# How to Set Up Discussion Topics in Sakai

Before using the Discussions (previously Forums) tool for online discussions, the instructor must add the Discussions tool to the site AND create one or more topics.

Step 1: Add the Discussions Tool to your Sakai site

1. Go to **Site Info** and select the **Manage Tools** tab. Check the box next to **Discussions.** Scroll down and click **Continue**, and on the next screen, click **Finish**.

2. On the course menu, click the **Discussions** button.

In Discussions, Sakai creates an initial forum based on your course site's name. In our example below, the forum is named *WEB 110 195 2017sp Forum*. Underneath this forum is a **topic** called **General Discussion**. If you'd like, you can allow your students to use the General Discussion topic as a place to ask general questions about the course or engage in discussion not related to specific course content.
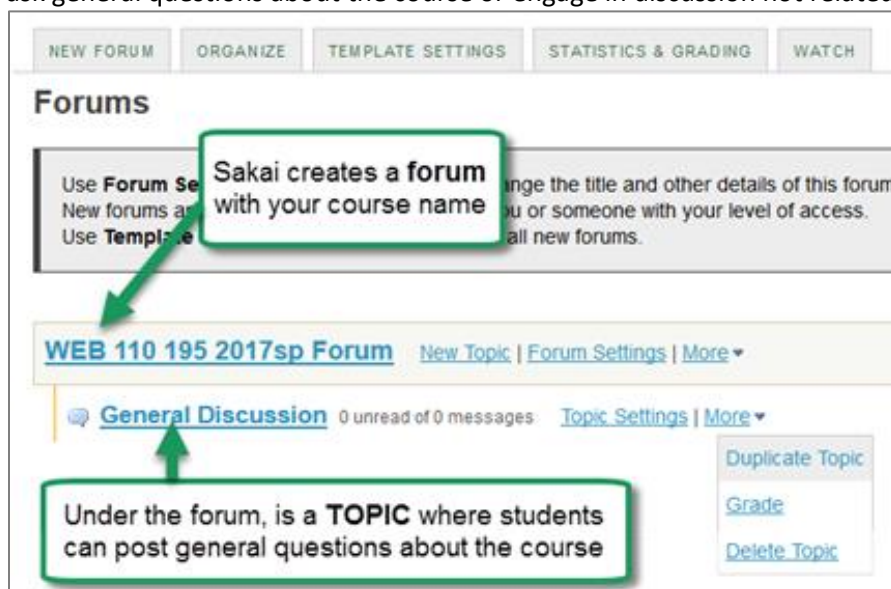
- **TIP:** As instructor, make sure to monitor the General Discussion topic at least weekly to answer students' questions. If you don't want to use (and monitor!) the General Discussion topic, you should delete it. To **delete the topic**, to the right of the General Discussion topic, click **More**, then **Delete Topic**.

Step 2: Add Topics to the Discussion Forum

Under the course forum, the instructor should add a new discussion topic for each week of the course (or for each topic the class will discuss throughout the course).

- To add a new discussion topic, click **New Topic** (located to the right of the forum's title).

NOTE: Be sure to add new topics, NOT new forums. **Posting can happen only in Topics**. If you don't add Topics, no one will be able to post.

These are the recommended Topic settings:

1. **Topic Title (required) -** *Example: Week 1 Topic*

2. **Short Description**
   The short description is limited to 255 characters, which is not enough space for posting a question and instructions for students. Therefore we recommend putting your question in the larger (full) **Description** box (see step 3 below).

   In order for students to see the text that you enter in the (full) Description, they will have to click on a link that says "View Full Description". This is not always obvious to students. To help them out, in the **Short Description** box, enter a note like this:
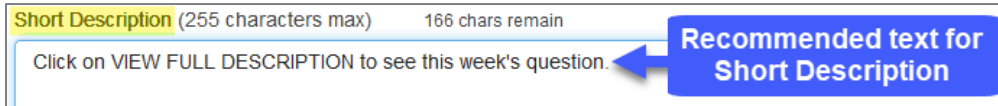
3. **(Full) Description**
   The (full) description can be very long and the text can be formatted. This is a good location for your topic questions and instructions; it replaces the need to create an instructor post.
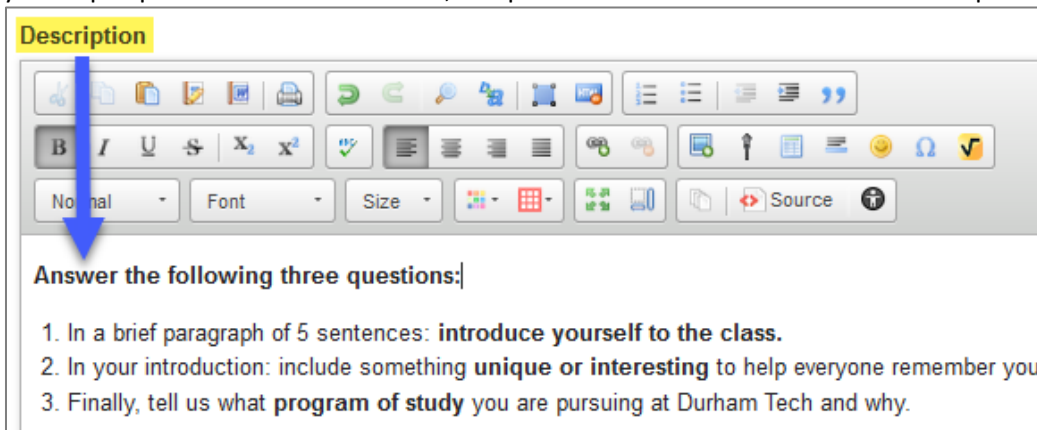
4. **Topic Posting**

   ☐ **Lock Topic** (***NOT*** *recommended*)
   Locks the topic so *students can no longer post*, but they can continue to read existing posts. Be sure to leave this unchecked initially. Later you can enable it, AFTER the due date has passed, if you want to allow students to read but *not submit* posts after the due date.

   ☐ **Moderate Topic** (***NOT*** *recommended*)
   All posts must be approved by a moderator (the instructor) before students can see them.

   ☑ **Require user to post before reading** *(recommended)*
   Students must post to the topic first before they can see any other posts. This encourages originality and prevents students from restating what others have already posted.

   TIP: If you enable this option, be sure to put the question and instructions in the Description box and NOT in a forum post, which students will not be able to see until after they post…

   ☐ **Posts are anonymous** (***NOT*** *recommended*)
   If you choose this, *you will be unable to tell who posted what*!

5. **Availability -** Either option is acceptable:

☐ Show immediately *(topic will be visible to students now)* - OR -

☐ Specify dates to **open** (show) and/or **close** (hide) the topic from students

  To specify dates:
  a. Click in the **Open** and/or **Close date field** or on the **calendar icon**
  b. Select month and year
  c. Select the day of the month
  d. Drag the sliders for the **hour and minute**
     (Do NOT select 12:00 am; it is confusing to students.)
  e. Click **Done** to save

6. **Grading**
   To send topic grades to Sakai's Gradebook, first you must go into the Gradebook *and add a Gradebook item* for the topic. Then, you will be able to select the appropriate Gradebook item from the dropdown list here.

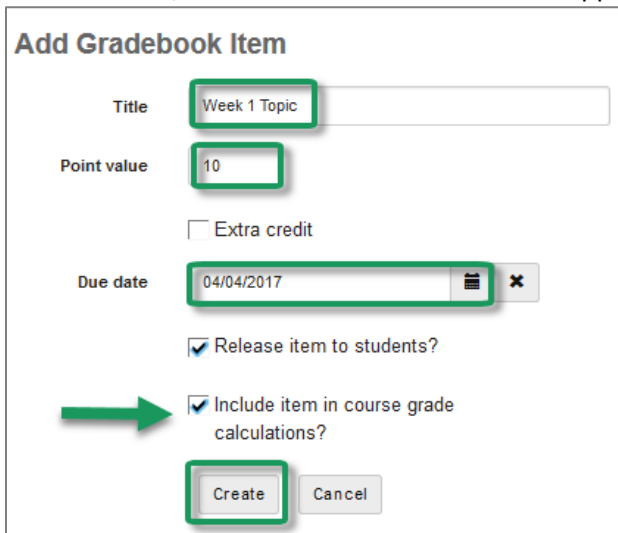   ==TIP:== Grading is covered fully in a separate handout and video on How to Grade Discussion Posts.

7. **Permissions –** We recommend that instructors not make changes to Permissions.

8. Click **Save.** Your new topic will be created. (To make changes after saving, click Topic Settings).

Send Discussions Grades to the Gradebook (optional)

To send a discussion topic's grades to the gradebook, you will need to first create a gradebook item for each graded topic in Sakai's Gradebook tool. Then you will need to "associate" each topic with its respective gradebook item.

Step 1: Add a Gradebook Item for a Discussion Topic to the Gradebook

1. On the course menu, click **Gradebook;** then click the **Add Gradebook Item** button.

2. Enter a **Title** (example: *Week 1 Topic*) and the **Point** value (example: *10*)

3. Enter a **Due Date**. (Optional, but recommended. Students will see due dates in the Gradebook.)

4. If you have set up Gradebook categories (recommended), choose the appropriate **Category** for this Gradebook Item. Then BE SURE to check the box to **"Include item in course grade calculations?"** so students' forum grades will be calculated in their overall course grade.

5. At the bottom, click **Create**. The new item now appears in your **Gradebook**.

Step 2: Associate a Discussion Topic with its Respective Gradebook Item

To tell the Discussions tool where to send grades for a discussion topic, you will need to "associate" the topic with the Gradebook item you created in Step 1.

1. In the course menu, click **Discussions**. To the right of the *topic*, click **Topic Settings**.

2. Scroll to the area labeled **Grading**. In the dropdown menu, select the **Gradebook item** you want to associate with this Forum topic.

    TIP: If you created a Gradebook item just a few moments ago, you may need to wait few minutes before it appears in this dropdown menu. You may need to Save and come back into Topic Settings before it will appear.

3. After selecting the appropriate gradebook item, click **Save**. Now your forum topic grades will be stored in the selected Gradebook item.