Excerpt - Grading Only

Making the Most of **Discussions**

Blackboard Learn 9.1

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6: Grading Discussions

In a face-to-face classroom setting, students are expected to participate in class discussions and that participation is part of the equation when assessing performance. Assessing this participation can be ambiguous. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate a student who is active, but does not advance the discussion, from a student who speaks less frequently, but with greater impact.

Student interactions with the discussion board create a permanent record of participation. You need to have reasonable expectations about what you and your students can accomplish in an online discussion. Due to its asynchronous nature, more time may be needed for well-articulated points to emerge in the online environment. In addition to providing a practical number of course discussion opportunities, students need timely and constructive responses regarding the quality of their contributions. Evaluation not only lets them know how they performed, but shapes the improvement of future interactions.

You can assign discussion grades within a forum or thread and evaluate students on their participation, on the quality of their posts, or a combination of the two. You can create rubrics and use them while grading forums and threads. To learn about the rubrics tool, see the *Using Rubrics* manual.

You can also grade discussion posts from the **Needs Grading** page. To learn more, see the manual for this feature.

Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the grading process.
- Grade discussion forums and threads.
- Disable grading.
- Change and delete grades.
- Use the email tool when assigning grades.
- Define discussion grading criteria.

The Grading Process

The discussion grading process consists of four steps.

Instructor activity

Student activity

1	**CREATE** When you create a graded forum or thread, a column is created automatically in the Grade Center. The name of the forum or thread is used as the column title. You can edit the title in the Grade Center.
2	**PARTICIPATE** Students participate in the discussion. As the discussion progresses, you can participate and provide feedback by replying to, rating, and moderating posts.
3	**GRADE** Review student posts and type a numeric grade. You can lock threads after they are graded.
4	**VIEW GRADES** The grades are saved in the discussion board and added to the Grade Center. Students can view their grades in **My Grades**.

Assigning Forum Grades

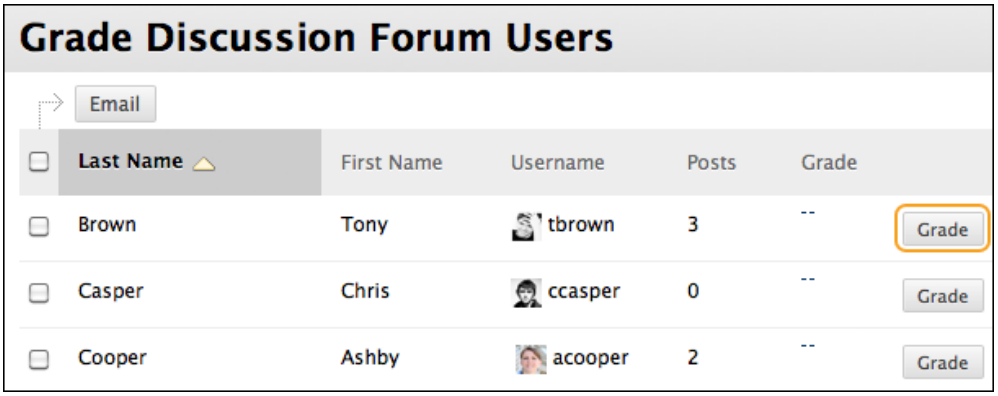
You can assign discussion grades to evaluate participants on performance throughout a forum. When you create or edit a forum, you can enable forum grading options and a Grade Center column is created automatically.

Only users with a role of manager or grader can assign grades for posts. A grader cannot view his or her own work.

QUICK STEPS: Assigning Forum Grades

1. Access the discussion forum where you enabled forum grading and click **Grade Forum** on the action bar.

2. On the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page, click **Grade** in a user's row with a number in the **Posts** column.



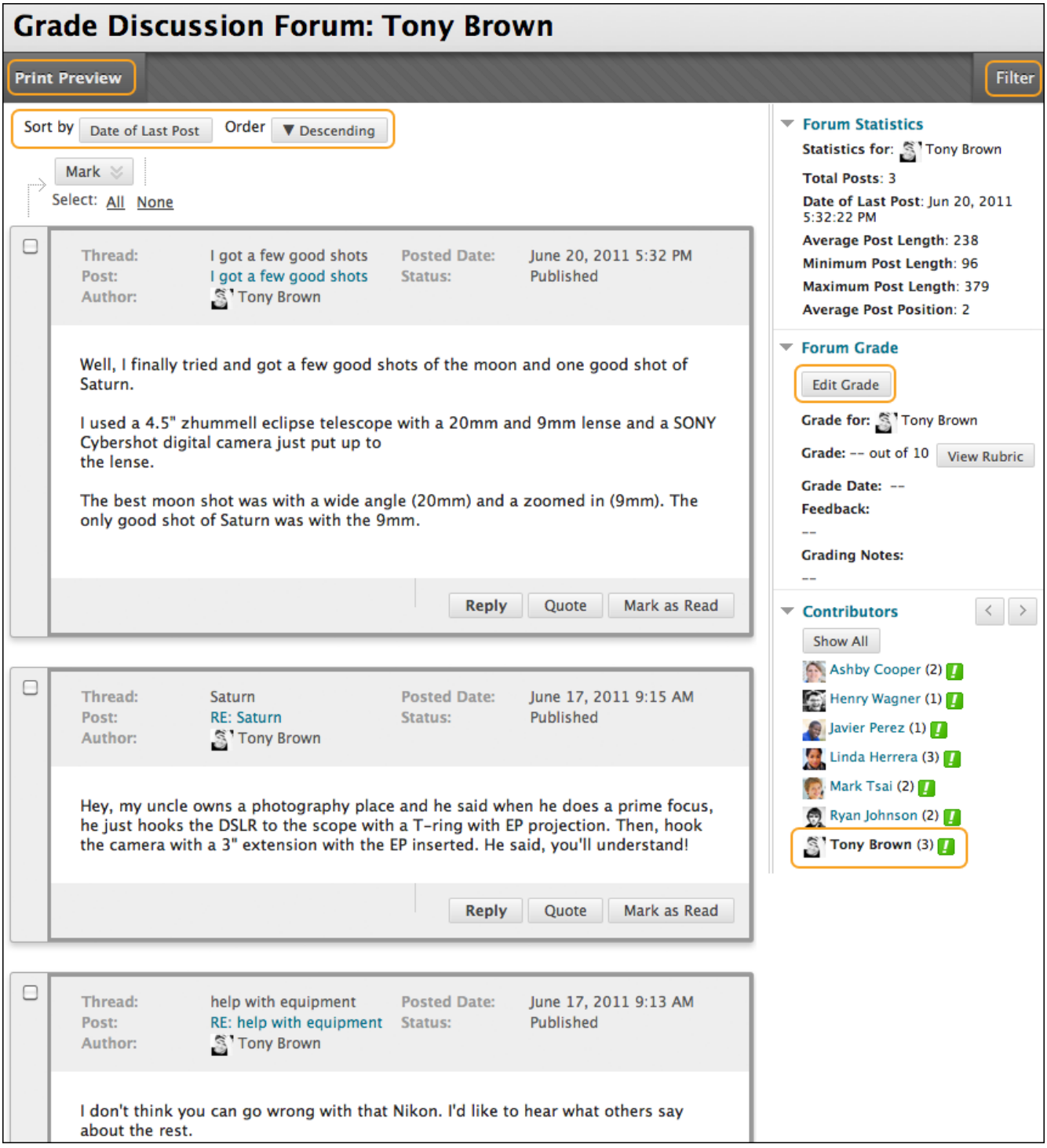
3. On the **Grade Discussion Forum** page, a collection of the user's posts made to the graded forum appears. Because you can base a forum grade on multiple threads, all messages posted by the student are included for review. On the action bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists.

   The side panel contains three sections:

   - **Forum Statistics**: Includes information about the user's posts, such as **Date of Last Post**, **Average Post Length**, and **Average Post Position**.
   - **Forum Grade**: Includes **Grade**, **Feedback**, and **Grading Notes**.
   - **Contributors**: Users who have submitted one or more posts appear with exclamation marks—the **Needs Grading** icon ( ). In this section, use the **Previous User** and **Next User** arrows in this section to navigate among users to grade -OR- click a user's name in the list. Click **Show All** to view all users in your course. Users who have not posted to the graded forum are included in this list. Click **Show with Posts Only** to return to the list of users who have posts to grade.

     NOTE: The **In Progress** icon ( ) appears next to a user's name until the specified number of posts is met for needs grading status. For example, if you choose three posts from the drop-down list and a user submits two, the **In Progress** icon appears.

4. In the content frame, evaluate the currently selected user's posts. To assign a grade, click **Edit Grade** in the **Forum Grade** section.

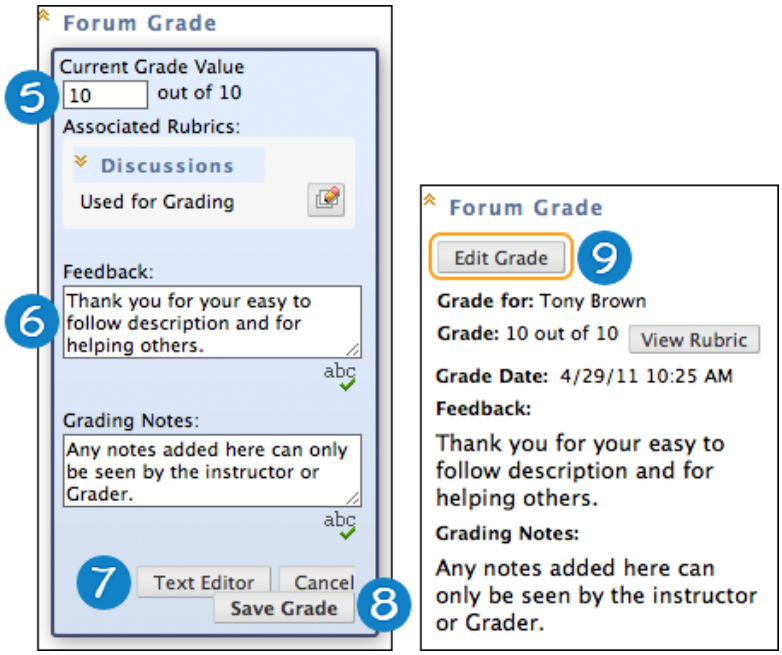


NOTE: To collapse or expand a side panel section, click the arrow next to the section title.

5. Type a numeric value in the **Current Grade Value** box. Assigning a score here removes any Grade Center override that may exist for this user for this forum grade.

   NOTE: If you associated a rubric with the forum, you can access and use it for grading.

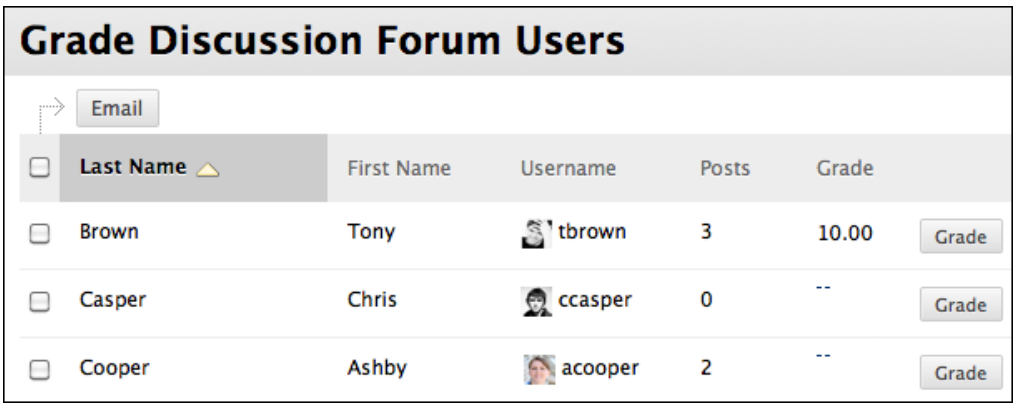
6. Optionally, type **Feedback** for the user and **Grading Notes** that appear to the forum manager or grader only. Optionally, use the spell check function at the bottom of each text box.
7. Optionally, click **Text Editor** to access the editor in a pop-up window. Use the functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups to your feedback or notes.
8. Click **Save Grade**. The information appears in the **Forum Grade** section and in the Grade Center.
9. Click **Edit Grade** to make changes. The changes appear in the **Forum Grade** section and in the Grade Center column. The changes are recorded in the Grade Center on the user's **Grade Details** page and on the **Grade History** tab.



10. When grading is complete, click **OK** to return to the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page or use the breadcrumbs to return to the discussion board.

Result

Grades appear in the **Grade** column on the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page and in the Grade Center.



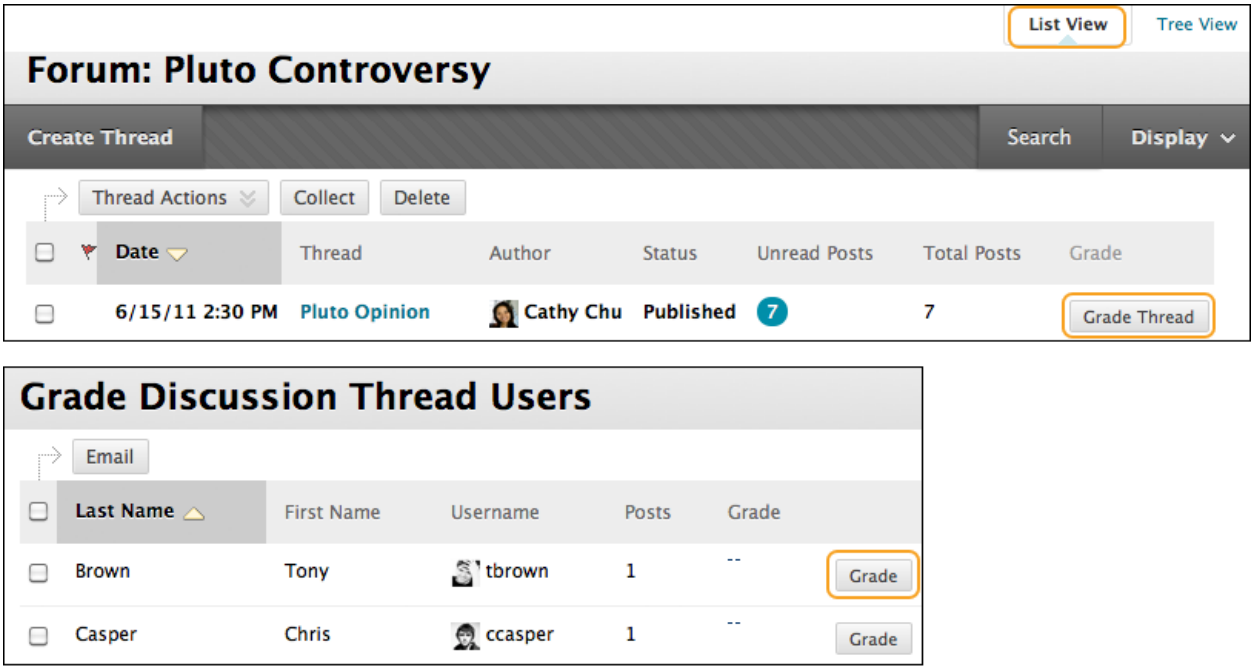
Assigning Thread Grades

If you enabled **Grade Threads** during forum creation, you can assign grades for threads within that forum.

REMINDER: Students cannot create new threads in a forum where threads are graded.

QUICK STEPS: Assigning Thread Grades

1. Access the discussion forum containing the thread you want to grade.
2. On the thread listing page, in **List View**, click **Grade Thread** in the thread's row.
3. On the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page, click **Grade** in a user's row with a number in the **Posts** column.



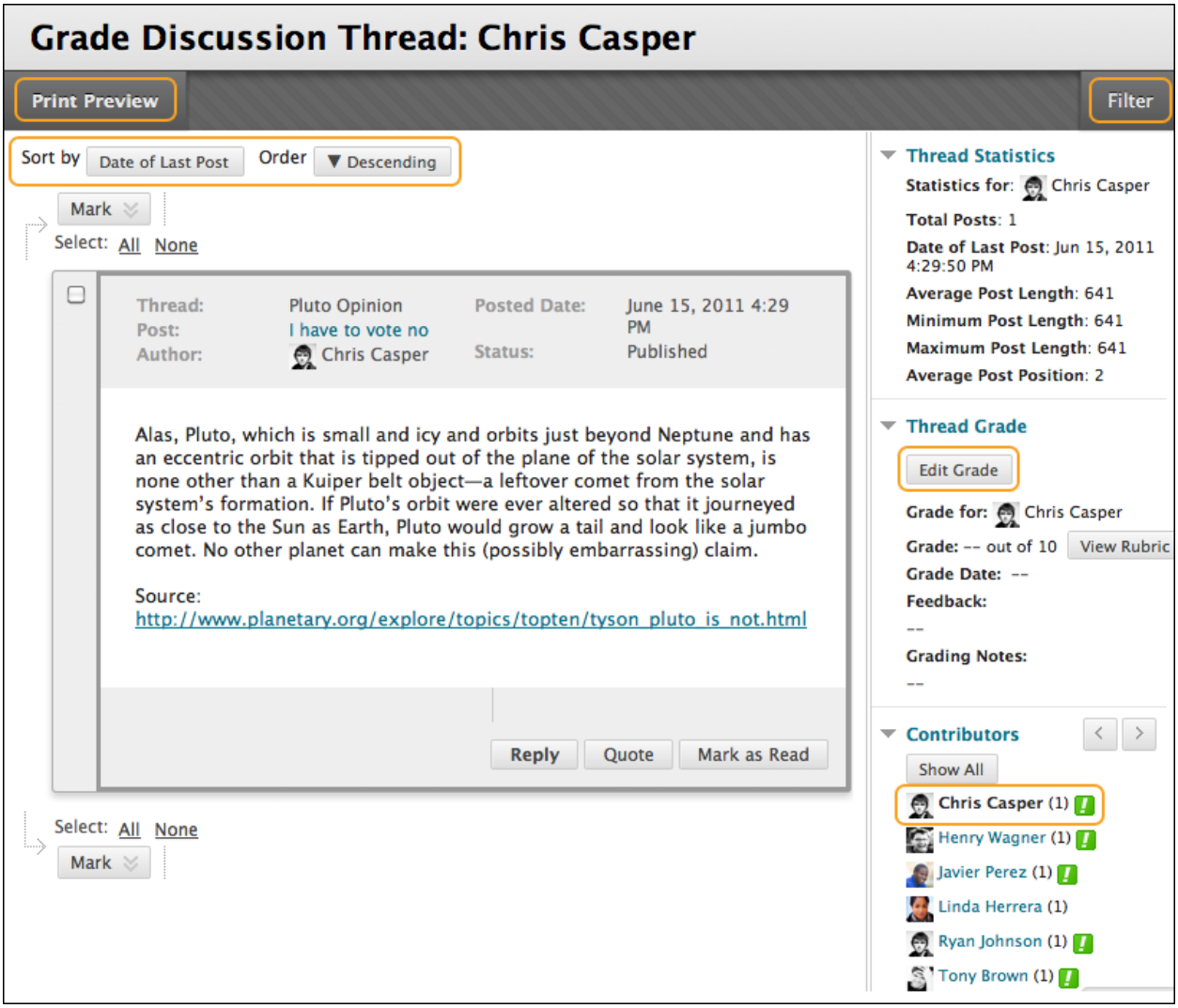
4. On the **Grade Discussion Thread** page, a collection of the user's posts made to the graded thread appears. Because you can base a thread grade on multiple messages, all messages posted by the student are included for review. On the action bar, click **Print Preview** to open the page in a new window in printer-friendly format. Posts print in the order they appear on the page. To select which posts appear and in which order, you can filter and sort posts using the **Filter** function and the **Sort by** and **Order** drop-down lists.

   The side panel contains three sections:

   - **Thread Statistics**: Includes information about the user's posts, such as **Date of Last Post**, **Average Post Length**, and **Average Post Position**.
   - **Thread Grade**: Includes **Grade**, **Grade Date**, **Feedback**, and **Grading Notes**.
   - **Contributors**: Users who have submitted one or more posts appear with exclamation marks—the **Needs Grading** icon ( ). In this section, use the **Previous User** and **Next User** arrows in this section to navigate among users to grade -OR- click a user's name in the list. Click **Show All** to view all users in your course. Users who have not posted to the graded thread are included in this list. Click **Show with Posts Only** to return to the list of users who have posts to grade.

     NOTE: The **In Progress** icon ( ) appears next to a user's name until the specified number of posts is met for needs grading status. For example, if you choose two posts from the drop-down list and a user submits one, the **In Progress** icon appears.

5. In the content frame, evaluate the currently selected user's posts. To assign a grade, click **Edit Grade** in the **Thread Grade** section.



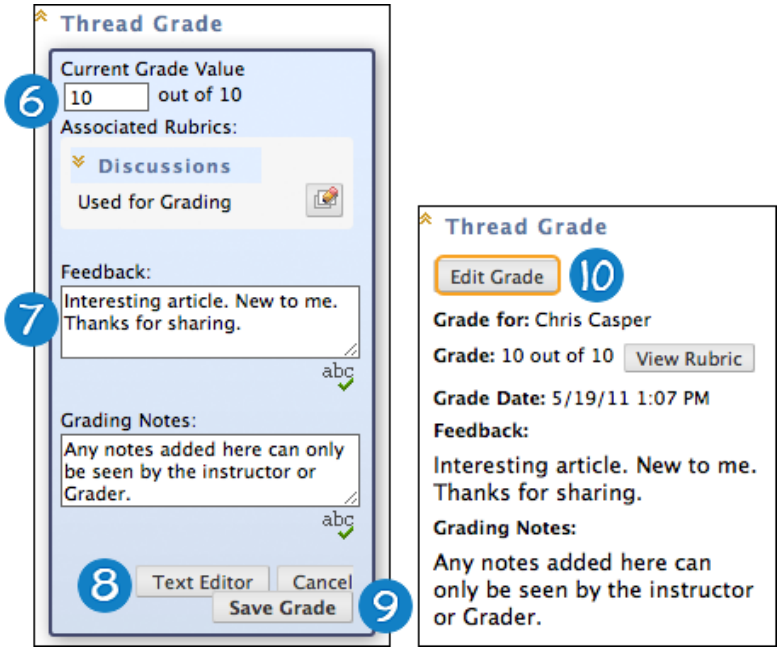
NOTE: To collapse or expand a side panel section, click the arrow next to the section title.

6. Type a numeric value in the **Current Grade Value** box. Assigning a score here removes any Grade Center override that may exist for this user for this thread grade.

   NOTE: If you associated a rubric with the thread, you can access it while grading.

7. Optionally, type **Feedback** for the user and **Grading Notes** that appear to the forum manager or grader only. Optionally, use the spell check function at the bottom of each text box.

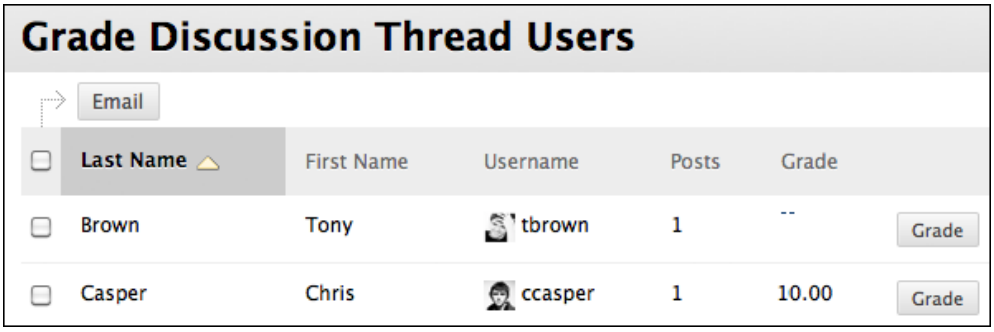
8. Optionally, click **Text Editor** to access the editor in a pop-up window. Use the functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups to your feedback or notes.
9. Click **Save Grade**. The information appears in the **Thread Grade** section and in the Grade Center.
10. Click **Edit Grade** to make changes. The changes appear in the **Thread Grade** section and in the Grade Center column. The changes are recorded in the Grade Center on the user's **Grade Details** page and on the **Grade History** tab.



11. When grading is complete, click **OK** to return to the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page or use the breadcrumbs to return to the discussion board.

Result

Grades appear in the **Grade** column on the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page and in the Grade Center.



Disabling Grading

You can disable grading for graded forums and threads, even if grades exist.

QUICK STEPS: Disabling Grading

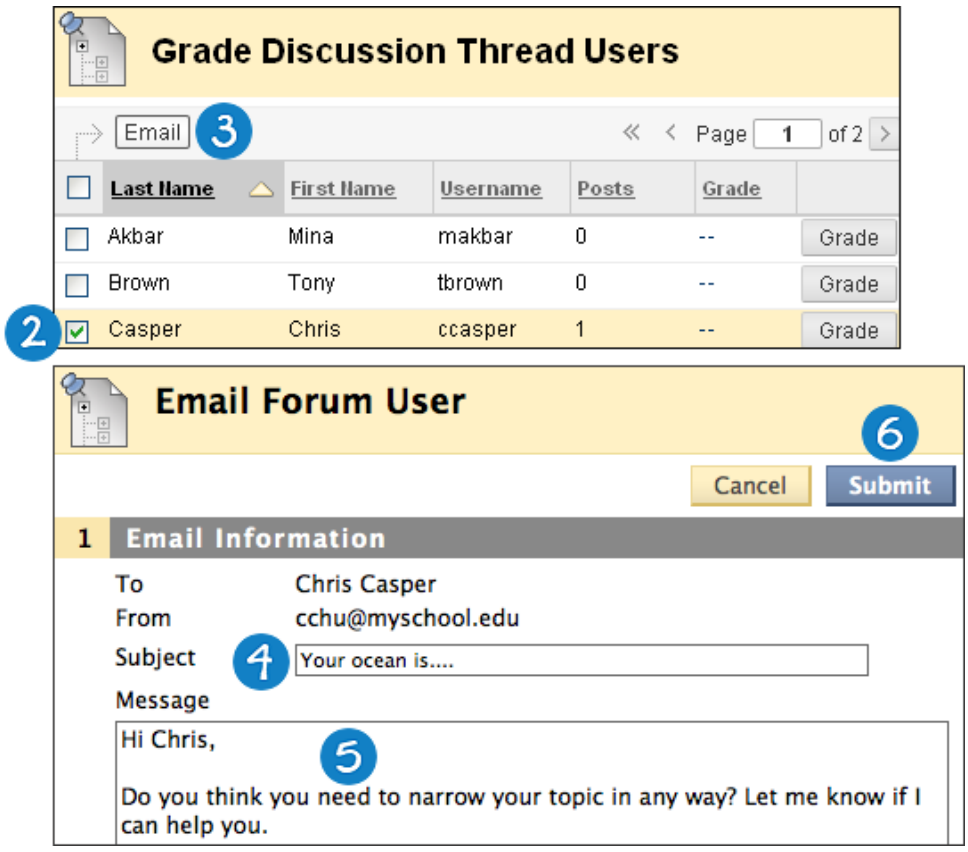
1. Access the discussion board and access a forum's contextual menu.
2. Select **Edit**.
3. On the **Edit Forum** page, in the **Forum Settings** section, change the grading option to **No Grading in Forum**.
4. Click **Submit**. If you assigned grades for the forum or its threads, a warning message appears indicating that changing the setting will delete all existing grades. This action is final.
5. Click **OK** to continue or click **Cancel** to preserve the Grade Center items.

Emailing Students When Assigning Grades

While assigning grades, you can use the email tool in the discussion board to quickly contact students. For example, send a student a question prior to assigning a grade or send feedback after assigning a grade.

QUICK STEPS: Emailing Students When Assigning Grades

1. Navigate to the forum or thread to assign a grade.
2. On the **Grade Discussion Thread Users** page or the **Grade Discussion Forum Users** page, select one or multiple users' check boxes or select the check box in the header row to select all the users you want to email.
3. On the action bar, click **Email**.
4. On the **Email Forum User** page, you can edit the **Subject**.
5. Type a question or feedback in the **Message** box.
6. Click **Submit**.



Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course and access the discussion board.

Grade Discussions

- In the **Unit 2: Astrophotography/Imaging** forum, review and assign a grade for **Ryan Johnson's** postings.
- In the **Unit 3: Mass Objects** forum, assign a grade to **Ryan Johnson** for his posting to the **Discovery of Trans-Neptunian Object** thread.
- In the **Pluto Controversy** forum, select the **Pluto Opinion** thread and change the grade assigned to **Linda Herrera**. Send her an email explaining the grade change.

Best Practice: Define Grading Criteria

When grading discussions, you need to have reasonable expectations about what you and your students can accomplish. Due to the asynchronous nature of an online discussion, you may need more time for well-articulated points to emerge than in a face-to-face classroom.

Tell students specifically what is expected, both in terms of quantity and quality of postings, and consider sharing some exemplary postings.

When evaluating student postings, keep the following questions in mind:

Did student participation in the discussion meet the objectives you set?

- Did students participate regularly?
- Did students reply to postings?
- Did students post new threads?
- Did students use the rating feature?

Did the quality of the contributions meet the objectives you set?

- Were replies or postings on topic?
- Did they add value to the discussion?
- Did they introduce new ideas?
- How did peers rate their postings?

Consider compiling your grading criteria into a rubric. By using a rubric to grade discussions, you provide students with clear performance requirements and consistent grading criteria to graders. To learn more about the rubrics tool, see the *Using Rubrics* manual.