



**Center for Scholarship in Teaching and Learning
Southeast Missouri State University**



Online Instructor Suite

Forum Basic



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Overview

OIS Forum allows you to create and manage an asynchronous bulletin board on the Web. The discussions on the bulletin board can take any number of forms, but one thing will remain constant: asynchronous discussion allows students more time for reflection, resulting in high levels of critical thinking and, if managed correctly, productive class discussions. In this manual, you will learn the basics of using OIS Forum: the organization of the bulletin board, setting up a Forum for a class, and creating and replying to discussions, topics, and messages.

Understanding Forum

Asynchronous Online Conferencing

Asynchronous online conferencing takes the place, most commonly, of in-class discussion, although it can also be used for small group work, journals, or any number of other assignments. Because the discussion is *asynchronous*, the students do not need to be online at any particular time nor do they need to respond immediately. One advantage to asynchronous communication is that students have more time to reflect upon and compose their messages, which provides an opportunity for greater depth of critical thinking.

Forum Organization

OIS Forum is organized in a hierarchical system that allows different discussions to remain clearly separate and focused. The hierarchical system has four levels: Class Forum, Discussions, Topics and Threads.

Class Forum (Top Level)

The *Class Forum* is the “parent” of all other levels. It contains the Discussions, which, in turn, contain Topics, which contain Threads.

Discussions

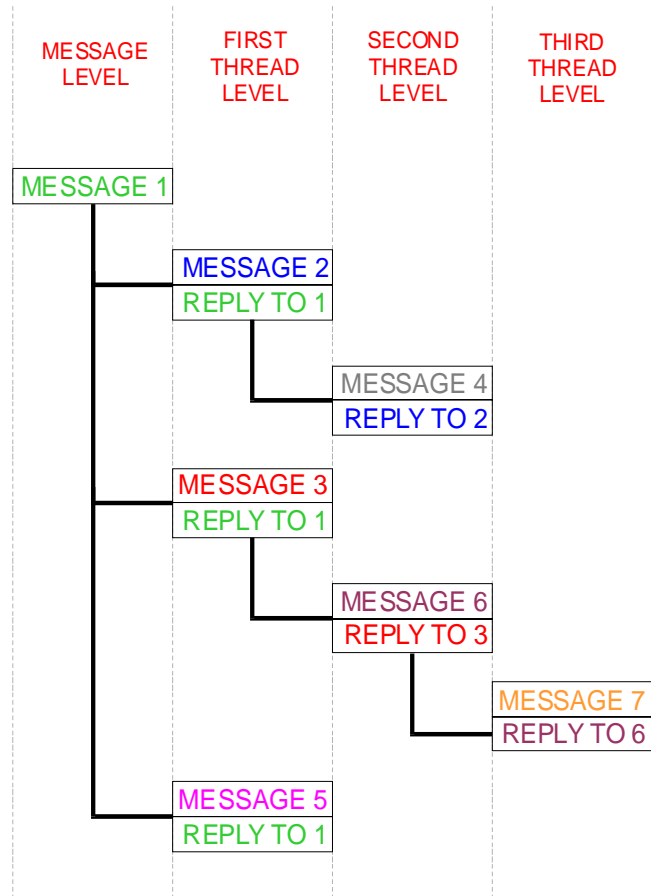
The second highest level of organization in the forum is the *Discussion*. A Discussion contains Topics and threads. It is usually appropriate to create a discussion to subdivide large groups of students, such as sections or class groups. Grading criteria can only be set at the Discussion level, so it is also appropriate to create a new Discussion when students’ posts must be graded in different ways. For example, in a class you may want to use Forum to allow students to post homework assignments and also post general messages about the class. Obviously, the grading criteria for the homework assignments are going to be different from the more informal discussion between students about the class. Therefore, it would be a good idea to create two separate Forum Discussions in this case, one for homework assignments and one for student discussions. Then, grading criteria for the two Forum Discussions can be set separately.

Topics

Inside each Discussion are *Topics*. Topics allow for a more fine-grained control of threads, which Topics contain. Topics are meant to be thread “starters” and normally ask a question to students. Students then may reply to the Topic to post their answers or comments about it. It is important to note that students, by default, can add new Topics to a Discussion, but this can be easily disallowed by the instructor if preferred.

Threads

When students reply to a Topic they are starting a *thread*. Threads do not just contain replies to Topics, however. They can also contain replies to replies to Topics. This allows students to not only comment on a Topic in general but also comment specifically on what another student said in reply to a Topic. Threads are the lowest level of Forum organization and contain messages, which instructors can grade according to the grading criteria of a Discussion.



Design Time

Think about how you are going to use Forum's divisions to serve your class discussions. For example, if you have different sections of a same course under one OIS class, you can make one or more Discussions for each section. Or you could use a Discussion for each part of the book, and a Topic for each chapter. Whatever you do, it's important to plan ahead how you are going to use Forum.

Starting Up

Running Forum

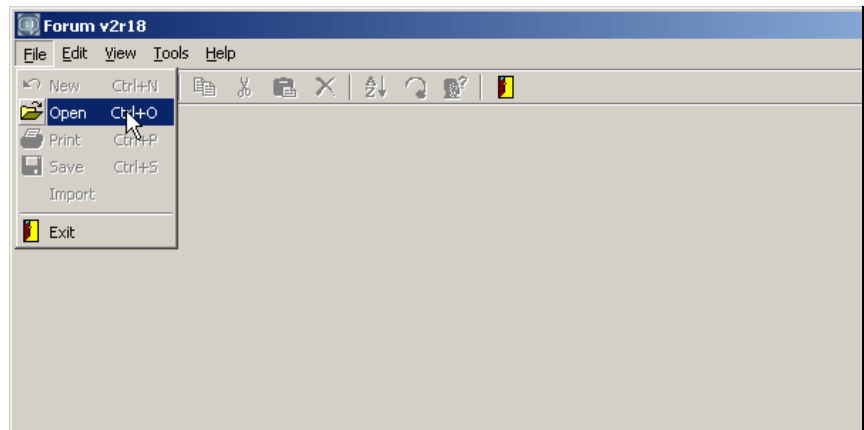
- Minimize all windows by clicking on the “Minimize” button as shown in the following picture:
- Double-click on the “Forum” icon to start it (see below).



Enabling Forum for a Class

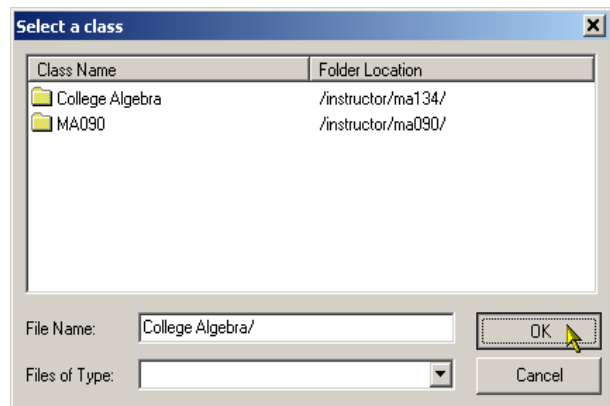
In order to enable OIS Forum for a particular class, an OIS class with students and an instructor must be created in OIS Manager.

With Forum open, choose **File | Open**.

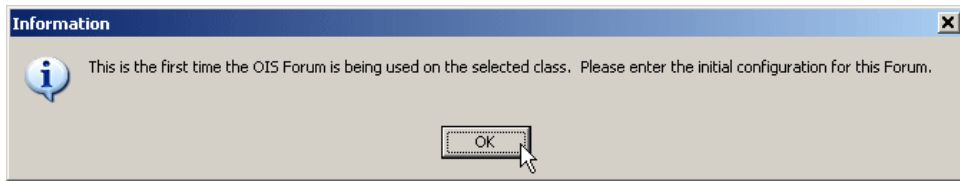


All of the classes in your current Web will be displayed.

Click on a class name to select it, and then click “OK”.



You will see this message box. Click “OK”.

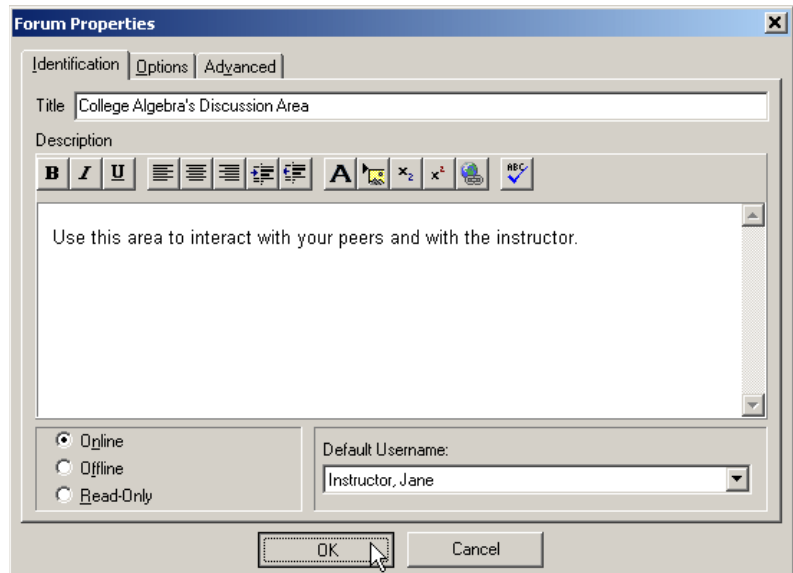


This will bring up the “Forum Properties” screen. Here you will be able to select a new title for your Forum.

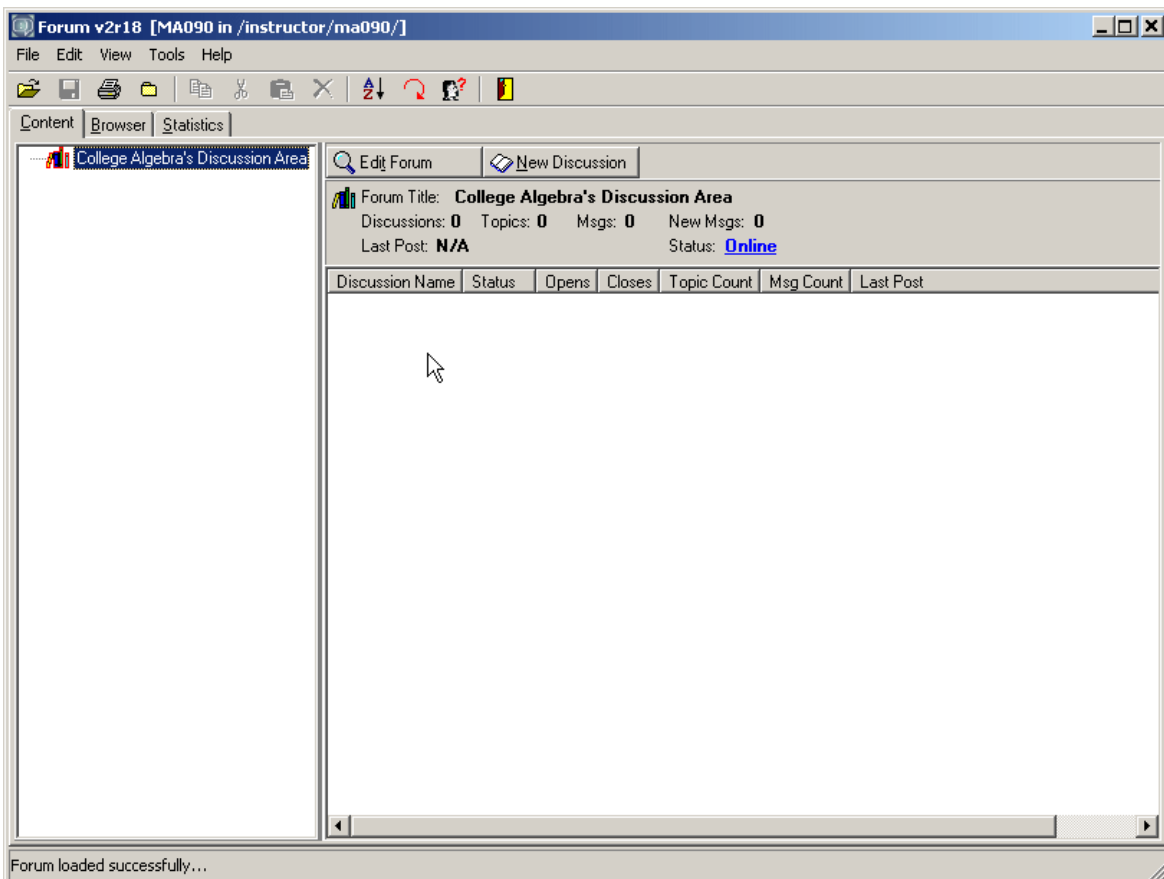
For “Title”, enter the name of your Forum (e.g., the class name).

In “Description”, type a brief description of the Forum.

This information will appear under the Forum’s title when it is displayed on the Web.



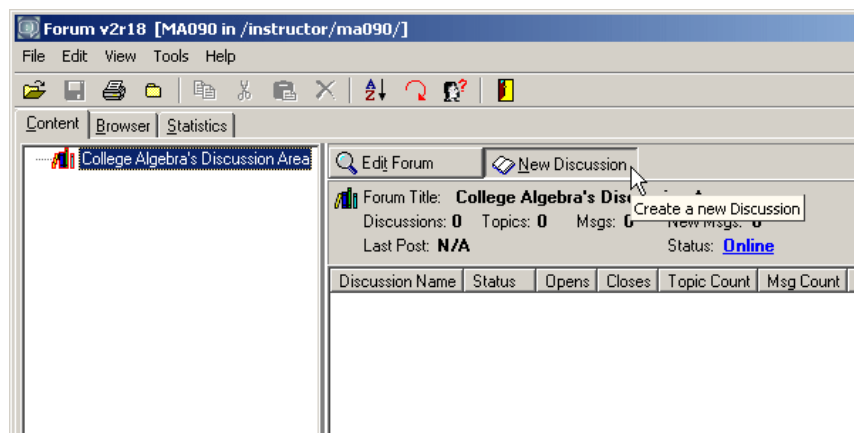
The Forum window will open. This interface is very similar to the Manager and DropBox windows: the left-hand pane is a navigation pane which lists all posts in your Forum, and the right-hand pane displays details about a selected area.



Creating Discussions

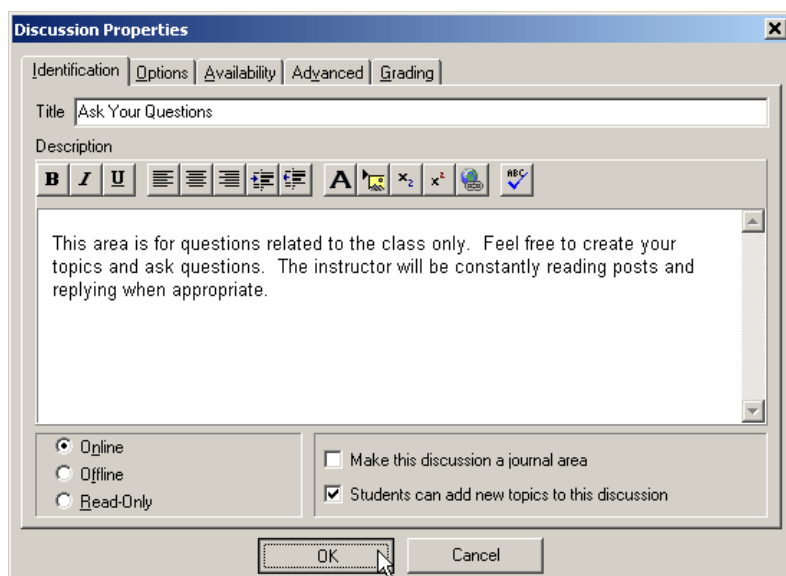
To create a new Discussion, click on the Forum name to select it.

Then, click “New Discussion”.



In the “Properties” window, enter a title and description for the Discussion.

Click “OK”.



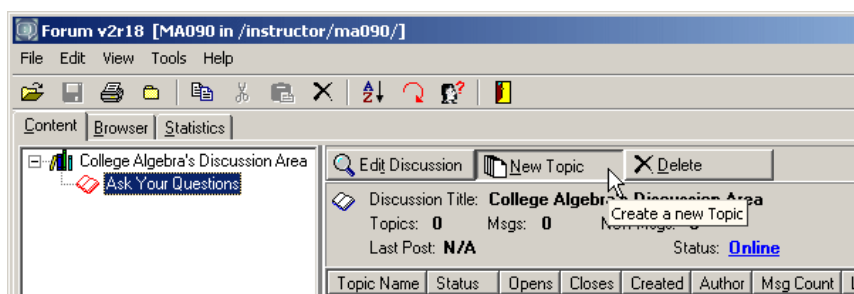
Note that the “Students can add new topics...” box is checked by default. This means that the newly created Discussion is now ready to be used by students. If this box was not checked, you would need to create new Topics before students could start using Forum. This would allow you more control over what your students write about.

Creating Topics

Creating a Topic is much like creating a discussion.

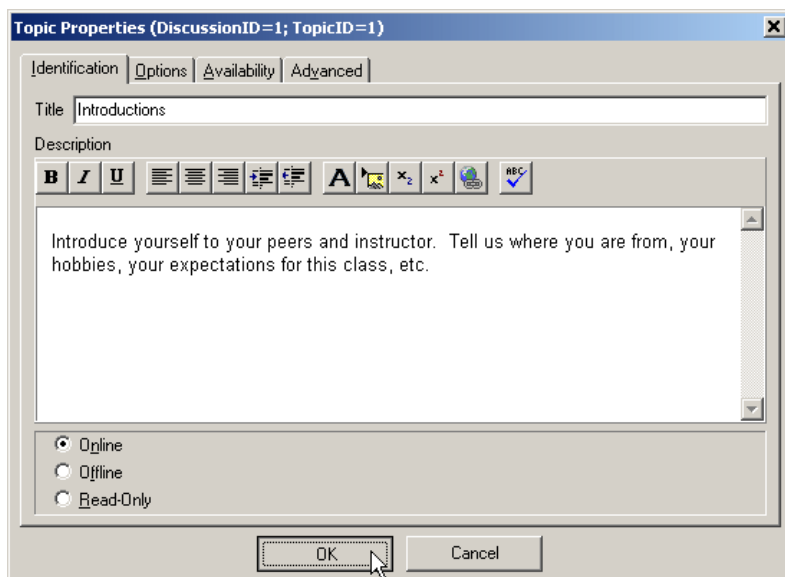
In the navigation pane, select the Discussion where you wish to create the Topic.

Click “New Topic.”

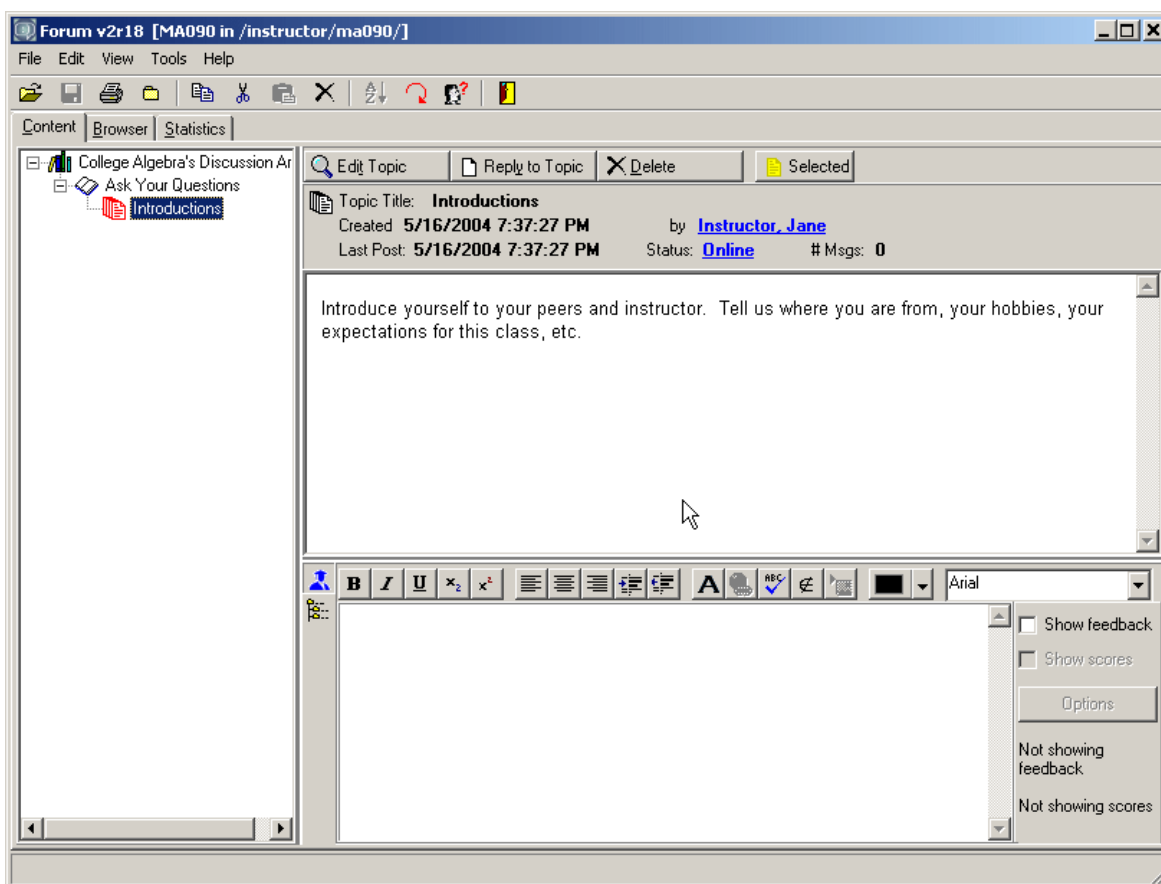


Enter a title and description.

Click “OK”.



Below, you see the Forum window displaying one forum, two discussions, and a topic. When messages are posted, they will be listed under a topic.



When a topic is selected in the left pane, its initial message—the Topic description—appears in the right pane along with the feedback text box. We will cover the feedback box later.

The Student View

Adding a Link to Your Class Web Page

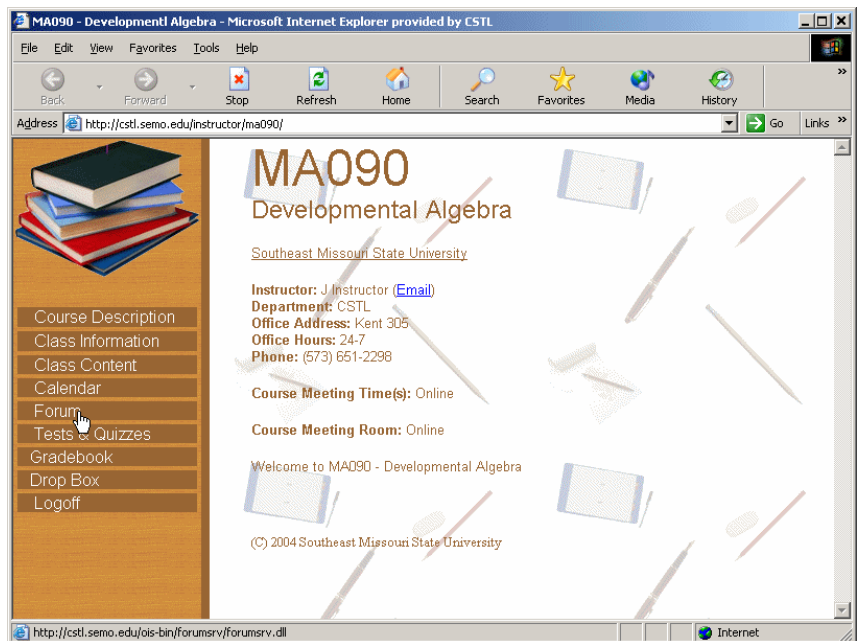
If you used a template to create your OIS class, you probably have a link to Forum in your pages already and you can skip this section. If you do not already have a link, follow these steps:

- 1) Open your main course Web page in your favorite HTML editor.
- 2) Make a link to `/ois-bin/forumsrv/forumsrv.dll`. Make sure you type the first slash, too.
- 3) Save the page.

Reading Messages in the Browser

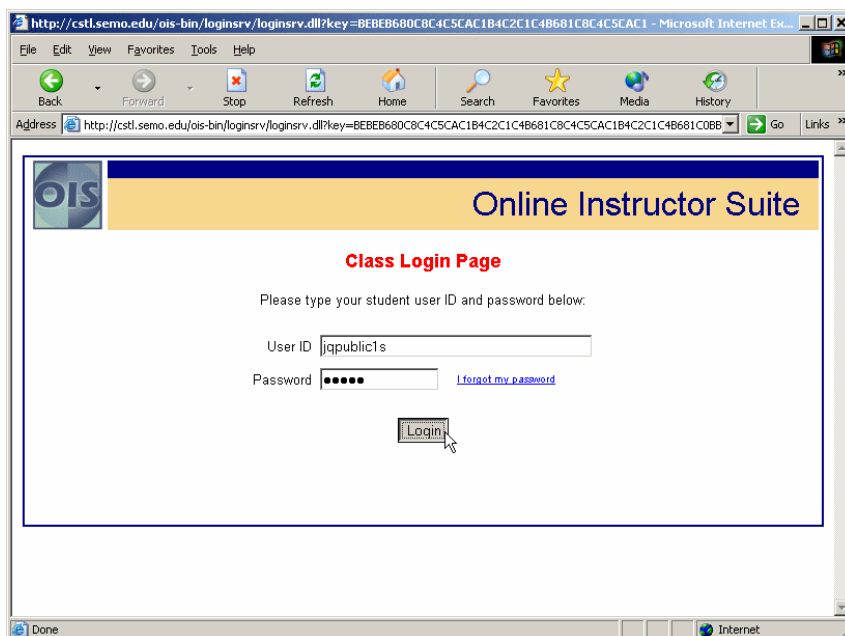
Begin by opening your favorite Web browser and pointing it to your class home page.

From your class page, click on the link to Forum.



Enter a student or instructor username and password from Manager.

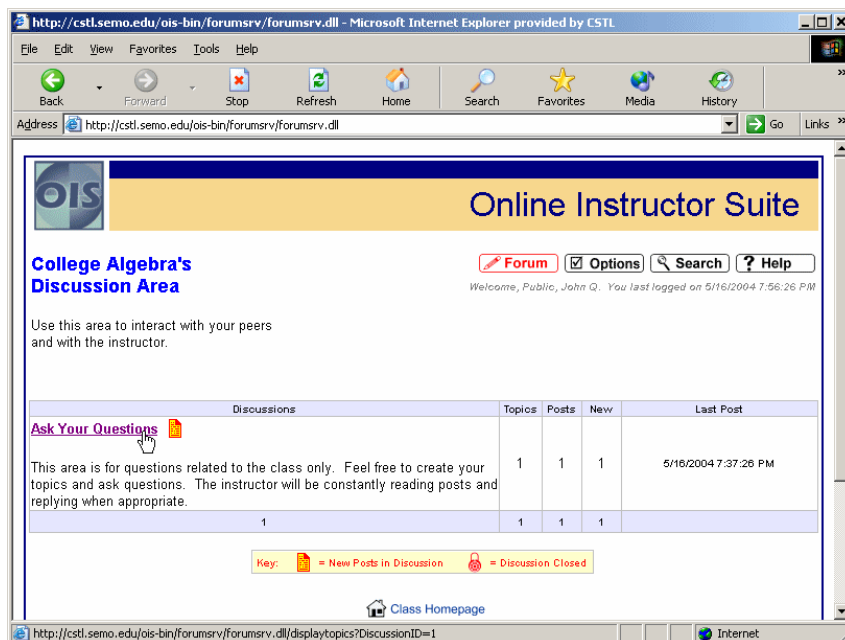
NOTE: If you have limited access to discussions and/or topics (see *Forum Advanced*), logging on as an instructor will let you see topics, posts, etc. that students may not be able to see.



The Forum page displays the class forum level's title and description in the upper left corner.

Topics are listed in the display area in the middle of the page. The orange page icon indicates a new message.

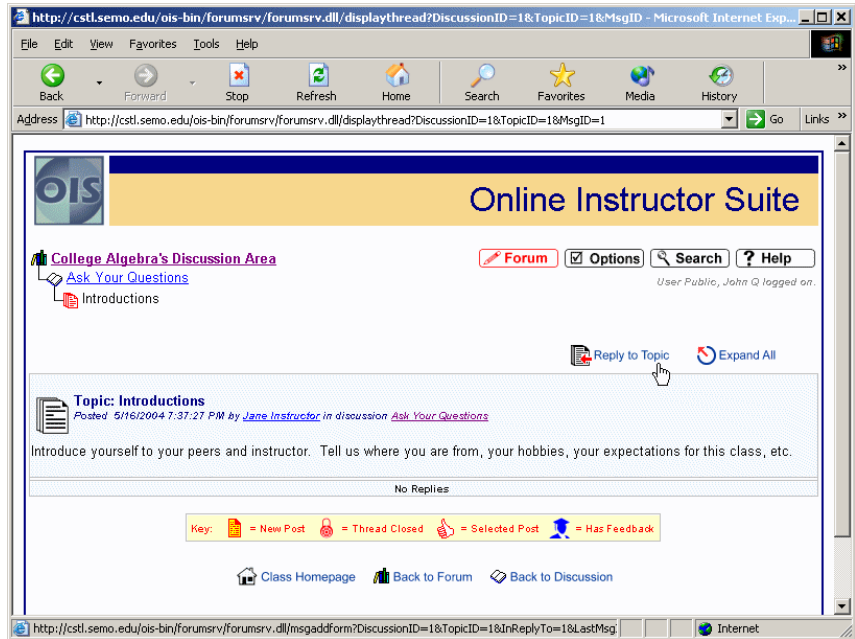
Click on the Topic title to list the messages in the topic. Then, click on a message title to read the message.



Replying to Messages and Topics

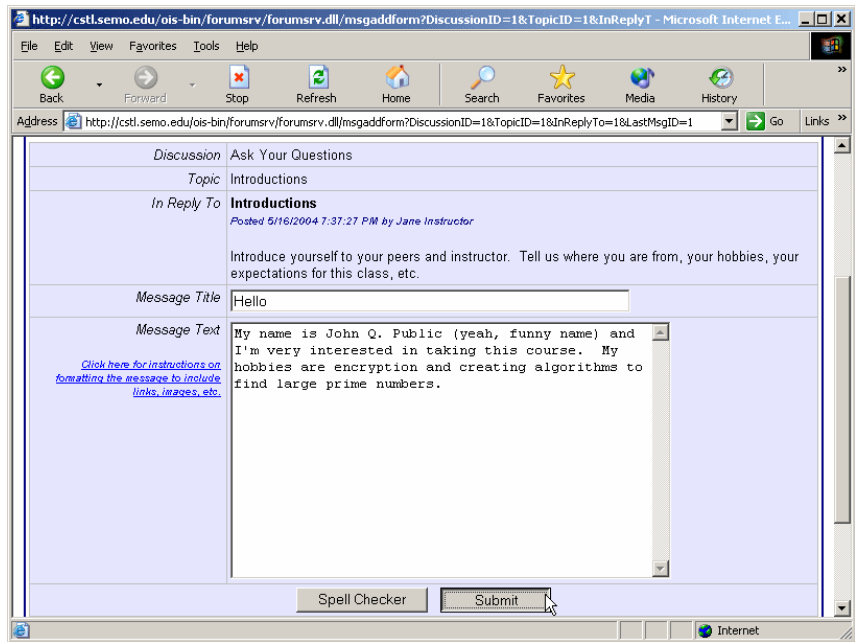
Once a student is at the Topic or Message level, he or she can reply to the Topic or message. (In this example, we are at the Topic level.)

Click "Reply to Topic".

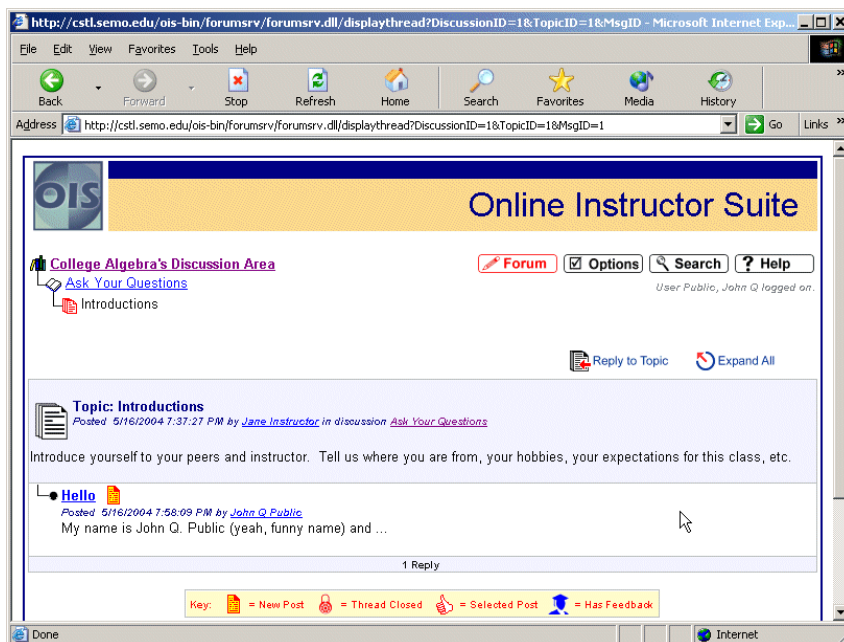


In the message composition form, enter a title for the message and the message itself.

Click "Submit".



After a few seconds, the student is returned to the Topic page, which now lists the new message (note the golden icon indicating it is an unread message to the currently logged on student).

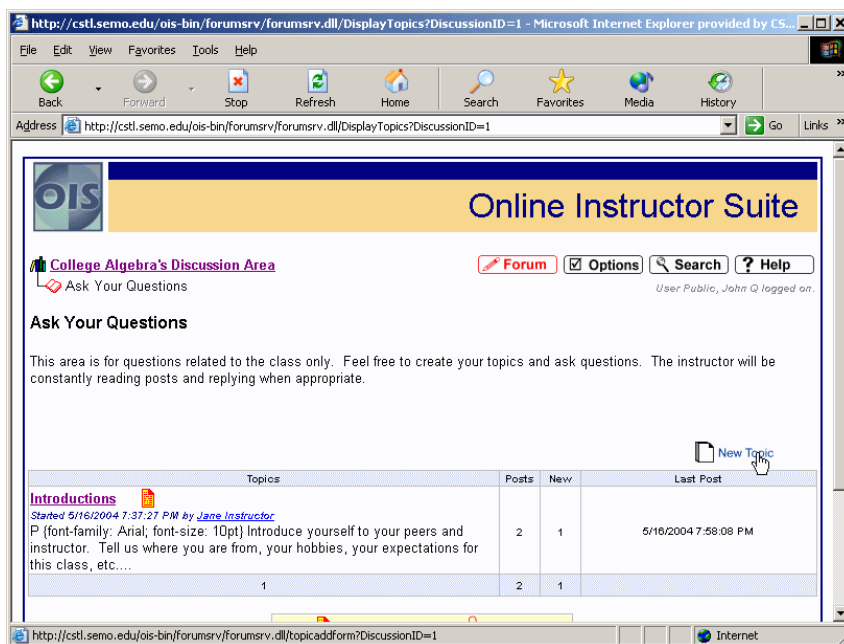


Note: It is very important that students understand the difference between replying to a Topic and replying to a message or thread. When replying to a thread, their response will be placed one level below the message they replied to, while replies to the Topic will be placed in the first level under the Topic message.

Creating New Topics

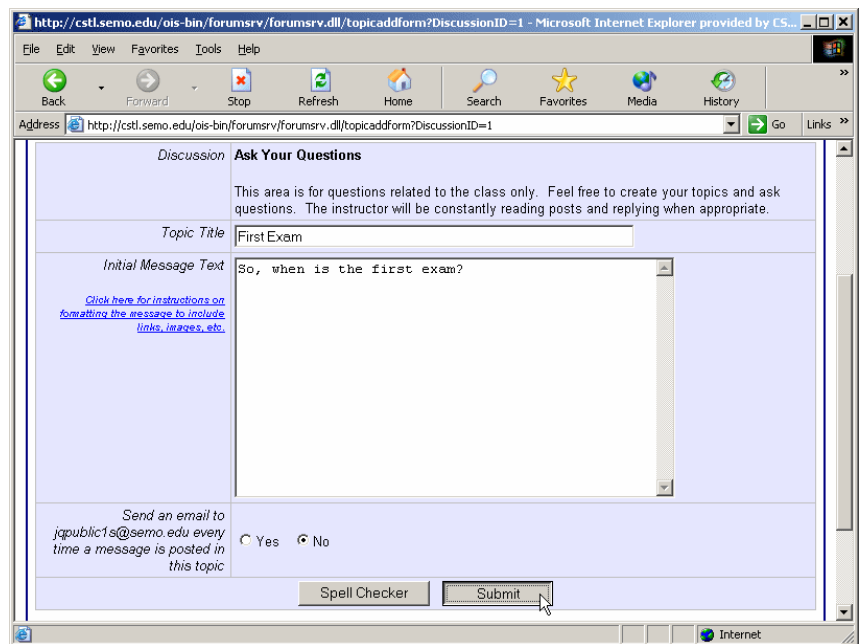
Students can also create new Topics in much the same way as they create a reply, but this feature will only be available if the “Allow students to add topics” box is checked in the Discussion’s properties.

From a Discussion page, click on “New Topic”.

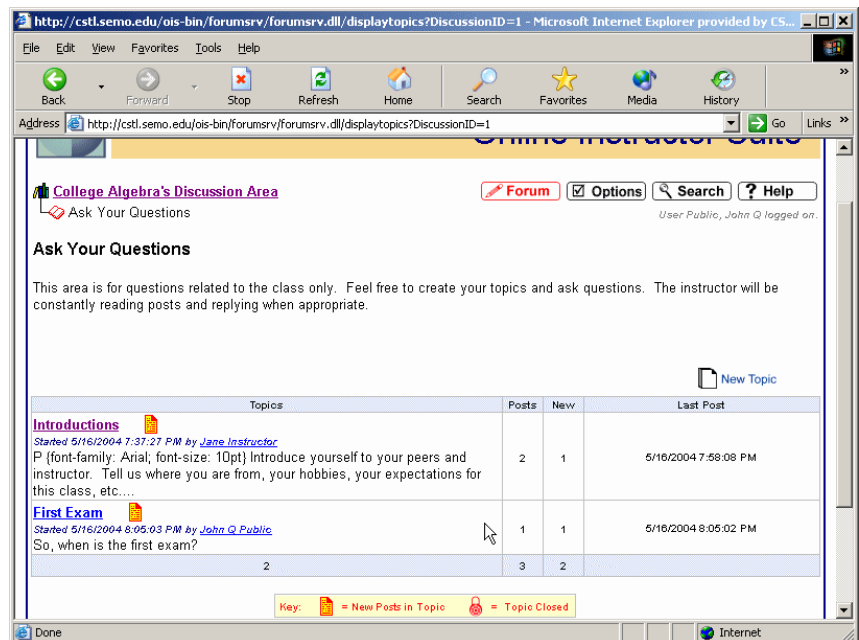


In the composition screen, enter a title, and the text for the initial message.

Click "Submit".



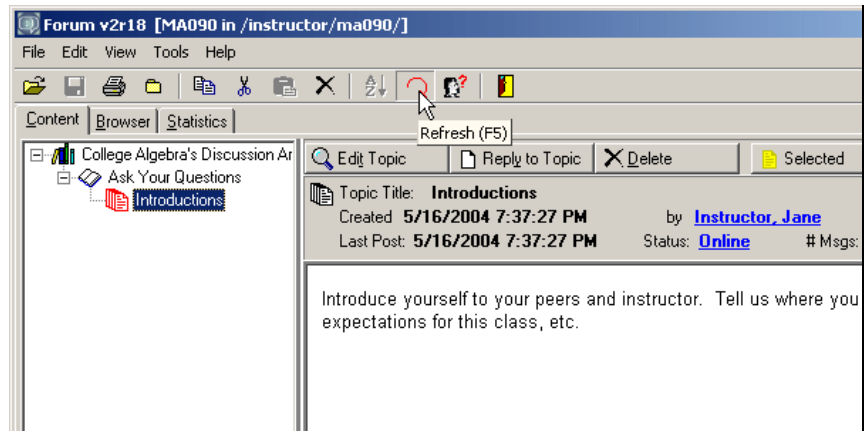
The new topic is now displayed in the Discussion screen along with the previously created ones.



Note: it is very important that students understand the difference between creating a new Topic and replying to a Topic or thread. To avoid unnecessary confusion, it may be a good idea to allow students to reply to Topics created by the instructor only. This way they will not create a new topic every time they need to post a message. You can do this by clearing the checkbox "Students can create new topics" in the Identification tab of the Discussion properties.

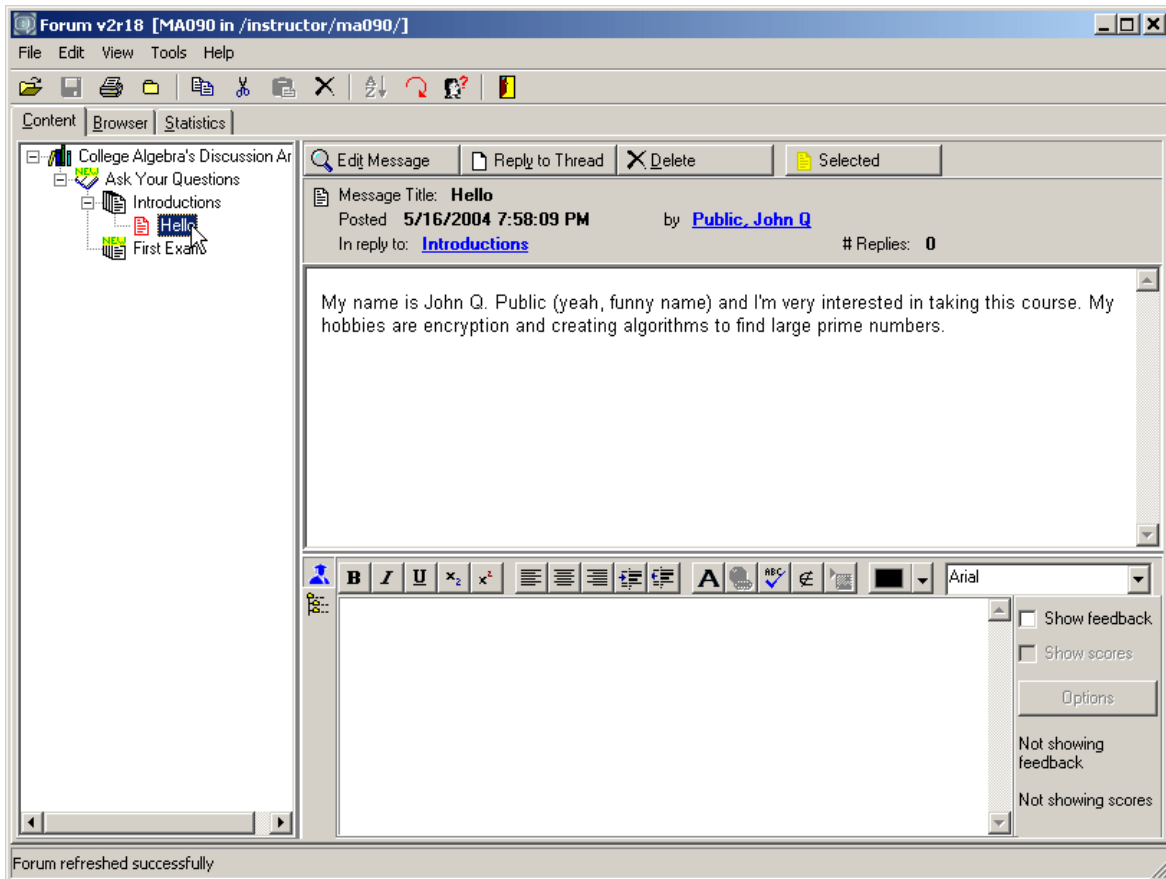
The Forum Client

If you had Forum open while messages had been posted to Forum, the new messages (posted after the time you first opened Forum) will not be displayed until you restart Forum or click on “Refresh” to obtain the newest information from the server.



Reading Messages

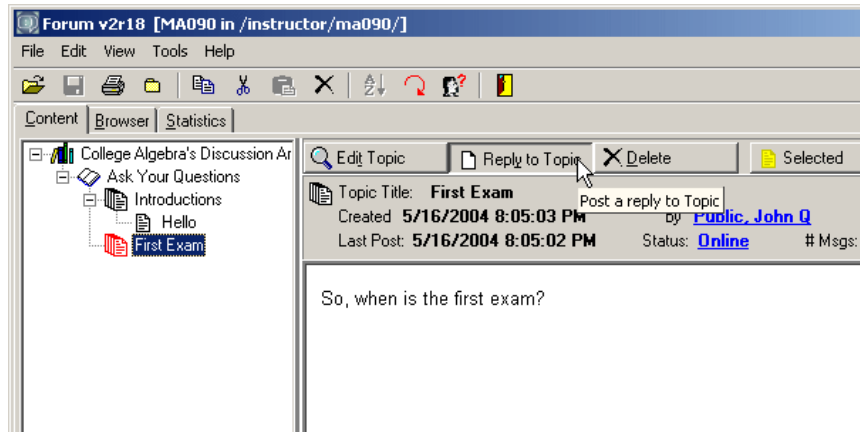
To read messages in Forum, simply click on a message title in the left pane to select it. The message text will appear in the top window of the right-hand pane. The message feedback text box will be displayed in the bottom right window (assigning private feedback to messages will be discussed in the “Forum Advanced” manual).



Replying to Messages

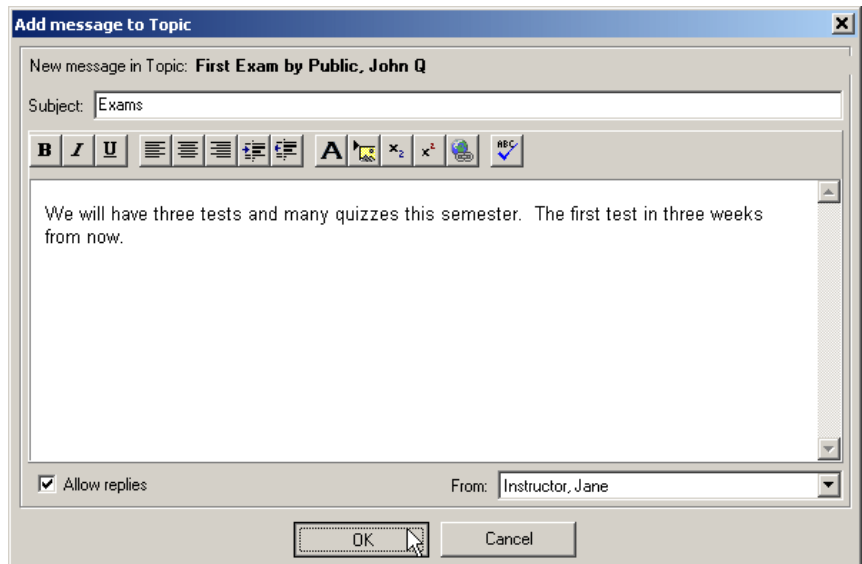
To reply to a message through Forum, click on the message's name to select it.

Then, click the reply button.



In the New Message window, enter a Subject for the message and the message text.

Click "OK".



The new message will be placed under the message you replied to.

