to Access the Discussions Tool
- Creating Discussion Forums and Topics
  - Forums
    - Forum Restrictions
  - Topics
    - Configuring a Topic for Assessment
    - Description
    - Visibility
    - Availability Dates & Conditions
    - Post & Completion
    - Evaluation & Feedback
- Managing Discussion Forums and Topics
  - Editing a Forum or Topic
  - Reordering Forums and Topics
  - Deleting Forums and Topics
- Assessing Discussions
  - Assessing Student Work
  - Quick & Easy: Assessing Discussions in Grades
- Discussion Settings
- Linking Discussions to Content

How to Access the Discussions Tool

Select the **Discussions** item from the available navigation options of the Navbar.

If you have difficulty finding the item, click on the **Course Admin** link and then the **Discussions** link found in the Course Administration options.

Creating Discussion Forums and Topics

Forums

Forums are used to organize your discussion topics into categories. Before you can create a discussion topic, you *must* create at least one forum.

Topics are where discussions take place, where users post and read messages. Your course can include as many topics as you like.

To create a new discussion forum, click the **New** button on the Discussions List page and select the **New Forum** option.
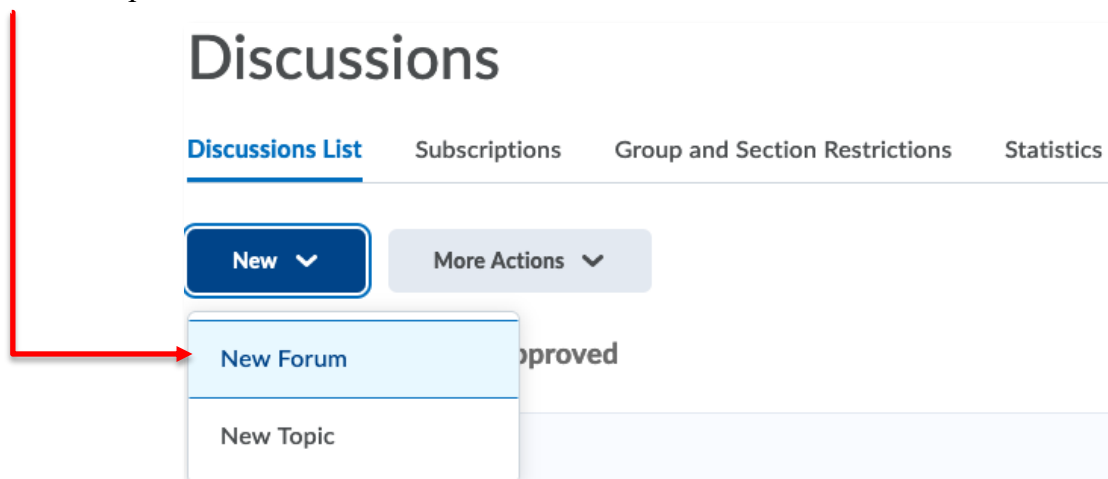
New Forum

Enter a **Title** for the forum.

New Forum Details

Title *

☐ Create a new topic in this forum with the same title ⊙

If you want to automatically create a Topic, select the **Create a new topic in this forum with the same title** check box.

Description

Paragraph ∨ | **B** *I* U ∨ A⁄

If you want to create a description enter it in the **Description** field.

If you would like to provide your students with the option of posting anonymously in the Forum, select the **Allow anonymous posts** checkbox. This setting will apply to all topics within the forum. Anonymous posts display with the author "Anonymous" in the thread.

NOTE: A post is only anonymous among students. Instructors can always determine the author of a post.

Options

☐ Allow anonymous posts ⊙

☐ Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads in each topic ⊙

To promote original work from students, you may wish to prevent students from reading each other's work before posting their own response to the prompt. You can do so by selecting the **Users must start a thread before they can read or reply to other threads** checkbox.

If you would like to review a post submission for approval before students' posts are available to the class, select the **A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the forum** checkbox. Again, this setting will apply to all Topics within the Forum.
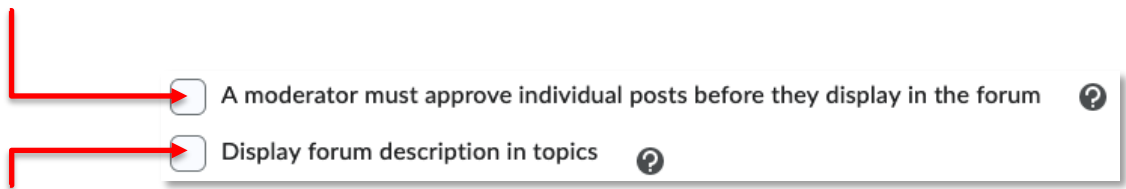
If you would like the Forum description to appear above the description of each Topic, select the **Display forum description in topics** checkbox.

NOTE: Regarding the **Users must start a thread before they can read or reply to other threads** setting, this is not a foolproof method of ensuring original work. It is possible for a student to publish an empty post, review their peer's work, and then edit their empty post to add content. Although this is a known issue, it is currently not possible to turn of the edit feature for students at the course, forum, or topic level.

NOTE: The Options listed below the Description field are available at the topic level. We recommend that you set them at the Topic level, and not the Forum level.

Forum Restrictions

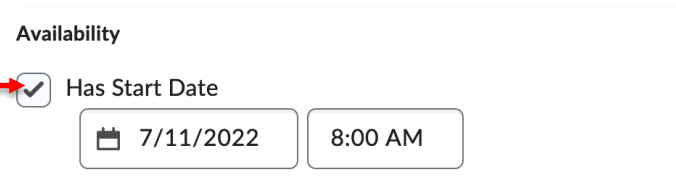Click on the **Restrictions** tab to set when students can see and contribute to the discussion Forum.

To blanket hide the Forum from students (include the topics it contains), click the **Hide from Users** checkbox.
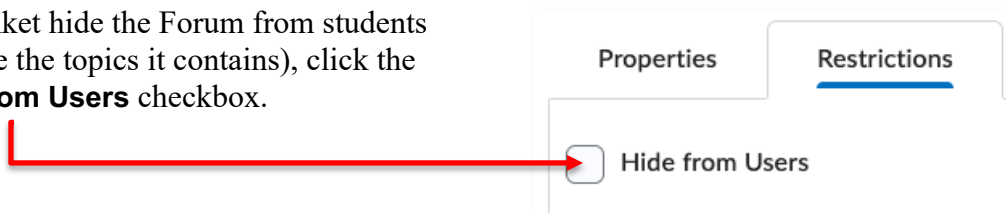
NOTE: It is recommended that Forums and Topics with student work always remain visible.

Has Start Date

If you want to limit the ability of students to work in the Forum prior to a specific date and time, set the **Has Start Date** checkbox under the Availability title and choose the point in time prior to which you wish to do so.
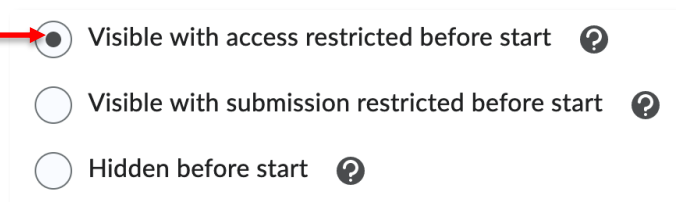
Availability

☑ Has Start Date

📅 7/11/2022 | 8:00 AM

Next, choose how you want the Forum visibility to be restricted.

If you choose **Visible with access restricted before start**, the activity will be visible to learners before the Start Date, but they cannot click or open it. Information displayed to learners about the activity is limited to title, dates, and restrictions.
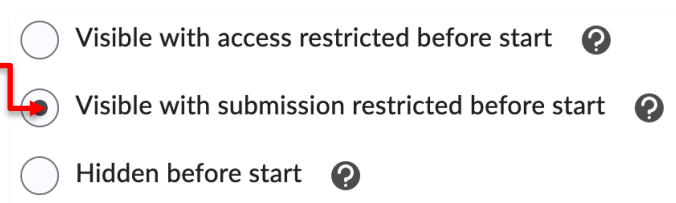
◉ Visible with access restricted before start ❓
◯ Visible with submission restricted before start ❓
◯ Hidden before start ❓

If you choose **Visible with submission restricted before start**, The activity will be visible to learners before the Start Date and they can access and view the activity but cannot complete it. Learners can access the description and evaluation requirements such as rubrics. The activity behaves the same as the previous 'locked' functionality.
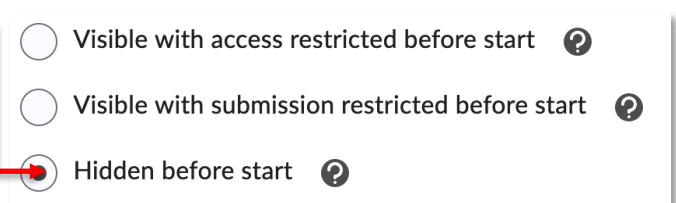
◯ Visible with access restricted before start ❓
◉ Visible with submission restricted before start ❓
◯ Hidden before start ❓

If you choose **Hidden before start**, The activity will be hidden from learners until the Start Date. Calendar events for Availability Starts and Availability Ends will be hidden until the Start date. Notifications will not be sent until the Start Date.

◯ Visible with access restricted before start ❓
◯ Visible with submission restricted before start ❓
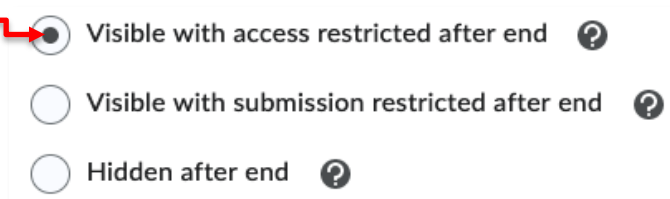◉ Hidden before start ❓

Has End Date

If you want to limit the ability of students to work in the Forum after a specific date and time, set the **Has End Date** checkbox under the Availability title and choose the point in time after which you wish to do so.
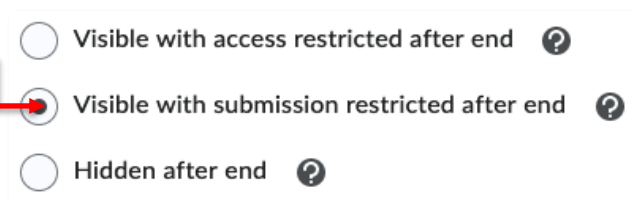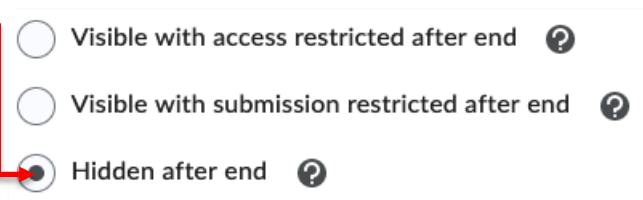

Next, choose how you want the Forum visibility to be restricted.

If you choose **Visible with access restricted after end**, the activity will be visible to learners after the End Date, but they cannot click or open it. Information displayed to learners about the activity is limited to title, dates, and restrictions.

If you choose **Visible with submission restricted after end**, the activity will be visible to learners after the End Date and they can access and view the activity but cannot complete it. Learners can access the description and evaluation requirements such as rubrics. The activity behaves the same as the previous 'locked' functionality.
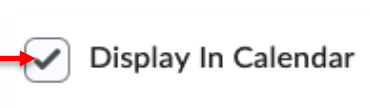

If you choose **Hidden after end**, the activity will be hidden from learners after the End Date. Calendar events for Availability Starts and Availability Ends will be hidden after the End date. Notifications will not be sent after the End Date.

NOTE: Again, it is recommended that Forums and Topics with student work always remain visible.

It is best practice to *always* use the **Display In Calendar** option if given the choice to do so.

Release Conditions and **Group and Section Restrictions** are advanced topics beyond the intended purpose of this document. For support with these topics, please contact CTL staff at dcconnect@durhamcollege.ca.

Click **Save and Close** or **Save** to save the Forum.
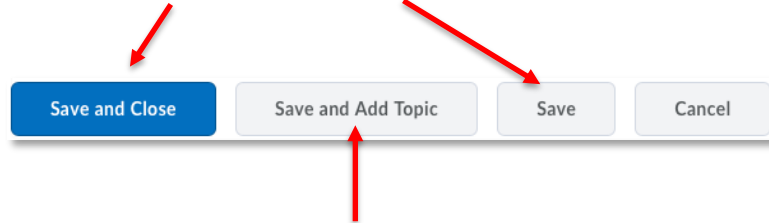
Alternatively, click **Save and Add Topic** to save the Forum and create a new Topic within it.

NOTE: You must create a Topic within the newly created Forum for students to contribute to the discussion. Students cannot create their own Forums or Topics; they can only participate in ones created by the instructor.

Topics

You are now ready to create a topic. If you clicked the **Save and Add Topic** button when creating a new forum, you will automatically be taken to the properties page of a new topic.

If you clicked **Save and Close,** click the **New** button and then select the **New Topic** option from the pull-down menu options.
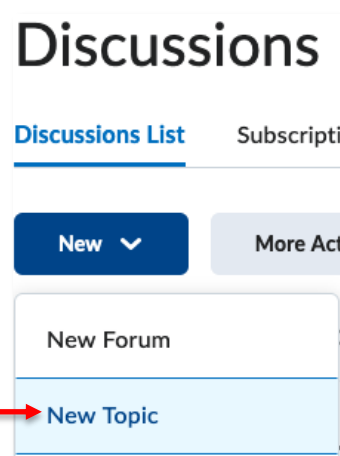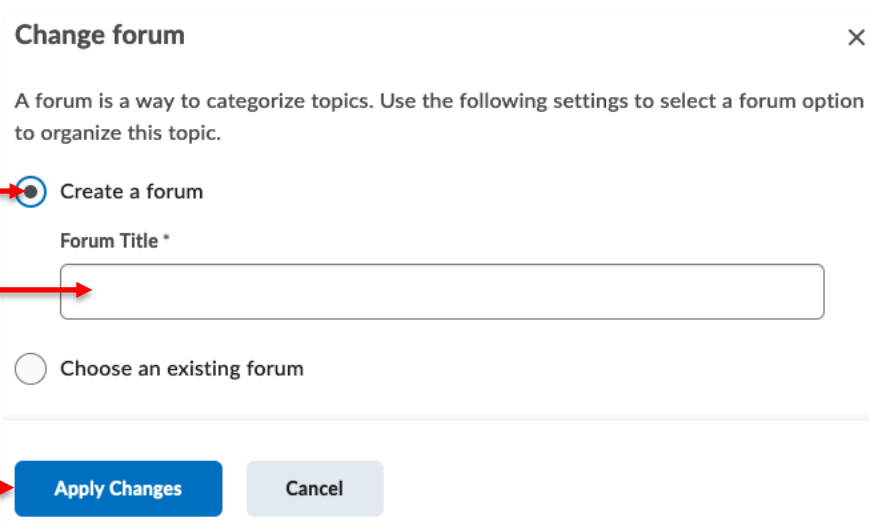

NOTE: At the top of the Properties tab of a new topic, you have the option of changing which forum the topic will be in or to create a new forum.

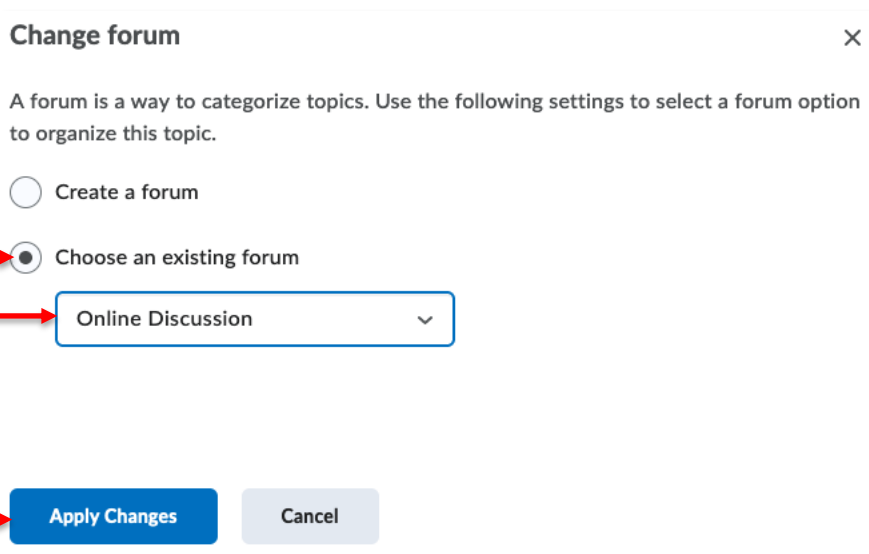Enter a **Topic Title** for the new topic.

Click the **Change Forum** link.

If no appropriate forum exists for your topic, click the **Create a forum** option, and input a new **Forum Title.**

Change forum ×

A forum is a way to categorize topics. Use the following settings to select a forum option to organize this topic.

◉ Create a forum

Forum Title *

[   ]

◯ Choose an existing forum

Click the **Apply Changes** button.

[**Apply Changes**] [Cancel]

If the appropriate forum already exists for your topic, click the **Choose an existing forum** option and select it from the pull-down menu.

Change forum ×

A forum is a way to categorize topics. Use the following settings to select a forum option to organize this topic.

◯ Create a forum

◉ Choose an existing forum

[Online Discussion   ⌄]

Click the **Apply Changes** button.

[**Apply Changes**] [Cancel]

Configuring a Topic for Assessment

Click in the **Grade Out Of** field and input the maximum points achievable for the Discussion Topic.

Grade Out Of

[Ungraded]

This step *automatically* initiates the process of creating a new Grade Item in the Grades of your course. Be sure to:

Grade Out Of

| 2 | points | In Grade Book ∨ |

Click the **In Grade Book** pull-down menu...

In Grade Book ∨

Edit or Link to Existing

Not in Grade Book

Reset to Ungraded

…and select the **Edit or Link to Existing** option.

If you have an existing grade item to associate with this Discussion Topic, use the **Link to an existing grade item** option.

Then use the pull-down menu to select the appropriate grade item.

Click the **OK** button.

Edit or Link to Existing

○ Create and link to a new grade item

⦿ Link to an existing grade item

Online Discussion Topic ∨

Points: 2 • Weight: 5 %

OK   Cancel

NOTE: When associating your topic with a grade item, we recommend that the **Grade Out Of** for the topic match the **Maximum Points** for the grade item

If you do not have an existing grade item to associate with this Discussion Topic, use the **Create and link to a new grade item** option.

The assignment name is used as the name of the new grade item.

If you need to organize this new Grade Item into an existing Grade Category, click the **Choose Grade Category** link and use the pull-down menu to select the appropriate one.

Click the **OK** button.

Edit or Link to Existing

◉ Create and link to a new grade item

🔑 Online Discussion Topic 1
  Points: 2

Choose Grade Category   **Choose Grade Scheme**

OK   Cancel

NOTE: You may subsequently need to visit the Grades and update/confirm the weight of this new grade item.

Grade Out Of

2 points | 🔑 In Grade Book ⌄

If you have entered a number by mistake, and do not wish to grade this Discussion Topic, click the **In Grade Book** pull-down menu…
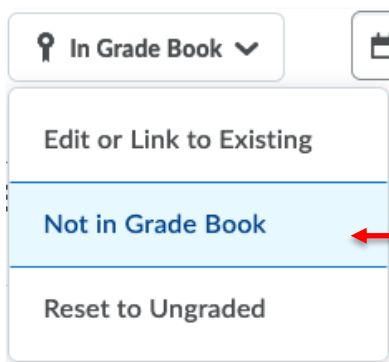
🔑 In Grade Book ⌄

Edit or Link to Existing

Not in Grade Book

Reset to Ungraded

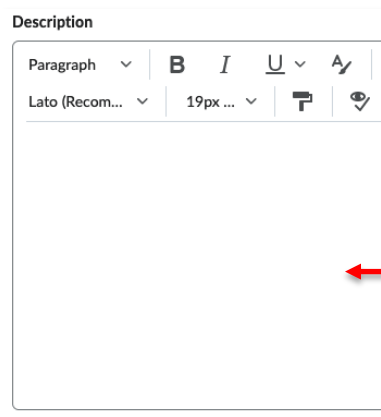…and select the **Reset to Ungraded** option.

NOTE: You will subsequently need to visit the Grades and delete the extraneous Grade Item.

If at any point you need to remove the Association between the Discussion Topic and its corresponding Grade Item, click the **In Grade Book** pull-down menu and select the **Not in Grade Book** option.

NOTE: This does not delete the Grade Item from the Grades, just the association between it and the Discussion Topic.

Description

Enter a description of the Topic in the **Description** field. This is commonly the details and instructions for what the student's thread should contain (a.k.a. the prompt).

Visibility

To control the overall visibility of the Topic, toggle the visibility switch found at the bottom of the page next to the save options.

NOTE: It is recommended that Forums and Topics with student work always remain visible.

Availability Dates & Conditions

If you want to limit the ability of students to see or work in the Discussion Topic, click on the **Availability Dates & Conditions** panel title to expand those options.

Availability Dates & Conditions   ▷

Start Date

To prevent students from seeing or posting to a Discussion Topic prior to a specific date and time, click the **Start Date** box and set the point in time prior to which you want access to be limited.
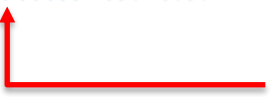
Start Date

📅 M/D/YYYY

Start Date

📅 7/17/2023   12:01 AM
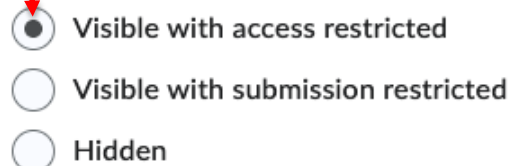
Before start: **Visible with access restricted**

After setting the Start Date you will be given the option to set the behavior of the availability before that point in time.

Click on the **Visible with access restricted** link (the default) to modify the option.

If you choose **Visible with access restricted**, the Topic will be visible to learners before the Start Date, but they cannot click or open it. Information displayed to learners about the activity is limited to title, dates, and restrictions.

- ⦿ Visible with access restricted
- ◯ Visible with submission restricted
- ◯ Hidden

If you choose **Visible with submission restricted**, the Topic will be visible to learners before the Start Date and they can access and view the activity but cannot complete it. Learners can access the description and evaluation requirements such as rubrics. The activity behaves the same as the previous 'locked' functionality.

- ◯ Visible with access restricted
- ⦿ Visible with submission restricted
- ◯ Hidden

If you choose **Hidden**, the Topic will be hidden from learners until the Start Date. Calendar events for Availability Starts and Availability Ends will be hidden until the Start date. Notifications will not be sent until the Start Date.

- ◯ Visible with access restricted
- ◯ Visible with submission restricted
- ⦿ Hidden

It is best practice to *always* use the **Add availability dates to Calendar** option if given the choice to do so.

☑ Add availability dates to Calendar

Click the **Done** button to finish setting your desired Start Date and visibility properties.

End Date

To prevent students from seeing or posting to a Discussion Topic after to a specific date and time, click the **End Date** box and set the point in time after which you want access to be limited.

End Date

📅 M/D/YYYY

End Date

📅 7/23/2023   11:59 PM

After end: **Visible with access restricted**

After setting the End Date you will be given the option to set the behavior of the availability after that point in time.

Click on the **Visible with access restricted** link (the default) to modify the option.

If you choose **Visible with access restricted**, the Topic will be visible to learners after the End Date, but they cannot click or open it. Information displayed to learners about the activity is limited to title, dates, and restrictions.

- ◉ Visible with access restricted
- ◯ Visible with submission restricted
- ◯ Hidden

If you choose **Visible with submission restricted**, the Topic will be visible to learners after the End Date and they can access and view the activity but cannot complete it. Learners can access the description and evaluation requirements such as rubrics. The activity behaves the same as the previous 'locked' functionality.

- ◯ Visible with access restricted
- ◉ Visible with submission restricted
- ◯ Hidden

If you choose **Hidden**, the Topic will be hidden from learners after the End Date. Calendar events for Availability Starts and Availability Ends will be hidden until the Start date. Notifications will not be sent until the Start Date.

- ◯ Visible with access restricted
- ◯ Visible with submission restricted
- ◉ Hidden

Again, it is best practice to *always* use the **Add availability dates to Calendar** option if given the choice to do so.

☑ Add availability dates to Calendar

Click the **Done** button to finish setting your desired End Date and visibility properties.

Release Conditions & Group and Section Restrictions

Release Conditions and **Group and Section Restrictions** are advanced topics beyond the intended purpose of this document. For support with these topics, please contact CTL staff at dcconnect@durhamcollege.ca.

Post & Completion

If you want to modify how students participate in the Discussion Topic, click on the **Post & Completion** panel title to expand those options.

Post & Completion

When the **Default participation** option is set, students can see other student work, as well as the name of the author(s), prior to contributing to the discussion.

Post & Completion

- ● Default participation
- ○ Allow learners to hide their name from other learners
- ○ Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads
- ☐ Posts must be approved before they display in the topic

When the **Allow learners to hide their name from other learners** option is set, students can see other student work prior to contributing to the discussion, and are given the option of posing anonymously among their peers.

NOTE: A post is only anonymous among students. Instructors can always determine the author of a post.

Post & Completion

- ○ Default participation
- ● Allow learners to hide their name from other learners
- ○ Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads
- ☐ Posts must be approved before they display in the topic

When the **Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads** option is set, students must start their own thread before they can see or respond to other student work.

Post & Completion ▼

○ Default participation

○ Allow learners to hide their name from other learners

◉ Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads

☐ Posts must be approved before they display in the topic

If you would like to review post submissions for approval before students' posts are available to the class, select the **Posts must be approved before they display in the topic** checkbox.

Post & Completion ▼

○ Default participation

○ Allow learners to hide their name from other learners

◉ Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads

☑ Posts must be approved before they display in the topic

NOTE: Regarding the **Learners must start a thread before they can view or reply to other threads** option, this is not a foolproof method of ensuring original work. It is possible for a student to publish an empty post, review their peer's work, and then edit their empty post to add content. Although this is a known issue, it is currently not possible to turn off the edit feature for students at the course, forum, or topic level.

If you would like to provide your students with the option of posting anonymously in the topic, select the **Allow anonymous posts** checkbox. Anonymous posts display with the author "Anonymous" in the thread.

NOTE: A post is only anonymous among students. Professors can always determine the author of a post.

To promote original work from students, you may wish to prevent students from reading each other's work before posting their own response to the prompt. You can do so by selecting the **Users must start a thread before they can read or reply to other threads** checkbox.

Options

☐ Allow anonymous posts ⑦

☐ Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads ⑦

☐ A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic ⑦

If you would like to review post submissions for approval before students' posts are available to the class, select the **A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic** checkbox.

NOTE: Regarding the **Users must start a thread before they can read or reply to other threads** setting, this is not a foolproof method of ensuring original work. It is possible for a student to publish an empty post, review their peer's work, and then edit their empty post to add content. Although this is a known issue, it is currently not possible to turn of the edit feature for students at the course, forum, or topic level.

Evaluation & Feedback

If you want to use a rubric to score student work or allow students to rate each other's posts, click on the **Evaluation & Feedback** panel title to make these options visible.

Evaluation & Feedback ▷

A published rubric can be selected for the purpose of assessing student work. The rubric, visible to students as they draft their discussion posts, will provide expectations of content and quality of work.

Rubrics

Add Rubric ⌄
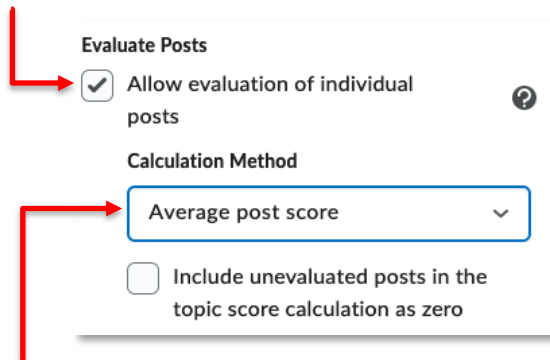
Create New

Add Existing

DC Connect is not currently leveraging the Learning Objectives feature of the LMS. This property can be skipped.

Learning Objectives
No learning objectives

Manage Learning Objectives

If you want to assess individual messages (rather than assigning an overall topic score directly for each user)…

Select the **Allow evaluation of individual posts** check box.

Evaluate Posts
☑ Allow evaluation of individual posts
Calculation Method
Average post score
☐ Include unevaluated posts in the topic score calculation as zero

Select the **Calculation** method you want to use to determine users' overall topic scores based on message scores.

By default, unassessed messages are ignored when calculating the topic score. However, if you want the calculation to treat unassessed messages as if those messages had received a score of zero, select **Include unevaluated posts in the topic score calculation as zero.**

We do not recommend using the **Allow learners to rate posts** option.

☐ Allow learners to rate posts

Click **Save and Close** or **Save** to save the Topic.

Save and Close   **Save**   **Cancel**

NOTE: You must create a Topic for students to contribute to the discussion. Students cannot create their own Forums or Topics; they can only participate in ones created by the professor.

Editing a Forum or Topic

From the Discussions List, select the **Edit Forum** or **Edit Topic** from the respective forum or topic pull-down menu.
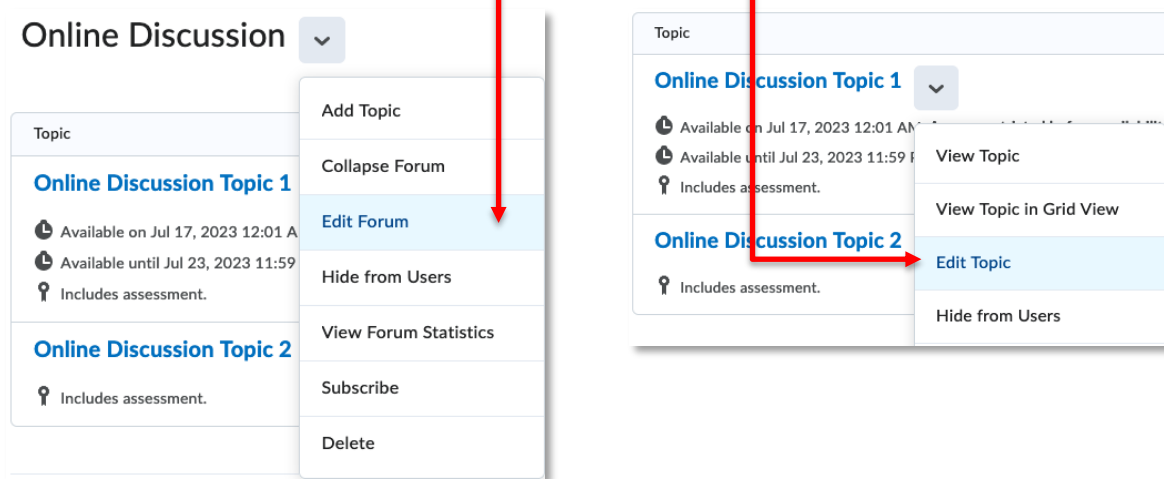
Navigate to the tab (Forums) or pane (Topics) containing the information you want to edit and make the appropriate changes. Be sure to click one of the **Save** button options to complete the process.

Reordering Forums and Topics
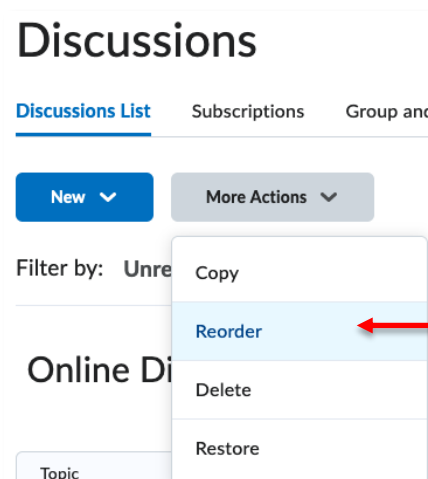
From the Discussions List, select the **More Actions** pull-down menu and then the **Reorder** option.

From the drop-down list in the **Sort Order** column, select the position in the list where you want each forum or topic to appear. Forums are ordered relative to each other; topics are ordered within each forum.

If the topics in a forum are not visible, click the small triangle to the left of the forum title, or click **Expand All** link at the top of the list. Click the **Save** button to complete the process.

Delete Discussion Forums or Topics

From the Discussions List, select the **Delete** option from the action menu of the forum or topic you wish to delete.

Click the **Yes** button in the pop-up window to complete the process.

Assessing Discussions

Assessing Student Work

Select the **Assess Topic** option from the pull-down menu of the topic you wish to assess. This option is available from both the Discussion List page…
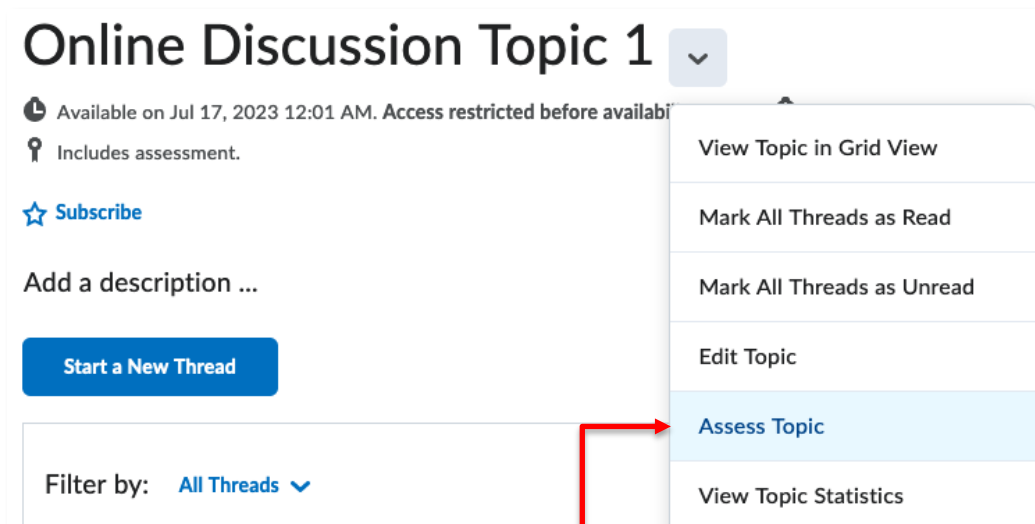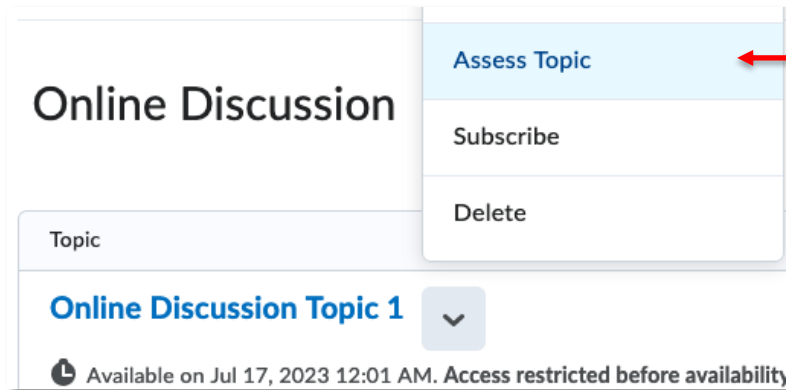
…and from within the topic itself.

You will be taken to the Assess Topic page.
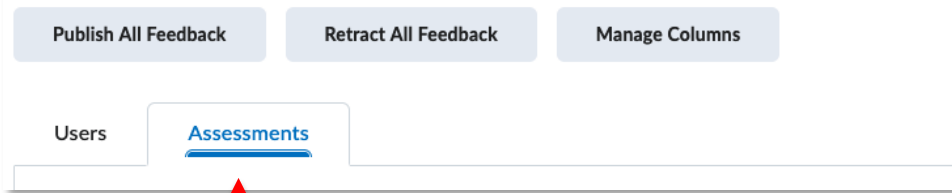
Click the **Assessments** tab, and the **Topic Score** option from the pull-down menu.
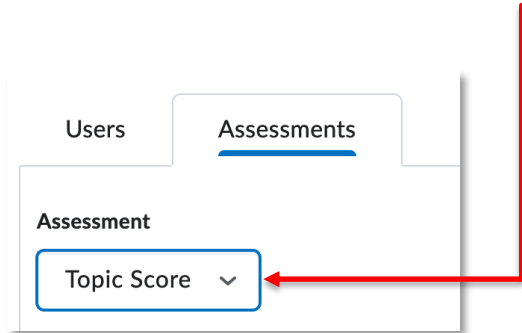
Next, click on the name of the student you want to assess.

You will then be taken to an evaluation page where the student's work will display on the left side of the screen,…

…and assessment tools will be available on the right.

If you are evaluating the topic without a rubric, click and enter the score for your student in the **Overall Grade** field.

If you have associated a Rubric with the topic that is being assessed, it will be visible at the top right of the evaluation page.

Click on the Rubrics icon to have the associated rubric open in a new window,…
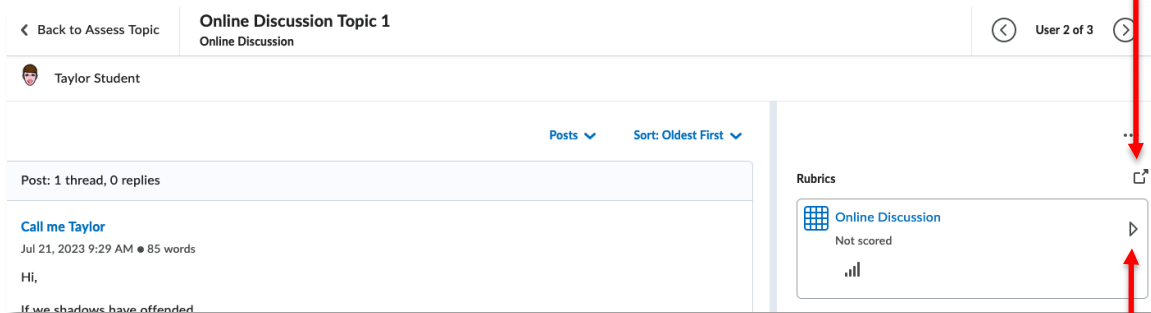
...or click the white triangle to expand a condensed version of the rubric.

Simply click on the appropriate level to score the student work.

Rubric criteria/level selections automatically save during the marking process. The Overall Grade will tally your selections. You must make selections for each criteria/level for the assignment to properly score and provide feedback.

NOTE: The Criterion Feedback from the Rubric will not automatically populate the Overall Feedback field. This is completed separately, if necessary.

You can provide feedback for your student in the **Overall Feedback** field.
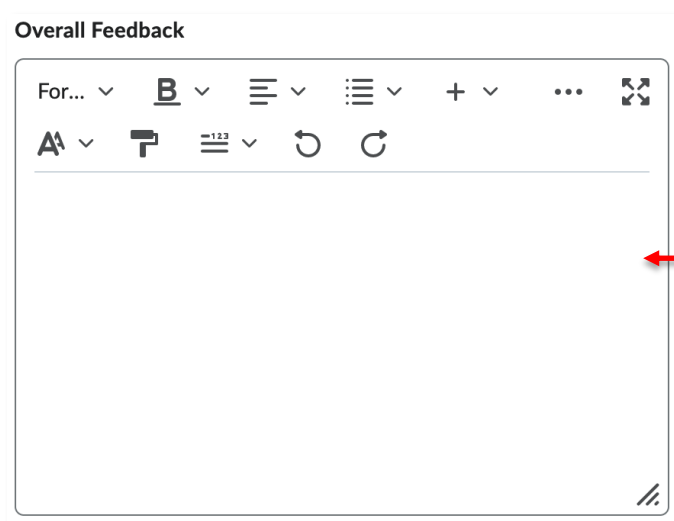
Click the **Publish** button if you want the student being evaluated to instantly receive their grade and feedback.

Click the **Save Draft** button if you want the evaluation and feedback to be withheld and published at a later date.

If you have used the **Save Draft** option when grading student discussions, you must publish the feedback and grades for them to be viewable by students. To publish student feedback and grades, return to the Assess Topic page and click the **Users** tab. Then click the checkboxes of the students you wish to receive the feedback. To select the whole class, click the topmost checkbox.


Click the **Publish** link.

NOTE: Make sure the **per page** option is set appropriately so all your students are selected when doing a bulk publish.

The feedback and grades will now be released to your students.

Quick & Easy: Assessing Discussions in Grades

After a topic has been set to be assessed and associated with a grade item, it is possible to access and mark student work directly in the **Grades**. A significant advantage to this method is that students who have not contributed to the discussion are easily identified.
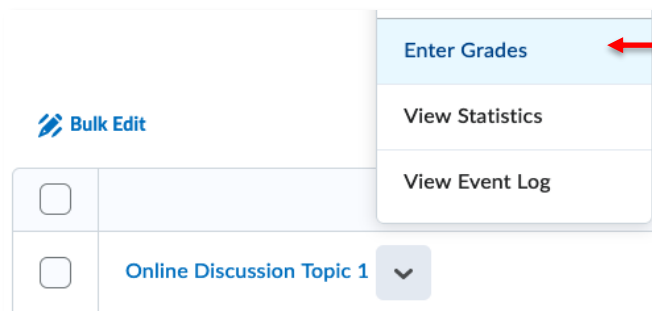
Go to the **Grades** tool in your course, click the action menu of the appropriate grade item, and select the **Enter Grades** option.

If a Rubric is attached to the Topic

Students who *have* completed the assigned work will have a word bubble icon in the **Assessment** column of the table.

Clicking directly on the icon will open a new window with the evaluation page where you can assess the student work.

Students who have *not* completed the assigned discussion are easily identified as there is no word bubble icon in the **Assessment** column of the table.

If no Rubric is attached to the Topic

Students who *have* completed the assigned work will have a word bubble icon in the **Submission** column of the table.

Clicking directly on the icon will open a new window with the evaluation page where you can assess the student work.

Students who have *not* completed the assigned discussion are easily identified as there is no word bubble icon in the **Submission** column of the table.

Discussion Settings

To access the discussion settings, click the Settings link at the right of the Discussions page (or the top of the message list within a topic).
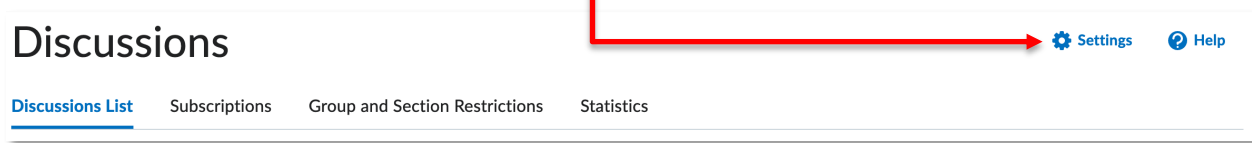
Personal Settings control the way you view messages inside a topic. These settings apply to all course offerings wherever you access discussions, but do not affect other users.

- **Always show the Discussions List pane -** Selecting this option will pin the Discussions List pane in the View Topic and View Thread pages.
- **Display deleted posts -** Selecting this option displays deleted posts when browsing topics.
- **Grid View -** Selecting this option will display the discussion posts in the traditional Grid View, with post subjects displaying in a grid.
- **Reading View -** Selecting this option will display the discussion posts in Reading View, where the entire text of a post displays for all posts.
- **Include original post in reply -** Selecting this option includes the original post by default when composing a reply.
- **When creating a new thread, subscribe to the thread by default –** Selecting this option will automatically subscribe you to each discussion thread you create.

Org Unit Settings apply to all users and all forums and topics in your course.

- **Default Rating Scheme –** This sets the rating scheme that will be automatically used for each new topic. This setting automatically applies to imported course components.

Availability Condition Defaults - These set the default availability for Forums and Topics

**Grid View Settings** control the way forums, topics, and threads display in Grid View.

- **Topic Descriptions display in the Message List -** Selecting this option will display Topic Descriptions in the Grid View for all users. Clearing this option can save space for users at lower resolutions in the Grid View. The Topic Description still displays on the Forums & Topics List.
- **Threaded -** Messages are grouped together with their replies, allowing you to follow the thread of a conversation.
- **Unthreaded -** Messages can be sorted by author, date, subject, message ID, or average rating.
- **Show the preview pane -** Selecting this option displays the lower Preview pane in the Grid View. If this option is not selected, clicking on a post in the Grid View will open the post in a pop-up window.

- **Show the search bar -** Selecting this option displays the Search fields in the Grid View.
- **Post ID -** Selecting this option displays the Post ID for posts in the Grid View.
- **Org Defined ID -** Selecting this option displays the Org Defined ID for the post author in the Grid View.
- **Character Limits -** The number of characters of the Subject to display for each post when browsing topics. Must be an integer between 1 and 150.

Linking Discussions to Content

To support student success, it is good practice to add any course activity (Assignments, Discussion, Quizzes) to your Table of Contents. After creating your discussion forum and topics in the Discussions tool, click on the **Content** tool to show the Table of Contents.

Next, click on the appropriate module to place the discussion in. If no modules currently exist, you will need to create one before continuing.
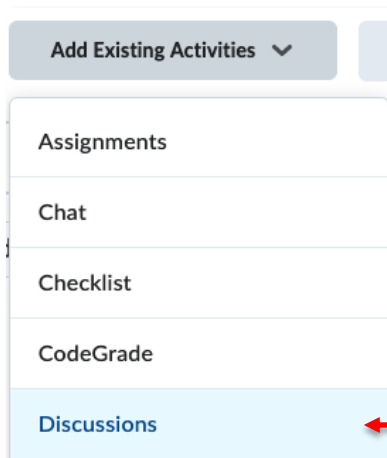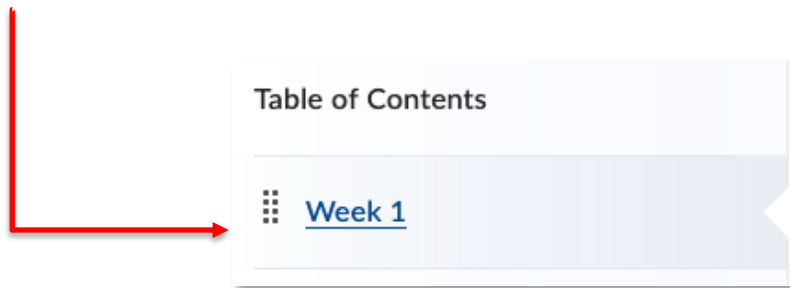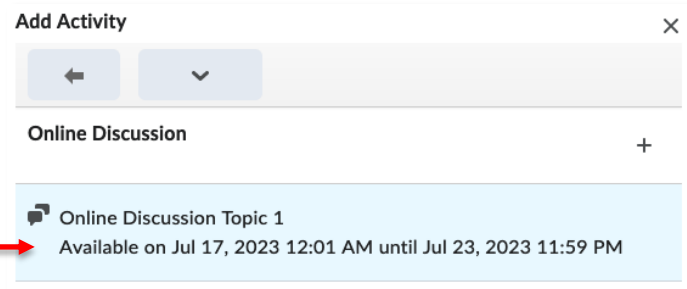
From the **Add Existing Activities** pull-down menu, select the **Discussions** option

Click on the desired forum from the available options.
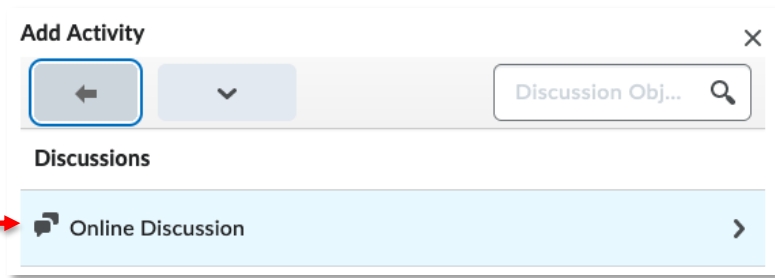
Next, click the discussion topic you would like to insert into your content as an activity.

The discussion will automatically appear as an item within the module content.