

## Using the Discussion Forums

### Overview

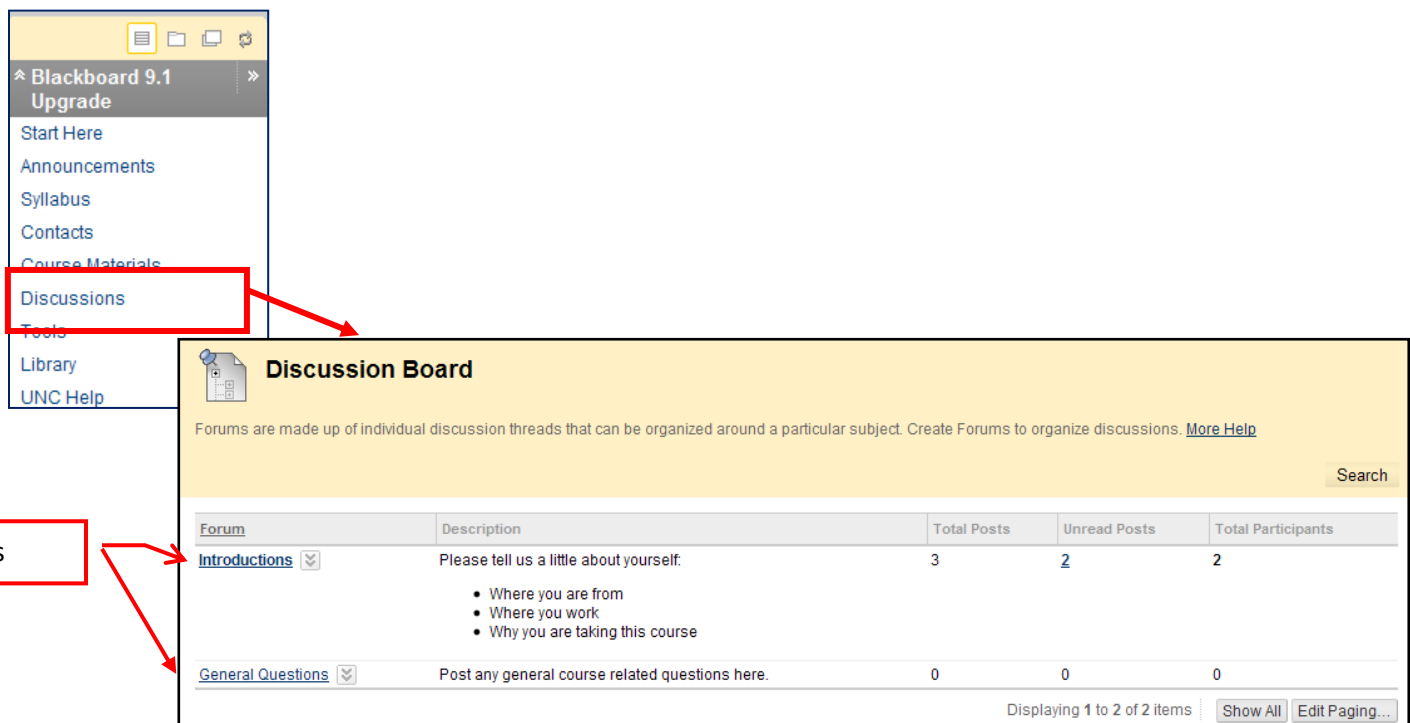
One of the most important parts of many Blackboard courses is discussion participation. Online discussions provide a way for you to share information, opinions, reflections, and resources with your classmates. They enable you to learn from each other and to develop a community of learners within a course. This topic will provide you with important information about how to use discussions along with tips to make the most of your discussion experience.

### Understanding Discussion Organization

The BB discussions are “asynchronous” meaning that they are not real time or live. You can post a comment in a discussion and the instructor or other students can read it when they access the course and post a reply.

Discussions have several levels.

The first level is the discussion board, which is accessible from your course menu.



**Discussion Board**

Forums are made up of individual discussion threads that can be organized around a particular subject. Create Forums to organize discussions. [More Help](#)

Forum	Description	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants
<a href="#">Introductions</a>	Please tell us a little about yourself. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where you are from</li> <li>Where you work</li> <li>Why you are taking this course</li> </ul>	3	2	2
<a href="#">General Questions</a>	Post any general course related questions here.	0	0	0

Displaying 1 to 2 of 2 items | [Show All](#) | [Edit Paging...](#)

The next level is the Discussion Forum. A **Forum** represents a discussion that has a specific purpose or topic. There are two forums shown in this course – Introductions and General Questions.

## Threads

The discussions in Blackboard are called “threaded” discussions because the postings are organized in logical groupings called “threads”.

For example, the instructor may post 3 questions in a discussion forum. Each of these questions is the start of a thread. When students reply, to a specific question, all the replies are organized under the original question.

This example shows two threads – as indicated by red boxes.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	Anonymous	3/31/10 12:59 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Sherri's Intro</a>	Sherri-Ann Lancton	2/4/10 3:38 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">RE: Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	Sherri-Ann Lancton	3/24/10 3:07 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">RE: Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	Student02 Demo	3/24/10 3:10 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">RE: Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	demo student03	3/22/10 2:48 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">RE: Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	demo student02	3/31/10 1:33 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">RE: Student 02 Introduction</a>	demo student02	3/31/10 3:11 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Student 3 Introduction</a>	demo student03	3/31/10 12:36 PM

These are all replies.

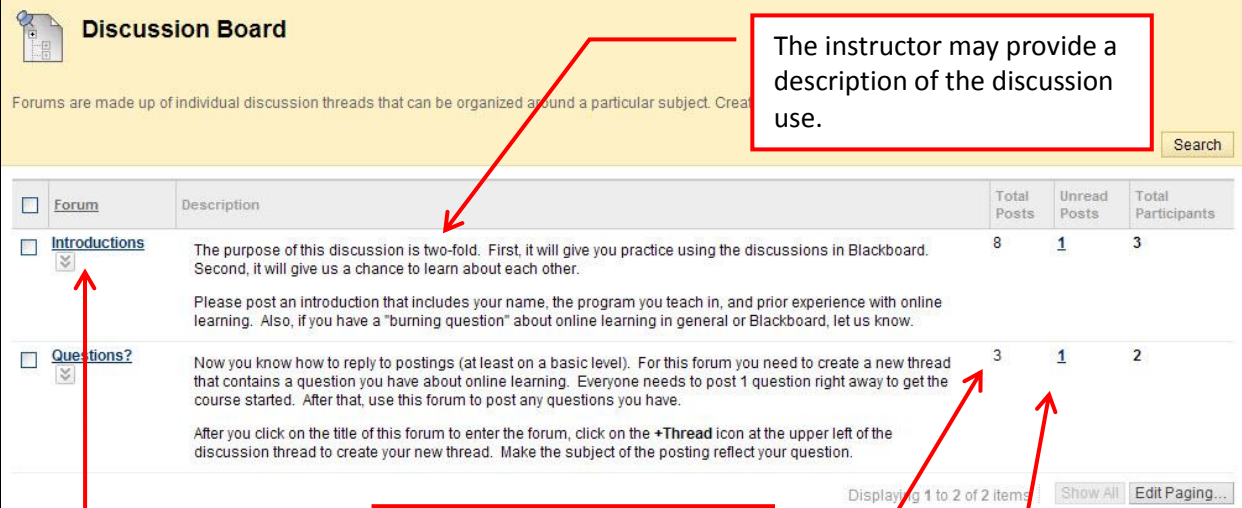
The Subject of the thread is in this column. Notice that replies are automatically named with RE and the original subject, but you can modify the subject to better reflect your topic.

Name of person who posted.

## Basic Discussion Use

The basic skills for using discussions include the ability to read the discussion postings, navigate in the discussions and reply to a posting.

When you first go to the discussion area, you will see a list of the discussions (sometimes called forums) available in the class. Click on the name of the forum to view the postings.



**Discussion Board**

Forums are made up of individual discussion threads that can be organized around a particular subject. Create a new forum.

<input type="checkbox"/> Forum	Description	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Introductions</a>	The purpose of this discussion is two-fold. First, it will give you practice using the discussions in Blackboard. Second, it will give us a chance to learn about each other.  Please post an introduction that includes your name, the program you teach in, and prior experience with online learning. Also, if you have a "burning question" about online learning in general or Blackboard, let us know.	8	1	3
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Questions?</a>	Now you know how to reply to postings (at least on a basic level). For this forum you need to create a new thread that contains a question you have about online learning. Everyone needs to post 1 question right away to get the course started. After that, use this forum to post any questions you have.  After you click on the title of this forum to enter the forum, click on the <b>+Thread</b> icon at the upper left of the discussion thread to create your new thread. Make the subject of the posting reflect your question.	3	1	2

Displaying 1 to 2 of 2 items | [Show All](#) | [Edit Paging...](#)

The instructor may provide a description of the discussion use.

Click on the name of the forum to read the posts.

This shows the total number of posts in the forum

This shows the number of posts you HAVE NOT read yet.

## Read a Posting

Once you have clicked on a discussion name, you will see the main threads (initial postings) in that forum. This Introductions forum has 2 threads.

Date	Thread	Author	Status	Unread Posts	Total Posts
12/21/09 2:24 PM	<a href="#">Post your Introduction as a reply to this message</a>	Anonymous	Published	0	7
3/31/10 12:36 PM	<a href="#">Student 3 Introduction</a>	demo student03	Published	1	1

Notice that the first thread above has an Author of “Anonymous” – this posting was actually made by the instructor during course development.

1. Click on the Thread name to see the thread detail and read all the postings.  
In the example below there are several replies to the initial posting by the instructor.  
The scroll bar on the right can be used to move down to see the list of all postings in the thread.

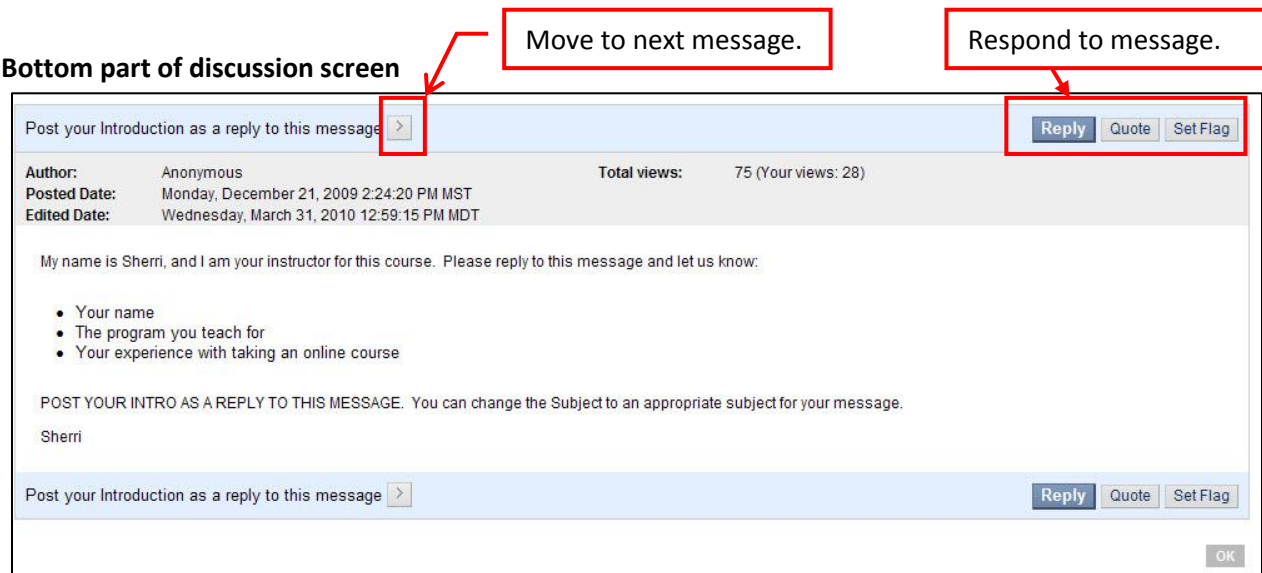
## Top part of discussion screen

Use the scroll bar to see a list of all the replies.

Click on the message to read it.

2. From here you have two choices:
  - a. The first posting in the thread is automatically displayed on the bottom half of your screen, so scroll down if you can't see it.
  - b. Or, the postings you have not read yet will be bold, so you can click on one of those to jump right to that posting.
  
3. Notice that you read the posting in the bottom half of the screen. From here you can:
  - Use the small arrow next to the message title to move to the next message in a thread.
  - Click **Reply** to reply to this posting.
  - Click **Quote** to reply and include the original posting in your reply.
  - Click **Set Flag** to flag the posting (a little flag shows next to the post to remind you to return to the posting later).

**Bottom part of discussion screen**

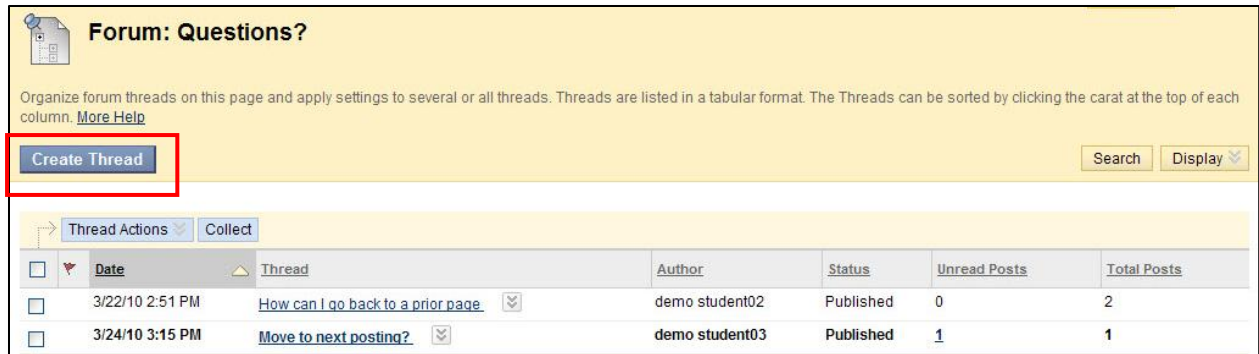


The screenshot shows the bottom portion of a Blackboard discussion thread. At the top, there is a text input field with the placeholder text "Post your Introduction as a reply to this message" and a small right-pointing arrow button. To the right of this field are three buttons: "Reply", "Quote", and "Set Flag". A red box highlights the arrow button, with a red arrow pointing to a text box that says "Move to next message." Another red box highlights the "Reply", "Quote", and "Set Flag" buttons, with a red arrow pointing to a text box that says "Respond to message." Below the input field is a message header with fields for "Author:" (Anonymous), "Posted Date:" (Monday, December 21, 2009 2:24:20 PM MST), and "Edited Date:" (Wednesday, March 31, 2010 12:59:15 PM MDT). The message body contains the text "My name is Sherri, and I am your instructor for this course. Please reply to this message and let us know:" followed by a bulleted list: "Your name", "The program you teach for", and "Your experience with taking an online course". Below the list is the text "POST YOUR INTRO AS A REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE. You can change the Subject to an appropriate subject for your message." and the name "Sherri". At the bottom of the message area, there is another "Post your Introduction as a reply to this message" input field with a right-pointing arrow button and "Reply", "Quote", and "Set Flag" buttons. An "OK" button is located in the bottom right corner of the message area.

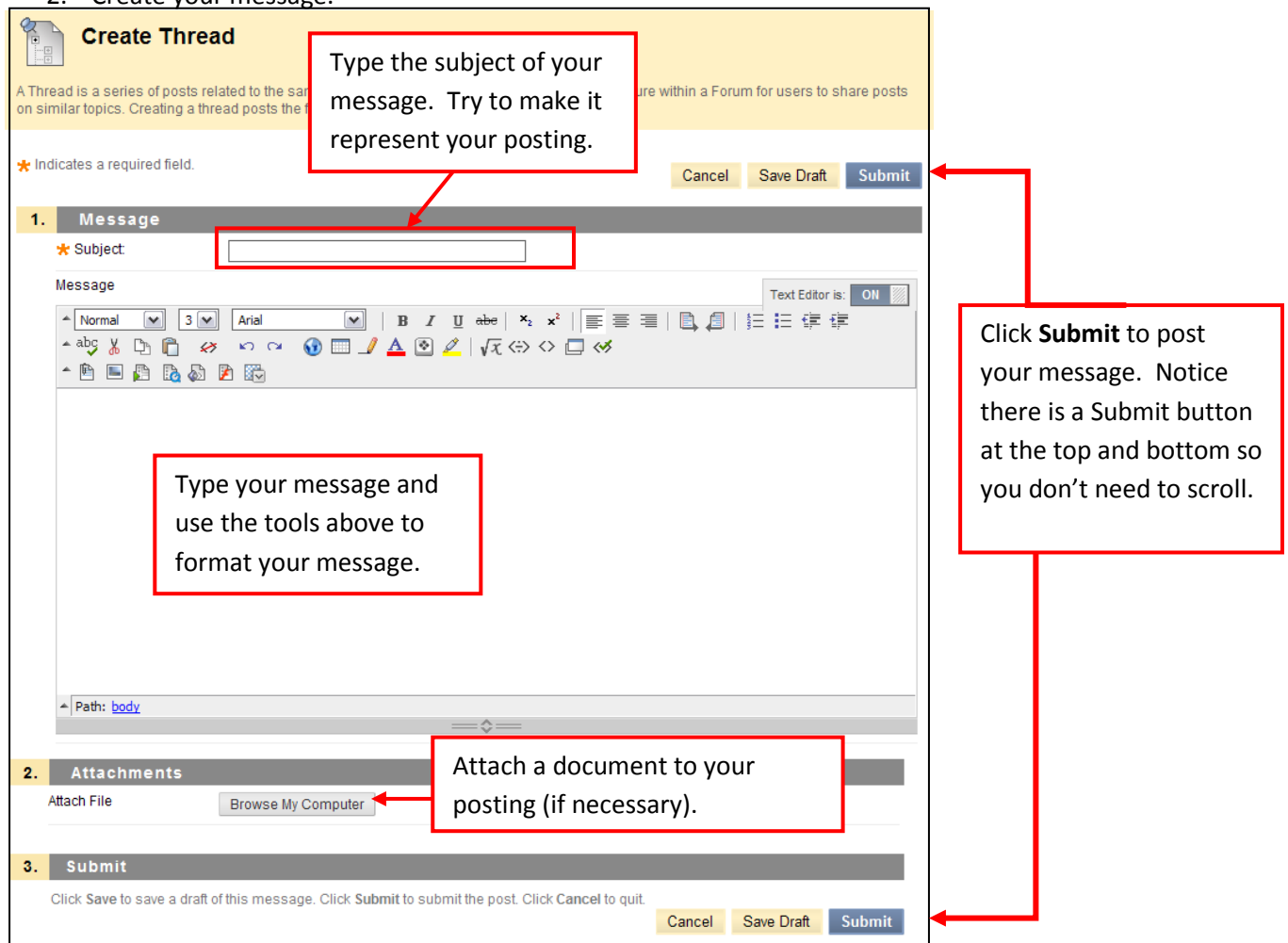
## Creating a New Thread

In some forums you will be responding to posts by the instructor, while in others you may be able to create initial postings or threads. For example, in the following “Questions” forum, the instructor is allowing you to post questions you might have about the course. Each question will be a new thread.

1. Click the **Create Thread** button to create a thread.



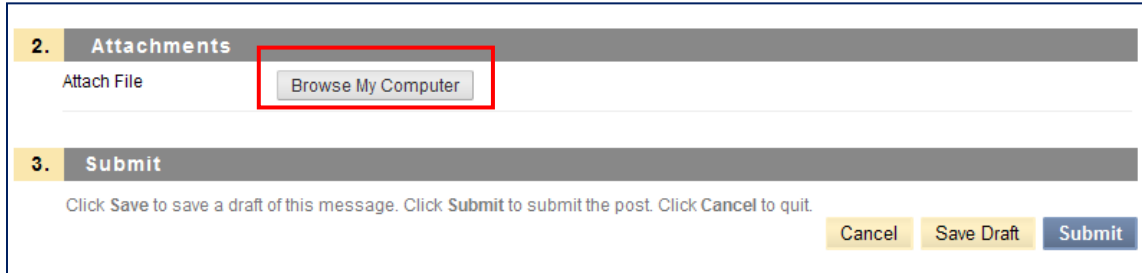
2. Create your message.



## Attach a Document to a Posting

Some assignments may require you to attach a document (a paper written in Word, a PowerPoint presentation, etc.) to a posting in the discussion forums. If so, when you create your posting, you will need to scroll down below the message area to the **Attachments** area.

1. Click **Browse My Computer**.



**2. Attachments**

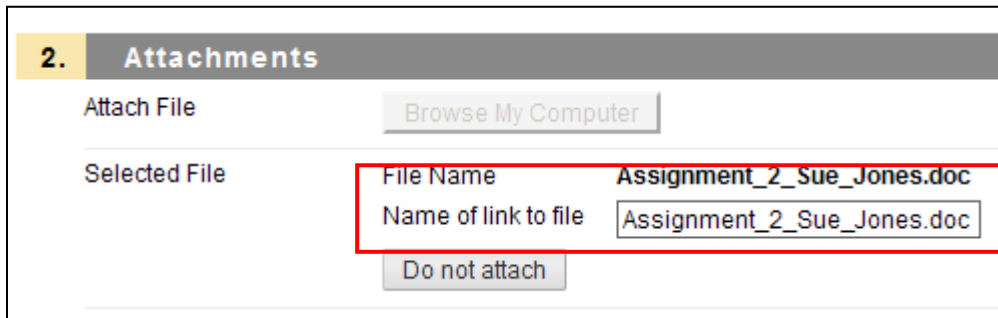
Attach File

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**3. Submit**

Click **Save** to save a draft of this message. Click **Submit** to submit the post. Click **Cancel** to quit.

2. Browse on your computer to locate the document you wish to attach and select it.
3. The name will appear in the Selected File area.



**2. Attachments**

Attach File

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Selected File

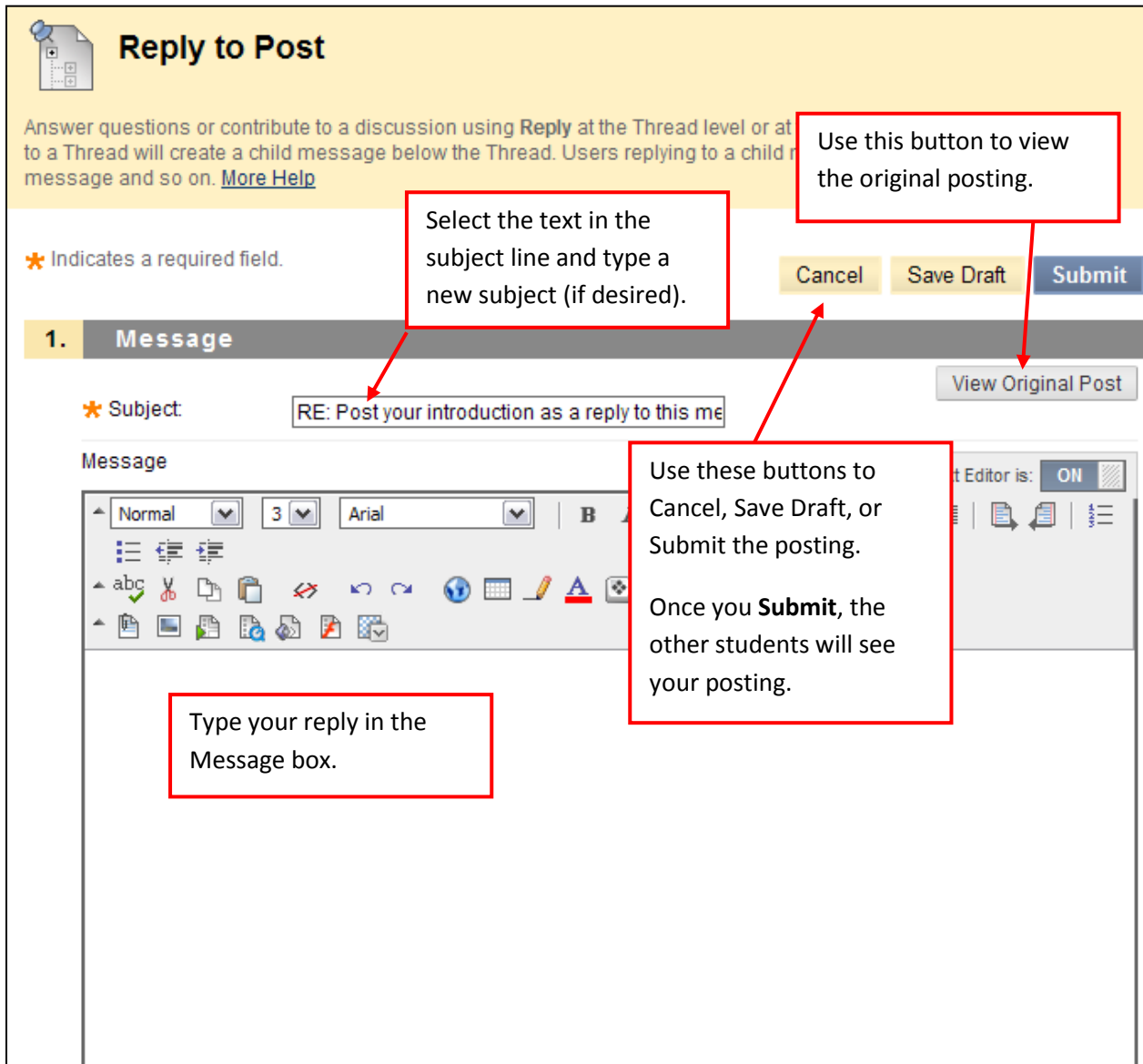
File Name	Assignment_2_Sue_Jones.doc
Name of link to file	Assignment_2_Sue_Jones.doc

Note: If you attached the wrong document, you can click **Do not attach** and browse your computer again for a different file.

4. Click **Submit** to submit your posting.

## Reply to a Posting

1. As you are reading a posting, click the **Reply** button in the upper right corner of the post.
2. The “reply to post” screen displays...



**Reply to Post**

Answer questions or contribute to a discussion using **Reply** at the Thread level or at the Message level. Replying to a Thread will create a child message below the Thread. Users replying to a child message will create a child message and so on. [More Help](#)

\* Indicates a required field.

**1. Message**

\* Subject: RE: Post your introduction as a reply to this me

Message

Normal 3 Arial B

Use these buttons to Cancel, Save Draft, or Submit the posting. Once you **Submit**, the other students will see your posting.

Use this button to view the original posting.

Select the text in the subject line and type a new subject (if desired).

Type your reply in the Message box.

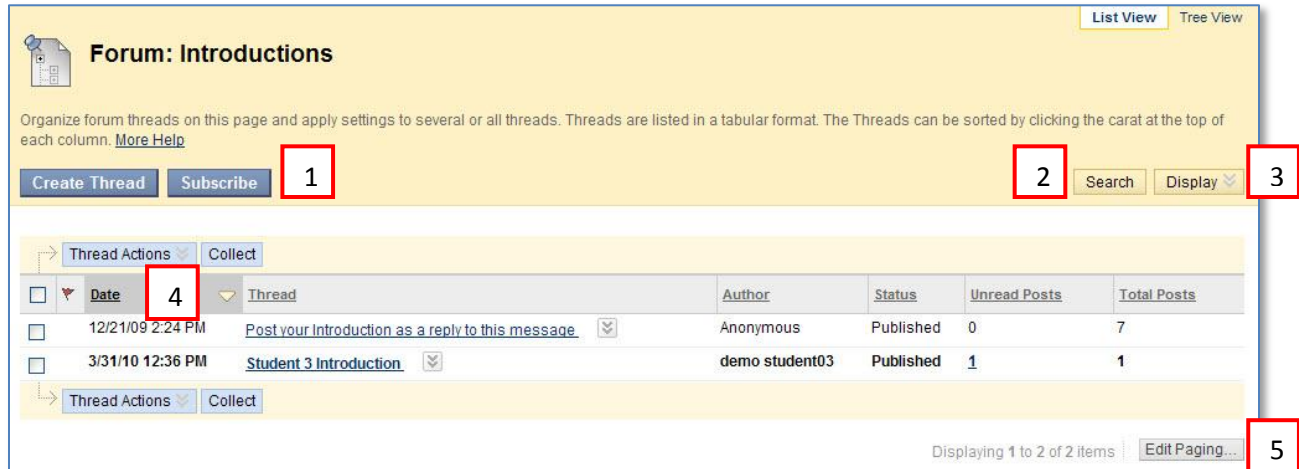
Cancel Save Draft Submit

View Original Post

Note: The **View Original Post** button (upper right above message box) can be used to display the original message (in case you need a reminder in order to compose your reply).

## Discussion Features

Here are some discussion features that might be helpful...



The screenshot shows the 'Forum: Introductions' page. At the top right, there are 'List View' and 'Tree View' buttons. Below the forum title, there is a text box explaining how to organize threads. Below this, there are buttons for 'Create Thread' and 'Subscribe' (callout 1). To the right, there is a 'Search' button (callout 2) and a 'Display' dropdown menu (callout 3). The main content area shows a table of threads with columns for 'Date', 'Thread', 'Author', 'Status', 'Unread Posts', and 'Total Posts'. The 'Date' column heading is highlighted with callout 4. At the bottom right, there is a 'Displaying 1 to 2 of 2 items' indicator and an 'Edit Paging...' button (callout 5).

	Date	Thread	Author	Status	Unread Posts	Total Posts
<input type="checkbox"/>	12/21/09 2:24 PM	<a href="#">Post your Introduction as a reply to this message.</a>	Anonymous	Published	0	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	3/31/10 12:36 PM	<a href="#">Student 3 Introduction.</a>	demo student03	Published	1	1

1. **Subscribe**  
If you subscribe to a discussion you will get an email each time something is posted.
2. **Search**  
Click on Search to find postings on a particular topic or by a specific person.
3. **Display**  
If you save a draft and can't find it use the Display button to display drafts.
4. **Sorting**  
Click on the column heading to sort the messages by that column.
5. **Edit Paging**  
Click on Edit Paging to increase the number of items you see on the page.

## Discussion Tips

- Write your posting in a Word document to take advantage of spell check and grammar check. You can copy and paste your posting into the text box in the discussion area. Keep the word document as a running record of all your discussion postings.
- Check the discussions daily, if possible. Set aside a specific time each day to review the course and read the discussions. If you wait several days, you will fall behind and not be able to devote appropriate time and thought to the discussion postings and your responses.
- Follow the instructions posted by the instructor regarding postings. This may include the average required length of a posting, what information should be included in the posting, and whether you need to cite resources. In many courses, discussion postings are part of a participation grade – you will get the best grade if you pay attention to the requirements.