

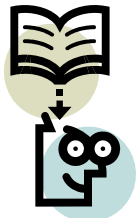


Creating Community with the Discussion Tool

Workshop Overview:

RamCT has a number of communication tools that can be used not only to communicate but to help create a sense of community between students and instructors. This workshop will focus on using the Discussion tool.

- I. [Prepare your computer to work with RamCT](#)
- II. [Terms To Know](#)
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- IV. [Best Practices](#)
- V. [Creating Discussion Categories and Topics](#)
- VI. [Creating and Posting Discussion Messages](#)
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- IX. [Grading Discussion Topics](#)
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Learning Objectives - Participants will be able to:

- Participate in a RamCT discussion
- Understand how to read a threaded discussion
- Create and post discussion messages
- Create discussion categories and topics
- View discussion posts for a particular student
- Grade a discussion topic

RamCT Workshops strive to incorporate best practices in web-based teaching which includes:

- Structure content so that it is easy to follow.
- State expectations of students and the course clearly and early.
- Provide regular feedback and guidance.
- Provide opportunity for students to give feedback on learning & course progress.
- Strive for participation by all students.
- Promote collaborative learning.

(Conrad, Verneil & Berge, Miller & Miller, Palloff & Pratt)

I. PREPARE YOUR COMPUTER TO WORK WITH RAMCT

(<http://ramct.colostate.edu>)

RamCT requires that your computer be configured in a certain way to interact with all of the RamCT tools. Before you use RamCT you should:

1. Install an approved version of Java on your Windows or Mac computer
2. Click on the Browser Check to verify you are using an approved version of a browser such as Internet Explorer 7 or Firefox 2
3. Disable any pop up window blockers for the <http://ramct.colostate.edu> website

Information about all of these steps can be found on the <http://help.ramct.colostate.edu> website.

Login to RamCT using your CSU ename and epassword.
<http://ramct.colostate.edu>



For your security and privacy RamCT will return you to the login page after one hour of inactivity.

User name: To Login: [CSU students](#) use your eID. [eID Help](#)

Password: [MBA students](#) use your Business ID. [MBA Help](#)

[Noncredit students](#) use Noncredit Login ID. [Noncredit Help](#)

First Step: **Install the CSU recommended version of Java on your computer.**

Browser Check ←
Before logging in, complete the browser check to ensure your computer is properly configured to use RamCT.

Pop-up Blockers
Turn off all popup blockers while using RamCT.

Java Security Certificate
In RamCT you may be prompted to accept a Java Security Certificate. Click **Yes** or **Always**.

[RamCT Help WebSite](#)

II. Terms To Know

Categories – New in RamCT, Categories can be used to group discussion topics. Categories are optional but can be very useful for organization.

Topics - Topics are used to group messages. A topic may be a question or the introduction of a new concept. There are three topic types:

- Threaded - Use this topic type for a structured discussion, or when the discussion might take different directions. In threaded topics only message subjects are displayed on the main screen. All replies to the same message are grouped together, creating message threads.

- Blog- Use this topic type for a more casual discussion, or when you want students to be able to quickly see all messages at once. In blogs (web log), topics messages are displayed on the main screen as a chronological series of entries. Participants can comment on messages; comments appear on a separate screen.
- Journal - Create a journal topic to give each student a place for their writing samples or to record their thoughts on course topics or lectures. Journals can be private (for student and instructor only) or public (accessible by the class). You can access students' journals via a list on the left of the screen.

For the purpose of this workshop we will focus on a threaded discussion.

Messages/Posts - The individual messages or posts by a student or instructor to a discussion topic.

Threads - A series of replies to the same message. A message *thread* consists of the original message and any replies to either the original message or to a posted reply. Creating a new message starts a new thread under a topic. A topic can have multiple threads. Usually the newest posts are at the top of a thread. Messages can be viewed as threaded or unthreaded.

III. Discussion Tool Overview

The Discussions tool provides an ideal forum for interpersonal interaction between students and with the instructor. Instructors, teaching assistants, and students can post messages about a topic in a public forum, benefiting from each other's opinions and input. Remember that Discussions are a communication channel that will take time to organize, manage and possibly grade.

You can use the Discussions tool to post important messages to the entire class, generate class discussions, facilitate peer review, and evaluate students based on their responses to open-ended questions.

The Discussions tool allows asynchronous conversation, which means that the writer and reader do not need to be online at the same time to communicate. It allows users to take the time to reflect, research, or survey opinions before they post a message. In addition, users can include attachments with their messages, to provide further details or resources.

TIP: Always create and interact with the Discussions Tool while under the Teach tab.

The primary goal of online discussion is to promote the skill of **thinking** - "to use the mind to arrive at a conclusion, make a decision, draw inferences, to reflect, to reason, to solve problems" (Berge & Muilenburg, 2002). These goals are more easily attained when

students are provided with a comfortable online space, clear expectations, and creative questioning.

Planning is the key to having an effective online discussion. Identify your learning outcomes and outline your plan for each discussion ahead of time, also know how you will determine when these learning outcomes have been achieved. Identify the key concepts and content material to be covered in each discussion, and formulate questions appropriate to your learning outcomes.

Lastly, provide learners with guidelines for online behavior (often referred to as “netiquette”).

Consider the following when planning the discussion:

- How many posts per week are required for participation?
- How long should a post be?
- When are the posts due?
- What percentage of the grade will be determined by participation in the discussion?
- How would you like learners to respond to each other's posts?
- How will you evaluate the quality of the posts?
- How will you enforce the rules for student behavior on-line?

IV. Best Practices

A. Make Time To Manage

The Discussions tool is communications channel that needs to be managed; plan time into your calendar for discussion maintenance.

B. Establish Rapport Early

Your efforts to establish rapport with students early in the course will benefit them during online discussions. Just as it is important to set the tone at the beginning of the course as a whole, online discussions also need to get started on the "right foot."

C. Use discussions consistently as part of the course design. List it as a requirement in the syllabus and post reminders about ongoing discussions to keep students cognizant of the need to regularly check for new messages and to participate.

D. State the goals or purpose for every formal discussion.

E. Reinforce the behavior you want to see with public recognition.

F. Make expectations known by stating them directly and modeling the desired behavior.

Instructor - how involved will you be in discussions? Will you lead discussions, only occasionally provide insights? What might the impact be on the instructor participating in a discussion topic?

Will students take turns leading small group discussions and be required to post summaries? Have to post a certain number of messages with meaningful content? Get students accustomed to using the discussion tool with an **ungraded** discussion topic that allows students to gain confidence conversing online. You may even want to evaluate their postings, but do not record the results in the Grade Book.

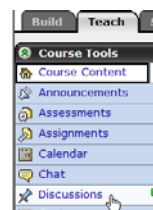
V. Creating Discussion Categories and Topics

Both designers and instructors can create and manage the discussion tool. Only instructors can grade discussions. For that reason we will use the Teach tab to work with discussions.

Discussions are divided into categories, topics, threads and messages (also known as posts)

A. Create a Category

1. From the **Teach** tab, under **Course Tools**, click on **Discussions**



2. Click on **Create Category**

In the **Title** box type in a **name** for your category.

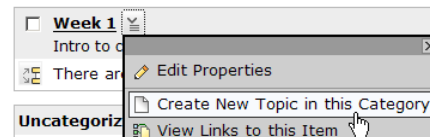
Description – you can provide a brief description that will appear under the Category name.

A screenshot of the 'Create Category' form. It has a 'Title' field with 'Week 1' entered, a 'Description' field with 'Intro to course' entered, and an 'Enable HTML Creator' button. There is also a 'Use HTML' checkbox.

3. Click **Save**.

B. Create a Topic

1. Using the **action links** next to the category you created **select Create New Topic in this Category**.

A screenshot of the 'Create Discussion Topic' dialog. It asks 'What type of discussion topic would you like to create?' and offers three options: 'Threaded topic', 'Blog topic', and 'Journal topic'. Each option has a brief description of its features.

2. Click on **Threaded topic**

3. Click **Next**

4. **Title box** type in the topic name

Create Threaded Topic

*Title:

Description:

5. **Item visibility:** Show item – visible to students
Hide item – hidden from students

Item Visibility: Show Item
 Hide Item

Category: Topics can be organized into categories.

Select Category:

6. **Category** – if you already created categories you can place this topic on one of your categories.

7. **Grading** - If you choose to grade a discussion topic determine if you will assign a numeric or letter grade. Once you make a topic gradeable you cannot go back and make it ungradeable. You can, however, change an ungradeable topic to gradeable.

Grading

Topic is not gradable

Allow the topic to be graded

Numeric grade: Out of

Alphanumeric grade

Grade by Grading Form:

A column is automatically created for this topic in Grade Book

Grade Book column title:

Release grade to Students in My Grades

Grading a discussion topic will automatically create a column in your RamCT grade book. You may want to shorten the name so it will be easier to see in the grade book.

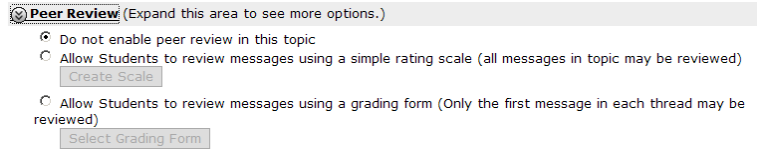
Decide whether you would like to release the grade at this time to your students so they can see their grade.

8. **Goals** - If you have used the RamCT Goals tool to identify specific teaching and learning goals you can link the topic to one of those goals so student can see how it applies to your course goals.

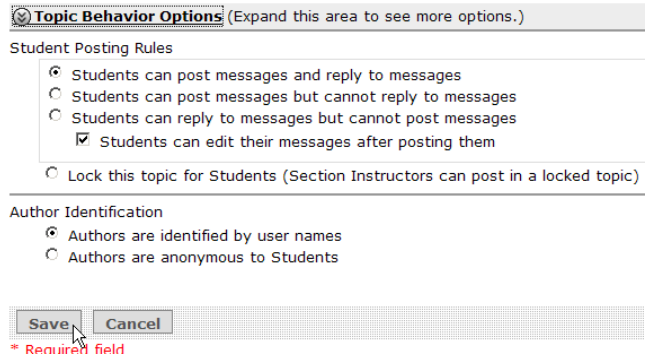
Goals

Associate goals with this discussion topic.

9. **Peer Review** -Determine if you will allow students to give other students a score for their posts to this topic.



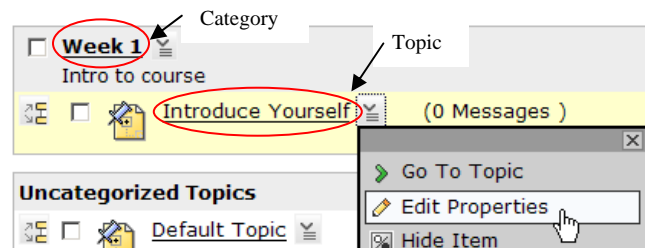
10. **Topic Behavior** - you can set the options that students will have when working with this discussion topic.



You can also control whether other students can see the name of person who posts a message to this topic. You can lock the topic so students cannot post – perhaps use for discussion instructions.

11. *Click Save*

You will see the topic under the category.



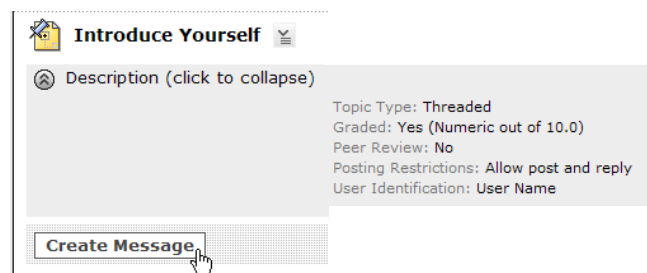
You can use the action links for the topic to revisit the behaviors you assigned to this topic.

VI. Creating and Posting Discussion Messages

The instructor will often post the first message to a discussion topic explaining what how they would like the students to use the discussion tool. This helps to set the tone and get the discussion started.

In our example topic, “Introduce Yourself”, it would be appropriate for the instructor to post the first message to get the ball rolling for this topic.

1. *Click on a topic*
2. *Click on **Create Message***
(Creating a message starts a new thread for that discussion topic.)



If you reply to a message, it remains part of the original thread.

If you create a new message it will start a new thread under that topic.

3. **Subject box** *type* the **subject**

4. *Type* a **message**

5. **Post** – will send this message to the discussion topic.

6. **Preview** – lets you see how the message will appear when posted.

7. **Save as draft** – lets you start a message, save it, then come back and finish the message so it can be posted to the discussion.

8. *Click* **Post**

Create Message

***Subject:**

Message:

By midnight on September 3 post a message to this discussion topic and tell the class:

Your Name
Your Major
What you hope to learn in this class

Use HTML Insert equation:

Attachments:

* Required field

When a section member clicks on the message they will see all messages that have been posted in “threaded” order – oldest messages on top, newest on the bottom.

Expand All Collapse All Display: Threaded Unthreaded

<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject	Messages	Author	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Introduce yourself instructions (New)		Nolan - Section Designer, Kevin ()	June 10, 2008 5:31 PM

Message

Subject: Introduce yourself instructions **Topic:** Introduce Yourself
Author: Nolan - Section Designer, Kevin () **Date:** June 10, 2008 5:31 PM

By midnight on September 3 post a message to this discussion topic and tell the class:

Your Name
Your Major
What you hope to learn in this class

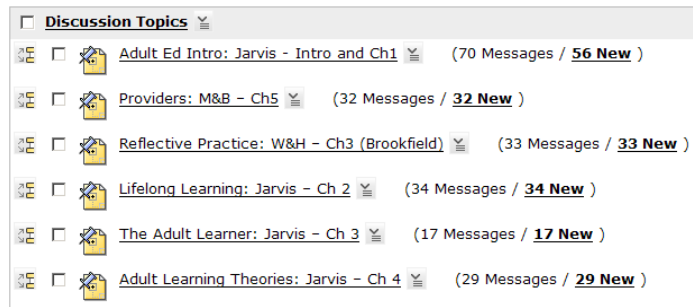
Messages in the thread


Name	Author	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Introduce yourself instructions	Nolan - Section Designer, Kevin ()	June 10, 2008 5:31 PM

VII. Discussion Organization Example

Category: Discussion Topics

Numerous topics listed underneath.

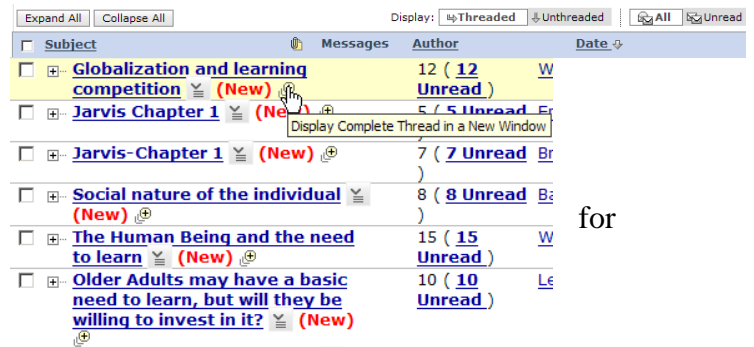


Note: you can rearrange the order of the topics by making the check box and click on the appropriate move symbol 

Here is an example of a number of **threads** that appear under a discussion topic.

Clicking the “+” symbol next to a thread will display all of the messages that particular thread in one window.

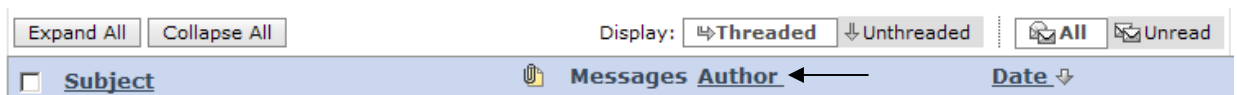
Oldest messages appear at the top, newest messages at the bottom.



VIII. Viewing Message Posts from a specific student

To view all posts from a specific student on a discussion topic do the following:

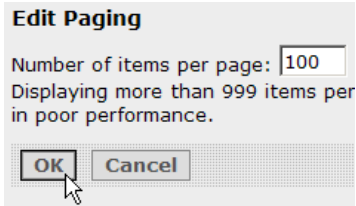
1. *Click* on the **topic** that you would like to **evaluate**



2. *Click* on **Author** to organize the messages by user last names

3. *Click* **Save**

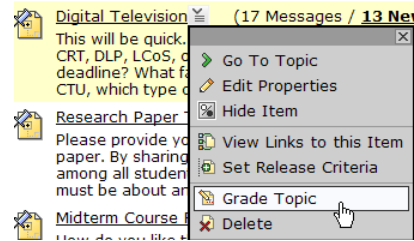
Tip: By default RamCT is set to display only 20 items the Discussion page. Click on the icon that looks like a number of sheets of paper at the bottom of the page and change the number of items to display to 100.



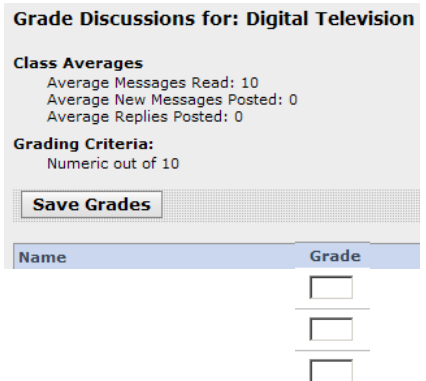
IX. Grading Discussion Topics

When you have set a Discussion Topic to be gradeable you can enter a grade for each student for that topic.

1. Click on the **action link** menu next to the **gradeable discussion topic** and **select Grade Topic**



On the left you will see all of your students' names and a place to enter a grade for this topic.



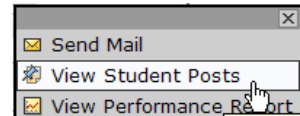
On the right you will see an Activity Overview window that shows you all students and number associated with their participation on this topic.

Discussion Activity Overview

To view messages posted by a Student, click the Student's name and then click View Student Posts.

Name	Messages		
	Total Messages Read	New Messages Posted	Replies Posted
12	0	1	
17	1	0	
14	0	1	
10	1	0	

- In the left window *click* on the **action link** next to a **student's name** and *select* **View Student Posts**.



On the right you will see all of the messages this student has posted for this discussion topic.

Digital Television

Description (click to collapse)

This will be quick. Who has a digital television at home? If yes, what type is it -- LCD, Plasma, CRT, DLP, LCoS, or other? If not, are you thinking about buying one before the Feb. 17, 2009 deadline? What factors will govern what you purchase and when? After reading Chapter 3 in the CTU, which type of display would you get?

Topic Type: Threaded
Graded: Yes (Numeric out of 10.0)
Peer Review: No
Posting Restrictions: Allow post and reply
User Identification: User Name

Print **Save as File**

Discussion Student Post

Author:

Topic: Digital Television

New Messages Posted: 0 (Class Average 0)

Replies Posted: 1 (Class Average 0)

Messages Read: 12 (Class Average 10)

Subject: Re:Digital Television **Date:** September 23, 2007 4:35 PM

I have digital TV in my home, nothing big just the basics. My parents have an LCD flat screen. I asked them their opinion. They said that the picture is skewed when you view the screen from an angle. Keep in mind we are not the most technical oriented family. My friends say that their plasma TV is very sensitive to movement and are not sure they would buy another one.

From what others are saying, the HDTV sounds fantastic, but the cost is keeping me from using it. I am not a big sports fan, although when I do watch football or national competitions the HD would be nice.

View Complete Thread

Print **Save as File**

- On the left you can *enter* a **grade** for this student's participation on this particular discussion topic.

Grade

- Go the **next student** and *select* **View Student Posts**.

5. *Review* and *grade*

- When you are done entering grades *click* on the **Save Grades** button. This will post the grades to the column associated with this discussion topic in the RamCT grade book.



X. RAMCT SUPPORT

Support for RamCT is available from a number of sources:

RamCT help website:

<http://help.ramct.colostate.edu>

College RamCT Coordinators:

http://help.ramct.colostate.edu/ramctsupport_faculty.aspx

Email us:

ramctsupport@colostate.edu