Blackboard Learn Ultra: Communication Tools

Blackboard Learn Ultra has a many of tools designed communicate with the students within your online course.

Discussions:

Online discussions provide unique benefits. Because students can take time to ponder before they post ideas, you may see more thoughtful conversations. You can observe as students demonstrate their grasp of the material and correct misconceptions. You can extend your office hours and reach students more often during the week so that learning is continuous.

For smaller course groups, you can also offer group discussions where only members of the group may access the discussion.

- **How to create a discussion board?**

  All new discussions are **hidden** at first. You can edit and make them visible when you are ready for student participation.

  You can create discussions in two locations within your course:

  1. Create a discussion directly on the Course Content page, so students can view it in context with other materials.
  2. Select the Discussions tab on the navigation bar to open the course discussions page. Select the plus sign in the upper-right corner to open the menu. You can add discussions and organize them with folders. Select the gear icon to open the Discussion Settings panel. You can allow students to create discussions that appear in the list with the label Created by student. You can turn this setting on and off at any time.
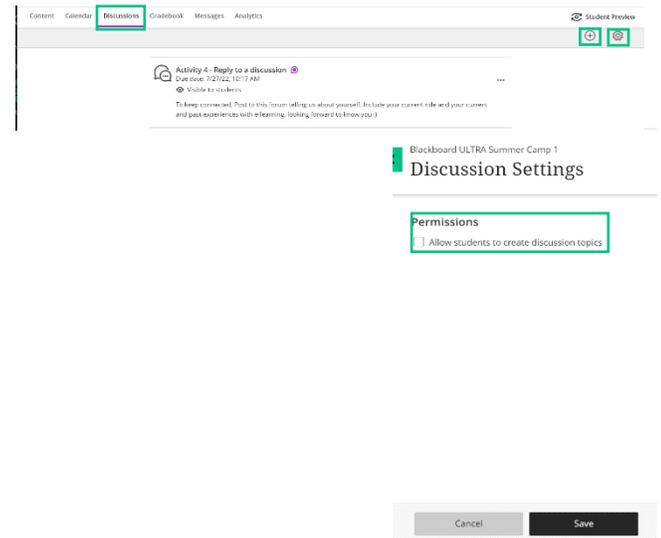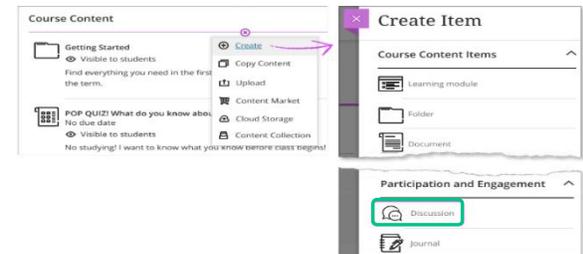
- ## New Discussion page

1. Type a meaningful title to help students find the right discussion. If you don't add a title, "New Discussion" and the date appear as the title for you and your students.

2. Include guidelines and expectations. You can use the options in the editor to format text, attach files, and embed multimedia.

3. Show or hide the discussion. New discussions are hidden by default. Students can't see a discussion until you choose to show it. You can create all your content ahead of time and choose what you want students to see based on your schedule. You can also set availability conditions based on date, time, and performance on other items in the course gradebook.
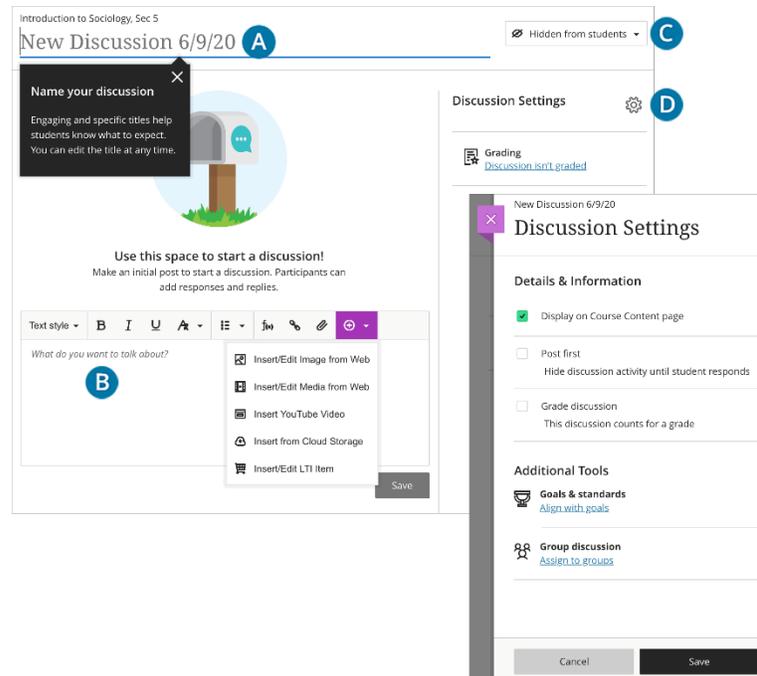
A. Select discussion options. Click the Discussion Settings icon to open a panel with options for your discussion:

- **Include the discussion with other content items**. Select Display on the Course Content page to include the discussion on the Course Content page.

- **Encourage original ideas**. Some students may rely too much on the thoughts of others when they draft responses. Hidden responses and replies can help students cultivate their own ideas on your initial discussion topic. Select Post first to hide discussion activity from students until they respond to the discussion. When you want to use both post first and groups, select Post first before you assign groups.

- **Grade the discussion.** To motivate students to post insightful contributions, you can make the discussion count for a grade. When you choose to grade a discussion, more options appear such as the due date and maximum points. The maximum points apply to one or more posts made by a student. When you enable grading for a discussion, a column is created automatically in the gradebook.

- **Align goals with the discussion.** You and your institution can use goals to measure

student achievement across programs and curriculums. When you create a discussion, you can align one or multiple goals. Select Align with goals to search for available goals. After you make the discussion visible, students can view the goals so they know your expectations.

- **Add groups.** You can assign students to discussion groups so fewer people are involved. You can also assign a specific topic to each group. You can grade group discussions.

- ## Delete discussion topics, responses, and replies:

Instructors can edit or delete anyone's discussions, discussion titles, responses, and replies. Students can delete only their own discussions, responses, and replies. Students cannot edit their discussion titles after they create discussions.

Open the menu for a response or reply to access the Edit and Delete functions. If you delete an initial response, all replies remain. The system displays a message about your deletion so others know what happened.

If you delete the discussion topic and responses and replies exist, everyone is informed about the deletion. The deletion message also appears if students delete discussion topics they created.

- ## Conversations:

If you enable class conversations for individual content items, students can discuss the content with you and their classmates. They can ask for help, share sources, or answer questions others have. As the conversation develops, it appears only with the relevant content. Conversations do not appear on the discussions page, you can enable conversations for these content items like Documents, Assignments, Group assignments, Tests, Group tests, Offline submissions and Links to teaching tools.

- **Enable conversations:** Select the item's Settings icon to open the panel with the item's details and information. Select Allow class conversations.
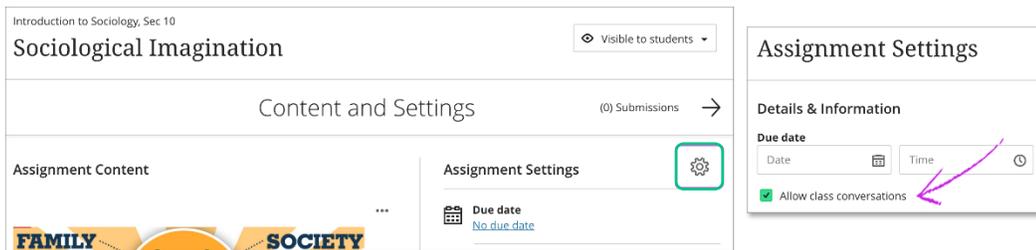
- **Access conversations:** When someone contributes to a conversation, **an icon appears next to the item's title** on the Course Content page. Open the item's menu and select Conversation to open the conversation in a new layer, or **select the Open class conversation icon** in the upper-right corner of an item's page or submissions page. A purple circle appears with the icon to indicate new activity.
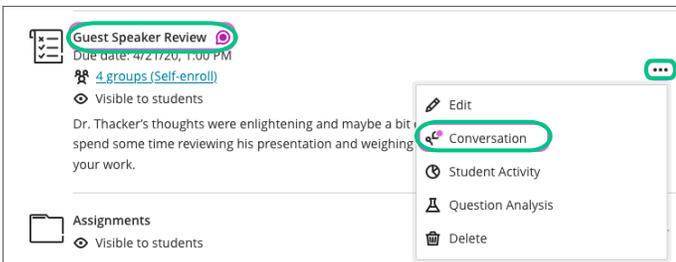
- **Journals:** Journals are personal spaces for students to communicate privately with you. Students can also use journals as a self-reflective tool. They can post their opinions, ideas, and concerns about the course, or discuss and analyze course-related materials.

- **Create a journal:**

  On the Course Content page, select the plus sign wherever you want to add a journal. Select Create > Participation and Engagement > Journal. You can also expand or create a folder or learning module and add a journal, Type a meaningful title to help students find the right journal in the content list. If you do not add a title, "New Journal" and the date appear on the Course Content page.

A. **Add a prompt to set expectations and guidelines**. You can use the options in the editor to format text, attach files, and embed multimedia. If you don't add a prompt, students see a message that you haven't added instructions for this journal.

B. **Show or hide the journal**. New journals are hidden by default. Students can't see a journal until you choose to show it. You can create all your content ahead of time and choose what you want students to see based on your schedule. You can also set availability conditions based on date, time, and performance on other items in the course gradebook. On the Course Content page, students can see when you set the journal to show.

C. **Grade a journal's contributions**. To motivate students to post insightful contributions, you can make a journal count for a grade. Select the gear icon to open the Journal Settings panel. When you choose to grade a journal, more options appear such as the due date and maximum points. The maximum points apply to one or more entries made by a student. You can also use Ultra's grading tools, like feedback and rubrics, to grade journals.
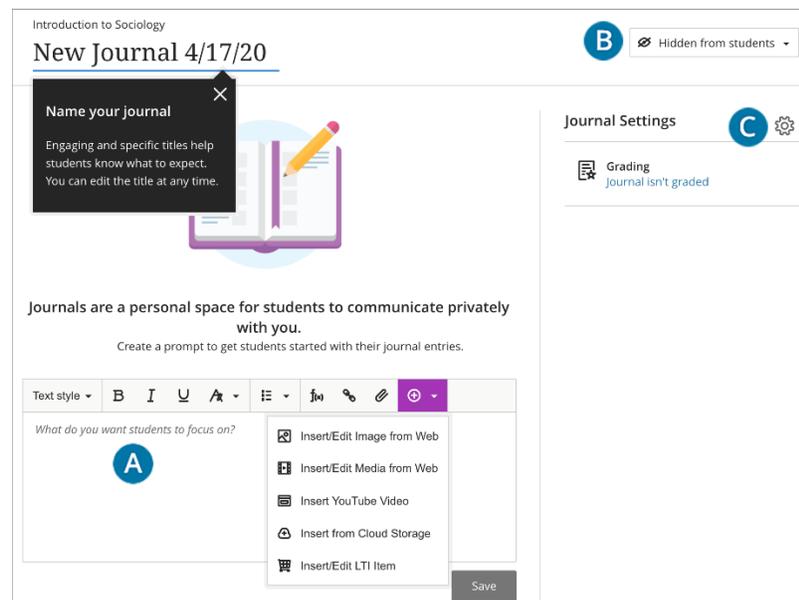
  We recommend that you use Ultra journals as you build new courses, but our guidance is to limit teaching and grading usage until additional improvements are completed.