



Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication in Western Online

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The Tools

Western Online provides a few tools for communication and assessment of students. These tools include:

- Blog
- Discussions
- Chat
- Email

Blog

Use the Blog tool to post and respond to questions, engage in discussions, and share opinions and comments with other users. You can create private blog entries, or choose to make public entries for other users to view.

Discussions

Discussions are asynchronous. Meaning that students do not need to be logged in at the same time. The instructor poses a question and the student post an answer in the form of a thread. Students can then reply to other students threads.

Chat

Chats are synchronous. This means that the conversation is live. The downside to this is that everyone has to be logged in at the same time. A great use for chats is to provide online office hours in an online course. The instructor can tell students that he/she will be logged in at a certain time/day and students can log in and ask questions.

Email

This is just your basic email tool. Send messages with a subject, cc or bcc is also available. Type in your message and hit send.

Blog

The Blog tool has three main areas:

- **My Blog** - Used for creating and maintaining your own blog.
- **Blog Watch** - Used for reading other users' blogs.
- **Blog List** - Used for setting up which other users' blogs you want to follow or read.

From the My Blog page or the Blog Watch page, you can change the following by clicking the **Settings** link on the upper right.

- **Show a link to your user profile from your blog** - Allow users who are viewing your blog to also view your profile
- **Make entries public by default** - Selects the Make Public option for new blog entries so they are automatically shared with other users by default.
- **Allow comments by default** - Selects the Allow comments option for new blog entries by default. Note that this option is only available if the Make entries public by default option is selected.
- **Receive email when comments are added** - Select this option to receive an email notification when a new comment is made on one of your blog entries.
- **Allow blog to be read by anyone** - Allow users who are not logged into Brightspace Learning Environment to view your blog through an external URL. The External URL field contains the URL to share your blog. Note that you cannot access private blog entries by URL.
- **Publish your blog as an RSS feed** - Allow readers of your blog to link to your Site Feed and view your blog using an external RSS aggregator. To publish your blog in this way, you must enter a title for it in the Feed Title field.
- **Persistence** - Enter a value in the Persistence field to determine how long blog entries stay in your Blog Watch list. For example, if you enter 10, entries will remain in your BlogWatch for 10 days after being posted. If you set the value to 0, blog entries remain in your Blog Watch indefinitely.

Blog Entry

To make a blog entry, do the following:

- Click **Communication** in the nav bar and choose **Blog**.
- Click the **New Entry** button.
- Give the entry a title.
- Type your entry into the **Content** text area.
- Select the options you want under the **Properties**.
- Click the **Save** button.

Discussions

The New drop down button in the Discussions tool contains two items; **New Forum** and **New Topic**.

- **New Forum** - A Forum is basically a category/section. Every discussion topic is required to go into a forum. You can have multiple forums or you can create one forum and put all discussion topics in it. You cannot post to a forum. Only a topic within the forum. You can create your forum(s) first, or create them while you are creating a topic.
- **New Topic** - A Topic is the actual discussion that your students will post to using the **Start a New Thread** button.

Creating a Discussion Topic

- Click **Communication** in the nav bar and choose **Discussions**.
- Click the **New** drop down button and choose **New Topic**.
- Put the topic into a Forum. This is required:
 - If you have already created the Forum, simply choose it from the Forum drop down menu.
 - If you want to create a new forum for the topic, click the [New Forum] link to the right of the drop down. Give the forum a title and click **Save**.
- Select the **Topic Type**
 - Open topic, everyone can access this topic and its contents
 - Group or section topic, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section
- Type in the discussion **Title** (for example, Discussion #1).
- Type in the instructions/question you want the students to answer in the **Description** text area.
- Optional setting under the **Options** section:
 - **Allow anonymous posts** - Allows users to post anonymously to the topic. Anonymous posts display with the author "Anonymous" in the thread.
 - **A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic** - This option will require a moderator to approve posts in this topic before they display to users.
 - **Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads** - This option will require a user to start a new thread in the topic before viewing or replying to other threads in the topic. If this topic requires post approval, users will not be able to view or reply to other threads until their thread is approved.
- Set the Availability and Locking Options:
 - **Availability** - This determines whether students can see the discussion or not. Options are **Topic is always visible**, **Hide this topic**, or use the **Topic is visible for a specific date range** to schedule the visibility.
 - **Locking Options** - This determines whether or not students can post to the discussion or not. Options are **Unlock Topic**, **Lock topic**, or use the **Unlock topic for a specific date range** to schedule the locking.
- Click **Save**.

Add a Grade Item to the Discussion

- Click the **Assessment** tab, click the **[New Grade Item]** link.
- In the window that pops up, scroll all the way to the top and enter a name for the grade item in the **Name** text box (give it the same title as the discussion).
- Type in the **Maximum Points**.
- Click **Save** to close that window.
- Type in the same points in the **Score Out Of box**.
- Click **Save and Close**. Your discussion is now ready.

Chat

The Chat tool allows for two types of chats (note - The chat type cannot be changed once it has been created):

- **General chat**
- **Personal chat**

General chat

General chats are public chats visible to everyone enrolled in the org unit where they are created. Instructors can create general chat rooms to incorporate chat discussions into the teaching of a course since they are automatically open to all users enrolled in the course.

- Click **Communication** in the nav bar and choose **Chat**.
- On the Chat List page, click **New Chat**.
- Enter a title.
- Select **General chat**.
- Enter a description of the chat.
- Click **Create**.

Personal chat

Personal chats are private and visible only to users who you have added to the chat's participants list. Personal chats are ideal for keeping in touch with friends and colleagues or for clubs and other groups whose members do not share a single org unit. Anyone with the proper permissions can create personal chat rooms. To create a personal chat, do the following:

- Click **Communication** in the nav bar and choose **Chat**.
- On the Chat List page, click **New Chat**.
- Enter a title.
- Select **Personal chat**.
- Enter a description of the chat.
- Click **Create**.

To add members to the personal chat, do the following:

- Click **Communication** in the nav bar and choose **Chat**.
- Click the drop arrow next to the chat and choose **View Members**.
- Click the **Add Members** button.
- Select the student(s) you want to add and click **Add**.
- Click **Done**.

Create Quicklinks to Discussions and Chats

When discussions and chats are created using their respective tools, they are only accessible through those tools. For example, if I create a discussion called Discussion #1, I can only access it by clicking Communication in the nav bar and choosing Discussions. You can use the Content tool to create links to these items that will appear in a learning module in the Content Browser on the homepage.

- Click **Resources** in the nav bar and choose **Content**.
- Under the **Table of Content** on the left, select the module or sub-module you want to add the quicklink to.
- Click **Existing Activities** and then choose **Discussions** (or Chat).
- Click the discussion forum that contains the discussion topic you want to add a quicklink to.
- Click the discussion topic. A link is added to the module.

This process works for creating links to all other items in Western Online including Chats, Assignments, Quizzes, Checklists, etc.

Email

The Email tool is an internal email system within Western Online that can be used to send emails to students from within a particular course. Emails sent from Western Online are forwarded to the users' WIU Gmail account by default.

- Click **Communication** and choose **Email**.
- Click **Compose**.
- Click **Address Book**.
- Click the **Filter By** drop down menu and choose the course you want to email.
- Check off all the names of the students you want to email.
- Click **To**.
- Click **Add Recipients**.
- Compose your message and click **Send**.

An easier way to send an email is actually not through the email tool, but through the **Classlist**.

- Click **Communication** and choose **Classlist**.
- Place a check next to the names of those you want to send an email to.
- Click the **Email** link at the top of the user list (the names you selected will be in the **Bcc** field).
- Compose your message and click **Send**.