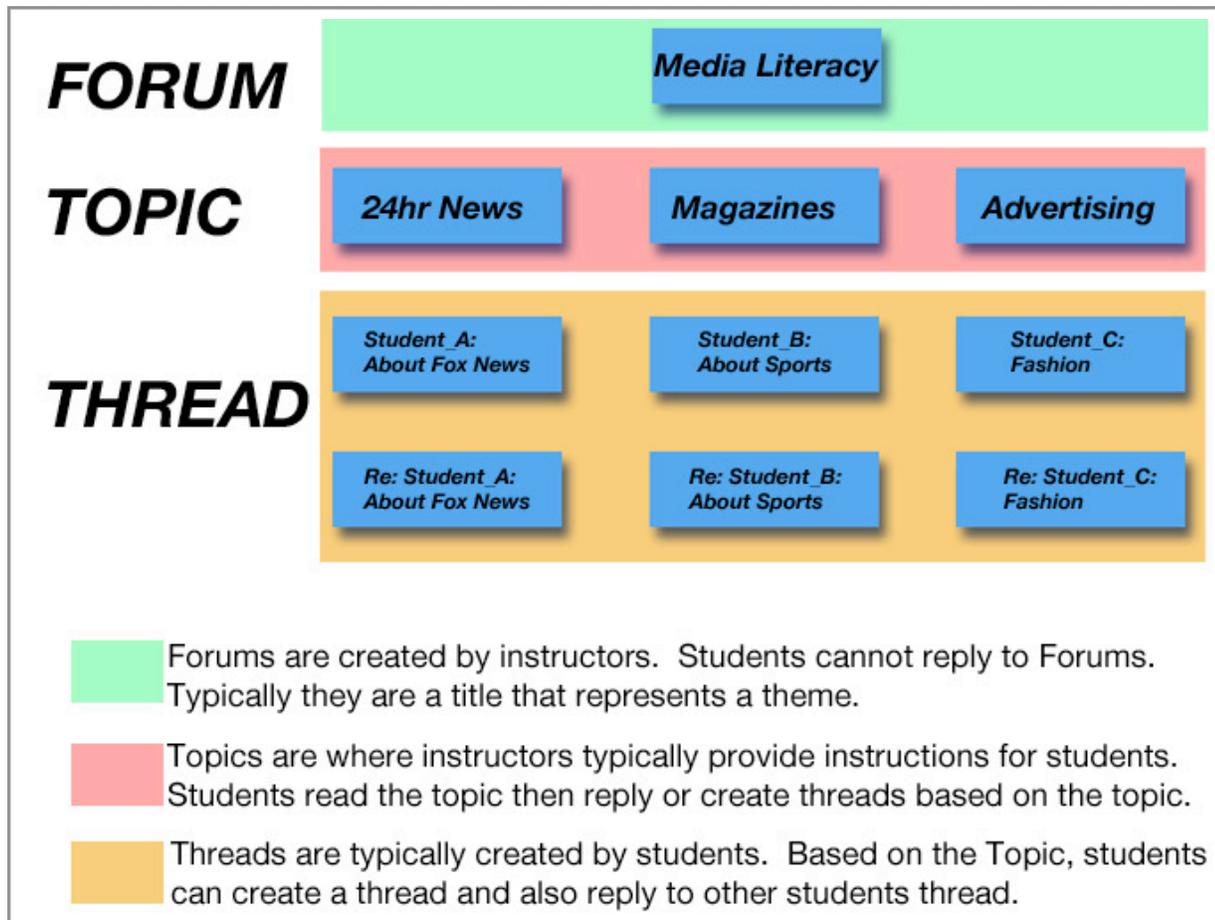


Sakai: Forums

A guide to using Forums



UNC-Chapel Hill

1st Edition

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Introduction

There are basically three levels to a Forum and their differences are based mainly on access, interaction, and workflow. At the top level is the Forums. Instructors, TA's, or other roles with permission use this level to set the permissions for each new topic created within it. It is at the Forum level that you typically adjust settings to create an exclusive space for groups or sections. Consider the Forum just a title representing what the subsequent topics are going to be. With some planning you may find it easier to create several Forums based on course concepts, a weekly/monthly discussion, or to designate an area for group collaboration. In this overall hierarchy of the Forums tool, the Topics are created next. Topics are generally where you will have a sub-category based on your Forum title. While creating your Topics you will also add a description explaining what the objectives or expectations for the students Threads will be. Students do not create Forums or Topics. The third part of a Forum is the Thread. Threads are created by students and teachers alike. It is where the real interaction between student-student or student-instructor takes place.

Effective Online Communication Strategies:

Creating a forum is the easy part, but establishing a thriving online community of learners and participants starts with a good foundation. Here are a few things to keep in mind when initiating an online discussion.

1. Post the rules of netiquette and expectations for the online discussions.
2. Take a little time up front acclimating your students to the learning environment
 - a. Explain the conventions and navigation of the forum
 - b. Use an icebreaker
 - c. Create a safe and comfortable place for students to reflect and share
3. Be consistent
 - a. You don't have to respond to every post or comment, but if you choose to then be consistent
 - b. It is recommended that you start a new discussion topic in the middle of the week.
4. Encourage students to participate but find a balance
5. When commenting during a discussion it is better to ask questions than make statements
6. Plan your topics ahead of time, but remain flexible
7. If you are grading then have a rubric
 - a. Let students know how much the online participation counts in the overall course grade
 - b. Share your rubric with students
 - c. Give feedback and encouragement when scores are low
8. Summarize the comments/threads in a topic then lead into the next topic
 - a. Re-frame
 - b. Include common comments
 - c. Clearly imply that the class is moving on to the next topic

Chapter 1

Setting up Forums

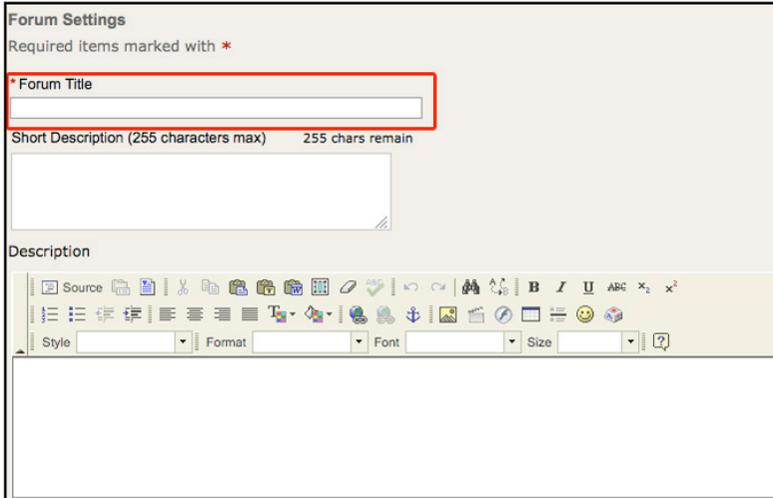
A forum is a subject - topics must be created within forums for posting. When creating a forum, at least one topic must be added so the forum is visible and site participants can post messages.

CREATING A FORUM

1. Click New Forum; the Forum Settings screen will open.

NOTE: A Forum is a subject; comments and discussions should be posted as Topics.

2. In the Forum Title field, type your forum's title
3. In the Short Description field, you can type a brief description
4. In the Description WYSIWYG text editor, you may enter a more detailed description of your forum, instructions, etc. – do NOT enter a discussion as this is done within topics.



The screenshot shows the 'Forum Settings' interface. At the top, it says 'Forum Settings' and 'Required items marked with *'. The 'Forum Title' field is highlighted with a red border. Below it is the 'Short Description (255 characters max)' field with a '255 chars remain' indicator. At the bottom is the 'Description' field with a WYSIWYG text editor toolbar.

5. Under Forum Posting, click of No for Lock Forum to allow users to post to the forum. If you wish to moderate the forum click on Yes for Moderate Topic in Forum.
6. Adjust Permissions (refer to “Setting up Group Forums”)
7. Next to Gradebook Assignment, select an entry in the Gradebook if you are assessing student’s discussions.
8. Then scroll to the bottom of the page and click on Save Setting and Add Topic.

CREATING A TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION

The steps to create a new Topic are very similar to creating a Forum.

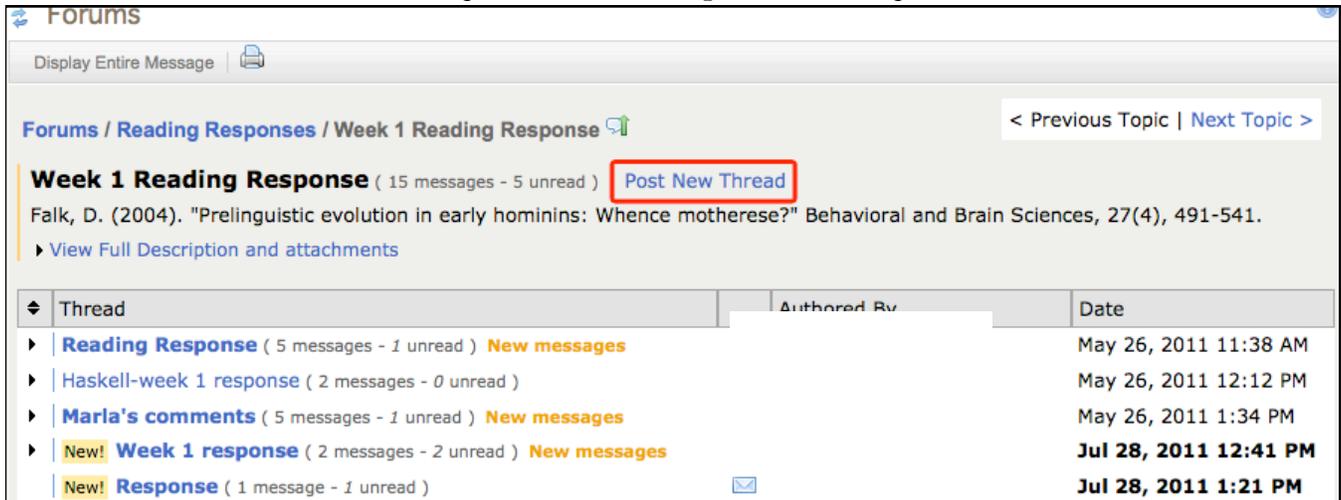
1. To the right of the Forum’s title click on New Topic.
2. In the Topic Title field, type your topic’s title
3. In the Short Description field, you can type a brief description
4. In the Description WYSIWYG text editor, you may enter a more detailed description and provide the writing prompt to which students will reply to.
5. When you are finished, scroll to the bottom of the page and Save your changes.

Chapter 2

Posting to Topics

CREATING A THREAD

1. From the Forums tool, click the title of the topic for which you'd like to post a message.
2. Click Post New Thread; the Compose Forum Message screen will open.



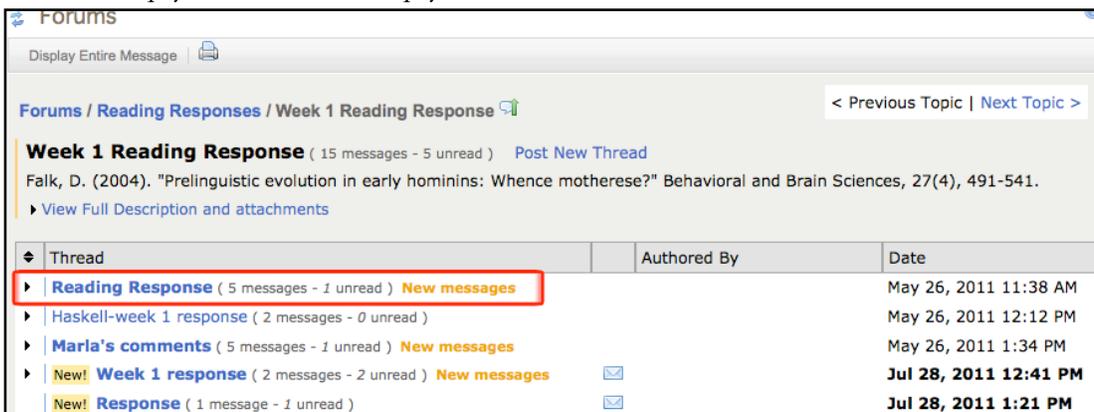
The screenshot shows a forum interface. At the top, there's a breadcrumb trail: Forums / Reading Responses / Week 1 Reading Response. Below this, the main thread title is "Week 1 Reading Response" with a subtext "(15 messages - 5 unread)". A red box highlights a "Post New Thread" button next to the title. Below the title, there's a snippet of text: "Falk, D. (2004). 'Prelinguistic evolution in early hominins: Whence motherese?' Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 27(4), 491-541." and a link "View Full Description and attachments". Below this is a table of threads.

Thread	Author	Date
▶ Reading Response (5 messages - 1 unread) New messages		May 26, 2011 11:38 AM
▶ Haskell-week 1 response (2 messages - 0 unread)		May 26, 2011 12:12 PM
▶ Marla's comments (5 messages - 1 unread) New messages		May 26, 2011 1:34 PM
▶ New! Week 1 response (2 messages - 2 unread) New messages		Jul 28, 2011 12:41 PM
▶ New! Response (1 message - 1 unread)		Jul 28, 2011 1:21 PM

3. Next to Title, type the subject (i.e., title) of your message.
4. Under Message, use the WYSIWYG editor to compose your message
NOTE: Use the Paste From Word tool if you copy and paste text from a Word document
5. Under Attachments, you can attach a file from your local computer or from Resources, or specify the URL for a file on the web.
6. When you're finished, click Post Message or click Cancel.

RESPONDING TO A THREAD

1. Click the Title of the desired topic.
2. Click the subject of the desired message.
3. Click Reply to Thread or Reply.



This screenshot is similar to the previous one, showing the same forum thread. However, in the table of threads, the first row "▶ Reading Response (5 messages - 1 unread) **New messages**" is highlighted with a red box, indicating it is the selected message.

4. In the text field next to **Reply Title**, give your reply a title.
5. Under **Message**, use the **WYSIWYG** editor to compose your reply. To insert a quote of the original message, click **Insert Original Message** (located above the **WYSIWYG** editor).
NOTE: Use the **Paste From Word** tool if you copy and paste text from a Word document.
6. Click **Add Attachment** to attach a file from your computer or **Resources**, or add a **URL**.
7. When you're finished click **Post Message**.

Chapter 3

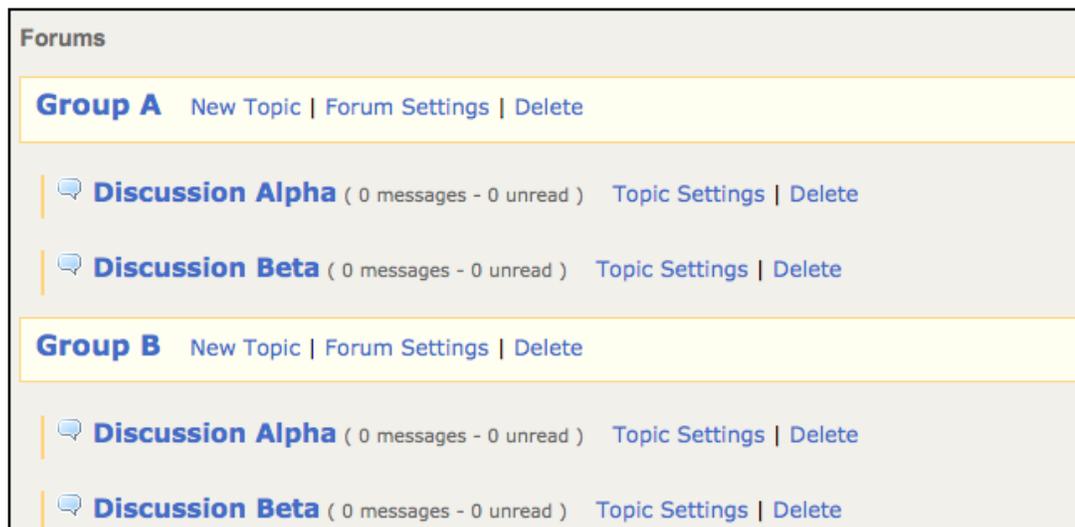
Private Group Forums

Sometimes you just want to create a virtual space for small groups to collaborate. Whether it be for a group project, writing prompts, or other collaborative inspiration then you can create Forums for groups of any size. When you set up your group Forums you are essentially creating a space where the only members that have access are the members in the group along with the instructor(s) and TA(s).

In order to set up a Forum for a specific group you first need to restrict access from all the students. Basically you are creating a Forum with a clean slate. By default all students have access and that is not what you want for group forums. After you restrict access for all the students, then you will go back and associate 1 group with that forum. In other words, only one group will have permissions that allow them to access and edit the Topics you create. The basic permission you may choose is the "Contributor" but as the instructor you can create custom settings that allow that group any privilege you deem necessary to effectively collaborate.

CREATE A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION BOARD

If you choose to setup multiple private discussion boards for a select group it is highly recommended that you start at the forum level. In the following example, only members in group A will see and be able to access their forum's topics. Understanding Roles and Permissions is very important.



1. Click New Forum; the Forum Settings screen will open.
NOTE: A Forum is a subject; comments and discussions should be posted as Topics.
2. In the Forum Title field, type your forum's title
3. In the Short Description field, you can type a brief description
4. In the Description WYSIWYG text editor, you may enter a more detailed description of your forum, instructions, etc. – do NOT enter a discussion as this is done within topics.

▼ Permissions

This site role: Auditor (Contributor)

gets this permission level: Contributor

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
<input type="checkbox"/> Post to Gradebook	

Edit Postings

○ None
○ Own
○ All

Delete Postings

○ None
○ Own
○ All

NOTE: There are two drop down menus. One to select a role and the second, Gets This Permission Level; lets you select what that role is allowed to do within the forum.

You can select a role then assign a permission level. Then use the drop down menu to select another role and modify their permission level independently. You will continue to select roles and modify permissions until you have the desired settings.

5. Select each role that a student could have in your site and change their permission to None. For instance, in the following example a student could have any one of the following roles: Student, Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, MMH101.002.FA11, MMH101.003.FA11.
6. Select the group that will have private access to the forum and topics then select Contributor. In the image below, the students in Group 1 will be the only students with access to the Forum.

The image shows two screenshots of dropdown menus. The left screenshot shows a list of roles with 'Student (None)' selected. The right screenshot shows a list of permission levels with 'None' selected.

7. Next to Gradebook Assignment, select an entry in the Gradebook if you are assessing student's discussions.
8. Then scroll to the bottom of the page and click on Save Setting and Add Topic.

Chapter 4

Grading Forums

Statistics will give you a snapshot of how your students are participating in the Forums. It isn't a recommended tool to base a grade on, but rather an overview of how much content they authored and how much they have read relative to the whole class. Keep in mind that these represent "visits" to a thread, not necessarily how long they were reading that particular thread. Also, a student could visit a thread which has 10 replies, but unless a student clicks read for all 10, then the statistics tool will only log it as 1 in the Read column.

Forums / Statistics				
Name 	Authored	Read	Unread	Percent Read
Student, Alpha (studenta)	11	15	397	4%
Student, Beta (studentb)	9	9	403	2%
Student, Delta (studentd)	12	17	395	4%
Student, Epsilon (studente)	16	20	392	5%
Student, Eta (studentet)	11	19	393	5%
Student, Gamma (studentg)	9	13	399	3%
Student, Iota (studenei)	12	17	395	4%
Student, Kappa (studentk)	13	15	397	4%

What can you do with Statistics? On the surface it gives you a relative idea of participation. But, it also allows you to choose a particular student and see all of their "Authored" content without having to filter through each topic or thread.

By default, everything that a student authors is also counted as something they read. So Student, Beta has Authored 9 and Read 9, which on the surface tells you that they most likely have not read any other students contributions. To see what they authored and read you can click on their name, Once you click on their name this is what you will see:

Messages Authored Show Full Text for All Authored Messages				
Forum Title	Topic Title	Date ▼	Subject	
Media Literacy	24 Hr News	Sep 20, 2011 1:38 PM	Commercials during Fox News	[display in thread]
Media Literacy	24 Hr News	Sep 15, 2011 9:03 PM	Prime Time	[display in thread]
Media Literacy	Advertising	Sep 13, 2011 3:50 PM	Advertising in Sports Magazines	[display in thread]
Media Literacy	Magazines	Sep 9, 2011 10:15 AM	Cover Page of Sports Magazines	[display in thread]
Media Literacy	Magazines	Sep 8, 2011 7:53 PM	RE: Student, Alpha's Teen Magazine	[display in thread]

Messages Read				
Forum Title	Topic Title	Date ▼	Subject	
Media Literacy	24 Hr News	Sep 20, 2011 1:38 PM	Commercials during Fox News	
Media Literacy	24 Hr News	Sep 15, 2011 9:03 PM	Prime Time	
Media Literacy	Advertising	Sep 13, 2011 3:50 PM	Advertising in Sports Magazines	
Media Literacy	Magazines	Sep 9, 2011 10:15 AM	Cover Page of Sports Magazines	
Media Literacy	Magazines	Sep 8, 2011 7:53 PM	RE: Student, Alpha's Teen Magazine	

Now, if you look at the Messages Authored and the Messages Read along with the time stamp, you know that they are both the same. In most cases Messages Read will have a longer list along with different times than Messages Authored. You can click on the subject title to read only the content they Authored. It may be out of context so you also have the option to “display in thread” or you can view all the authored messages at once.

Show Full Text for All Authored Messages	
<u>Subject</u>	
Commercials during Fox News Prime Time	[display in thread]
Advertising in Sports Magazines	[display in thread]
Cover Page of Sports Magazines	[display in thread]
RE: Student, Alpha's Teen Magazine	[display in thread]

GRADING A THREAD

You can either go to the Topic of choice, in this example it is "24 Hr News" and then choose their contribution by clicking the title-"Prime Time". Another option is to go to Statistics, choose student by clicking on their name, and then selecting the subject title you are ready to grade as described above. Either way, when you get to their content you select Grade and this is what you will see.

1. Select the topic which you are ready to grade
2. Select the title of the thread

New! **Prime Time**

Student, Beta (studentb) (Aug 29, 2011 10:47 AM) · Read by: 6   [Reply](#)

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

3. Click on Grade

You can either go to the Topic of choice, in this example it is "24 Hr News" and then choose their contribution by clicking the title-"Prime Time". Another option is to go to Statistics, choose student by clicking on their name, and then selecting the subject title you are ready to grade as described above. Either way, when you get to their content you select Grade and this is what you will see.

Grade Forum Message

24 Hr News - Prime Time

Prime Time Student, Beta (studentb) (Aug 29, 2011 10:47 AM)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

Required items marked with *

* Gradebook Items:

Lesson 1 (20.0 points possible)

* Grade (Points Only):

10.0

Comments:

Submit Grade

Cancel

You can select the drop-down box for Gradebook Items and choose which gradebook entry you want to associate the discussion points to. In this example, there were 20 possible points and Student, Beta received 10 pts. There is also a text box where you can provide comments that only that participant will be able to see. Your comments are private between you and them. Don't forget to click on Submit Grade.

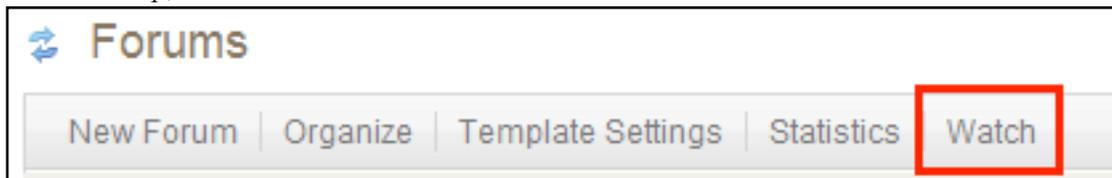
Chapter 5

Forum Notifications

You can see the number of new forum postings from either My Workspace or your site's Home page. You can also choose to get email notification of new postings on forum threads you have contributed to.

EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS

1. From your site's menubar, click Forums.
2. At the top, click Watch.



3. Select your preferred option and click Save.



Chapter 6

Credits & License

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Some instructions in *Sakai Forums* were adapted from The Sakai Project, <http://sakaiproject.org/>

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Feedback welcome

Your comments, corrections and suggestions for improvement are welcome. Please email sakaissupport@unc.edu.