

A Guide to WebBoard Discussions

What is WebBoard

WebBoard is the online discussion software integrated into the VLP. Within WebBoard, discussions can be started for modules or for a specific course; messages can be posted and replies made. An online discussion is created with contributions, in the form of asynchronous messages, i.e. non-real time, from different people who have permission to participate in that discussion. There is also a live 'webchat' facility.

This document covers the following areas:

1. **How WebBoard can be used in Learning & Teaching**
2. **A WebBoard Overview**
 - a. **Terminology – What's a Board? What's a Topic?**
 - b. **Starting a Discussion**
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3. **Joining in the Discussion**
 - a. **Starting a Topic**
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 - b. **Adding Hyperlinks & Formatting Messages**
 - c. **Adding images & files to a Message**
 - d. **Using Message Rating (the star system)**

Further (and more extensive) documentation is available from the **Support** area of the **VLP**.

1. How WebBoard can be used in Learning & Teaching

It may be worth considering some examples of how WebBoard can be used in Learning & Teaching before going on to look at the technical aspects of using it.

- **The following areas are some of the reasons you may wish to use an online discussion forum such as WebBoard:**
 1. Using a Constructivist approach to learning - Communities of Practice (Experts & Novices)
 2. Peer review & evaluation
 3. Collaborative & group projects
 4. Taking class discussions outside the classroom (Asynchronous discussions)
 5. Tutor Moderated discussions
 6. Self-reflective writing
 7. Informal class discussion for group motivation

For further information see the [Why use Online Discussion?](#) In the ACC Staff Resources area.

2. A WebBoard Overview

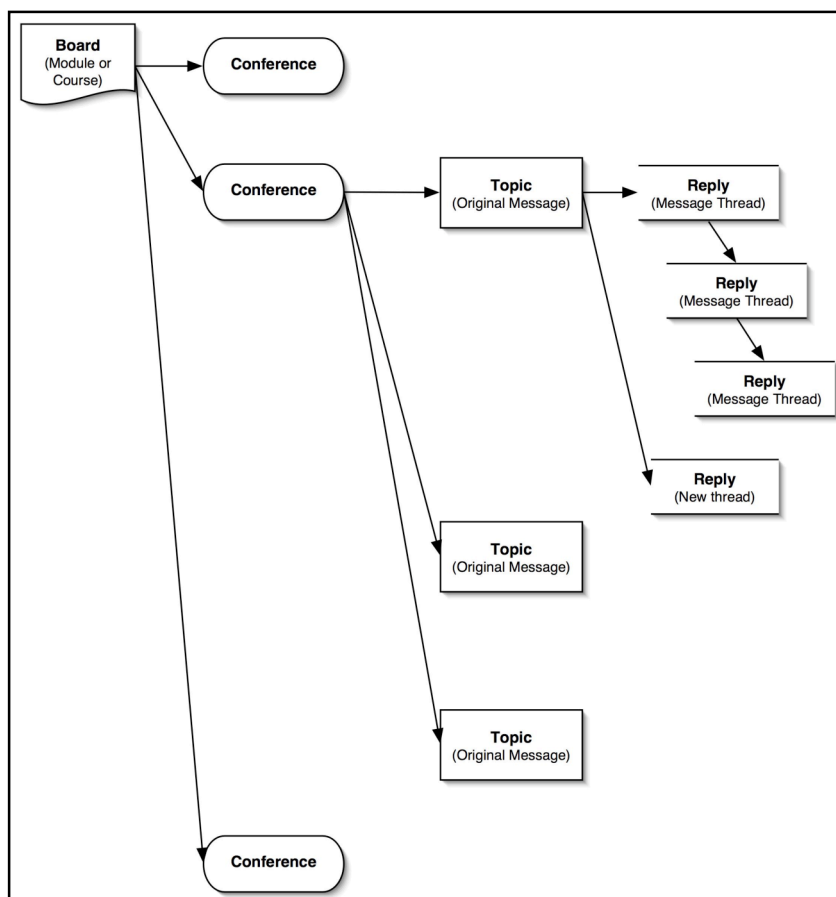
Terminology – What's a Board? What's a Topic?

Boards: Each University course or module can have a discussion **Board** with **Conferences**. WebBoard's standard view is to show one or more **Conferences**.

The default **Conference** title in a board is the Banner course or module code and title. There can be more than one conference in the discussion board depending on how many have been created.

Topics and Messages provide the discussion content for Conferences, with Conferences being the highest level of discussion within a board.

An Overview of the WebBoard discussion board schema is shown right.



Note: All Module Conferences cannot be immediately viewed from a Course conference or other Module Conferences

Topics are listed within a Conference and the start of a new discussion within the overall subject of a Conference. A new Topic can be started if a message is not a direct response to a previous message posted under a topic.

Reply Messages create the Thread of a discussion within a Topic. Reply messages respond to an existing Topic or reply to and keep a discussion thread going. A **Topic** can contain several Threads when more than one response to an original message is posted

Starting a discussion

WebBoard can be set-up within Module or Course Tasks area of the VLP (see separate sheet for details) and also edited at a later date. If a discussion has been set up, then a link to WebBoard will be displayed in the **Learning Room** of the VLP.

- **To access discussions:**

1. In the Left hand **Resources** menu by clicking on the **Discussions** link
2. In the **Conference Area** that opens, click on the conference title listed to open WebBoard.

- WebBoard will open and display the conference together with all conferences associated with either the Module or the Course in the standard view shown below.

Navigating a Conference

The opening screen in WebBoard displays a summary list of Topics in the chosen Conference.

Note: To view a list of all the Discussion Boards, select **Boards** in the top breadcrumb trail. You will not be able to access the boards for courses/modules that you do not study or have administration permissions for.

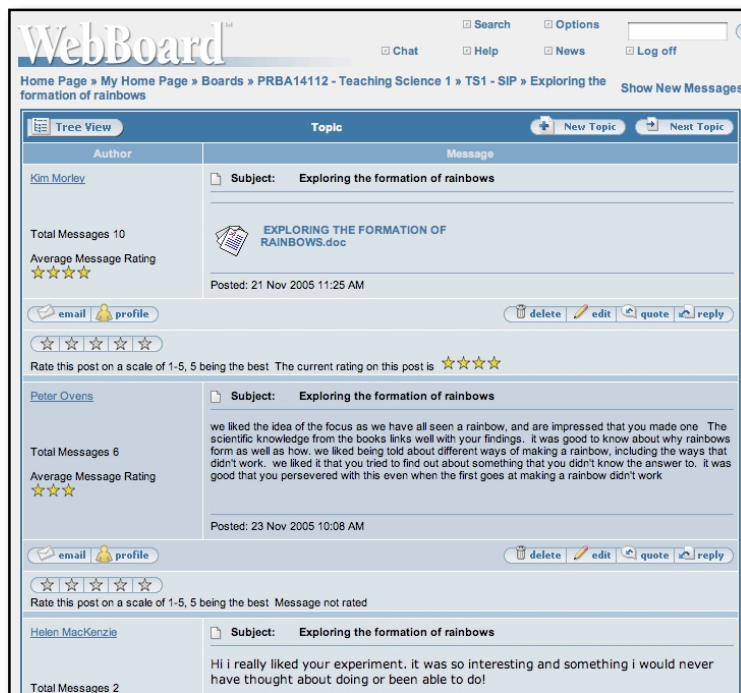
There are 2 ways of navigating around WebBoard:

- The default **List View**
- Tree View**.

Tree view may be **recommended** for giving a better overview of the discussion board. WebBoard will retain whichever view has been selected and display this view when logging in again.

- To navigate through a discussion in List View**

- Topics and Reply Messages are displayed as a list.
- Navigation between topics can be made using the **Prev Topic** and **Next Topic** buttons on the right, at the top and bottom of the window.



List view

- To navigate through a discussion in Tree View**

- Click on the **Tree View** button in the top-left-hand corner to change the view.
- To revert to **List View**, click on the **X** in the right hand corner of Conferences list window.
- In the left-hand pane you will see a list of **conferences** shown in **bold blue text**.
- Click the **Conference title** (or the plus (+) sign) at the top of the Conferences list to expand it & view a complete list of Topics under that Conference.



Tree view

Conversely clicking on the minus (-) sign contracts a view.

5. The normal indented text under a **bold conference title** denotes a **topic**. You can also expand and contract list views of that topic message and it's reply messages.
6. Message threads are also shown indented to the degree of which they are replies to previous messages.

The number in brackets () shows the total number of messages posted for this Topic, together with an indication of any **new** messages shown in red.

Each discussion thread appears as a list of Message titles under a Topic. This can be extensive where a lengthy debate has taken place. If you are unsure which topic you are currently in, look at the topic list in the Conferences window and the position is marked with a blue arrow

3. Joining in the Discussion

This is a basic guide to joining in the discussion. For more details of options available with the messaging window see **Section 3. Message Options** below.

Starting a Topic

Topics are the start of a new discussion or conversation with a conference. Unless you wish to do this, skip down to **Replying to messages** below.

- **To start a new topic**
 1. Click on **New Topic** on the right hand side of the Topic bar
 2. In the **Post Topic** window select from the set of options available.
 3. Give the Topic a descriptive **Subject** title.
 4. Type the message text in the **Message** box.
 5. Format the text using the tool bar provided (see **Message Options** below).
 6. If you wish to you can **Preview** the message and **Check Spelling**
 7. Click **Post** to place the message in a discussion.
 8. A **new** post message indicator will appear next to the Conference in the Tree View.

Reading & Replying to messages

- **To open and read messages**
 1. Click on the subject of the **Topic** you are interested in from the list.
 2. The list of messages based on this initial message will be displayed
 3. Click on a message to open & read that message or message thread in the right-hand window.
 4. Your currently viewed topic will be highlighted in the left hand tree list by a blue arrow.
 5. To read the full thread of a topic, use the scrollbar on the right-hand side of the screen to view all responses to the initial message.
- **To post a reply to a topic message or message in a thread**
 1. Once the message is open in the right hand window, click on **Reply** beneath the message text.
 2. In the new page, enter a title in **Subject** for a new thread or retain the existing title
 3. Type the message text in the **Message** box. The message you are replying to is shown in a yellow box above this.
 4. To include some of the text from the previous message, click on **Quote**.

5. Remove any unwanted text and type in your message.
6. There are further options that are available. **See section 3. Message Options** for more information.
7. When you have finished click **Post** to place the message in a discussion.

Note: It is bad practice to include all the text from a previous message. Only include relevant statements in the reply. Original text is prefaced with a ">", indicating it is from the message to which you are replying.

Starting a New Thread

You may wish to move the discussion on from the initial reply to a topic, or another reply message, rather than replying to the last message in a thread. This is called starting a new thread.

- **To create a new thread**

1. Reply to the first message within the Topic or on a message you wish to take in another direction by clicking on **Reply**.
2. Edit the reply message options and write your message in the **Message** box the same as in replying to any other message.
3. When you have finished click **Post** to place the message in a discussion.

4. Message Options

This section provides advice about advanced options within a message. These include the ability preview a message before you send it, editing and deleting messages. You can also use text formatting, add hyperlinks and rate a message.

To Preview, Edit & Delete Messages

Note: Messages can only be edited and deleted by the person who has posted the message or a Moderators or an Administrator for the discussions.

Previewing is useful if you have done some formatting of the message and added inline images and wish to proofread and check it before you send it.

- **To Preview your message**

1. Click on the **Preview** button at the bottom of the message edit window.
2. A pop-up window will appear with your message in it.
3. Close the window to resume editing your message, or post it.

- **To Edit a message**

1. Locate your message.
2. Make sure you are reading your message not another message in the thread.
3. Click the **Edit** button to make changes to your message.
4. The **Post Topic** or **Reply** window will appear containing the message and any attachments ready for amendment.
5. After editing the message, click the **Post** button

- **To delete a message**

1. Locate your message.
2. Make sure you are reading your message not another message in the thread.
3. Click the **Delete** button to remove your message.
4. Click **Confirm this selection** in the following dialogue box.
5. The message will be deleted

Adding Hyperlinks and Formatting messages

- To add a hyperlink into a message:

1. Enter or paste the hyperlink directly, i.e. <http://www.ntu.ac.uk>
Or
2. Enter appropriate text and then add a hyperlink to it.
3. Highlight the text with your mouse
4. Click the **Insert Hyperlink** (the anchor icon) button in the toolbar.
5. Enter the hyperlink in the Hyperlink dialogue box

Formatting Messages

WebBoard includes a simple 'What You See Is What You Get' (WYSIWYG) editor. With this editor, WebBoard messages can be formatted in a similar way to Microsoft Outlook or Microsoft Word. This editor is available to users running Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0 or greater, on the Windows operating system.

Font size, colour & style can be changed as well as the standard bold, italic, alignment, etc. For further details on formatting see the VLP help sheet: **webboard user guide v8.doc**

Adding images & files to messages

You can add an image or document to a message or include an Inline Image (i.e. an image that appears in the discussion message rather than as an attached file). Images displayed within a message need to be in **GIF**, **JPEG**, or **PNG** format. They should not be physically too large or people will not be able to read the thread properly. Moderators can remove image files from messages that disrupt a discussion thread. If you wish to post large images, add them as attachments rather than an inline image.

- To add and inline image:

1. Click **Attach File** and after typing your message click **Post**.
2. In the next page check the **Inline Image** radio button and click **Browse** in the **File location** window and select the file for inclusion.
3. Click **Upload Now** button to attach the file/s and complete the message

- To attach a file to a message

1. Click **Attach File** and after typing your message click **Post**.
2. In the next page select a **document type** radio button in the **Category** section
3. Click **Browse** in the **File location** window select the file for inclusion.
4. You can add a **File Description** for the attached file
5. If you wish to upload another file click on the **Upload Another?** checkbox
6. Click **Upload Now** button to attach the file/s and complete the message

Using message rating (the star system)

Messages can be rated using the star rating system and contributors to the discussion can rate posted messages. This can aid readers scanning down the thread, to only read those messages that others have deemed to be important. Messages that have not been rated will have grey stars.

The number of stars from left to right is important within the WebBoard rating system, clicking on a single star, i.e. the first star on the left, indicates a poor message, clicking on the middle star indicates an average message, and finally, clicking on the right will light all five stars and indicate an excellent message. Users can only rate a message once, though individual messages can receive ratings from a number of people. ***The Current Rating on this Post is*** the 'mean' average of all the ratings given to the Message.

The ***Average Message Rating*** is the 'mean' average of all the **ratings received** for the various messages a person has posted to the discussion forum. This can be an indication of the quality of the posts of a single person.

Note: If you only have a single module that uses WebBoard, this is your overall rating for the messages that you post on that module. If you have more than one module that has a WebBoard discussion, this will be the average of all your messages posted across all of the discussions.

Further (and more extensive) documentation is available from the ***Support*** area of the ***VLP***.