**Communication Tools: Discussions and Mail**

WebCT 4.x has several built-in tools that facilitate communication and collaboration among class members and the instructor. Two of the most popular tools include Discussions and Mail.

**Before You Begin**

To be able to view changes as you make them while designing a WebCT course, it is important to set the cache settings of the browser to verify web documents **Every Time**. (If not, the web browser will often display a cached copy (old version) of a document (i.e. a previous version that it has stored locally on your computer). You must also ensure that **Java** and **Javascript** are enabled. (They should be activated by default.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Browser</th>
<th>Directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Netscape Navigator 4   | - Select **Edit, Preferences**.  
                          - Under **Category**, click **Advanced**.  
                          - Ensure that **Enable Java** and **Enable JavaScript** are selected.  
                          - Expand the Advanced folder by clicking the +, then select **Cache**.  
                          - Check **Every time** in the section about comparing the cached document to the network document.  
                          - Click **OK**. |
| Internet Explorer 4+   | - Select **View, Internet Options, General**.  
                          - Select **Settings** under **Temporary Internet Files**.  
                          - Check **Every visit to the page**.  
                          - Click **OK**. |
| Internet Explorer 5+   | - Select **Tools, Internet Options, General**.  
                          - Select **Settings** under **Temporary Internet Files**.  
                          - Check **Every visit to the page**.  
                          - Click **OK**. |

**Note:** Version 6.0 of Netscape is **not** compatible with WebCT. However, Version 6.2 is. Most versions of Internet Explorer are compatible with the exception of Version 5.5, Service Pack 1.

©Kirkwood Community College, 2006  
No portion of the printed copy may be reproduced without permission. All rights reserved.
Use the **Check Browser** feature of WebCT, shown as a link in the menu bar of your course.

**Login to WebCT**

WebCT is a client/server application, which means users (such as you, the instructor) access the program, which resides on a server, through use of a client (in this case, a web browser).

1. Open your browser.

3. Click on **Login** in the upper-right corner of the site.
4. Enter your user name and password. (For class, use **staffx, kirkwood**)

**Discussions**

Discussions is one of the main WebCT *asynchronous* communication tools. It allows instructors and students to compose messages electronically and to “post” and read them. Discussions are “threaded” so messages within the same subject stay connected, making it easy to follow the conversation. “Unthreaded” messages display chronologically. The Discussion tool allows you to compile and print messages and to search messages by subject, date, and author.

Discussions can be divided into different topics, which can be either public or private. All students can access public topics whereas private topics are only available to those students selected by the instructor. For example, private topics might be useful when the class is divided into presentation groups. Each group would then be able to exchange ideas and discuss their individual projects.

**Access Discussions**

Discussions can be accessed from the **Communication Tools** link on the homepage. If there are new messages, the pushpin icon is highlighted in green.
1. Click the **Communication Tools** link on the homepage.
2. Click the **Discussions** icon. The **Discussion Messages** screen displays as shown below. By default, you enter Discussions in Designer Options.

![Discussion Messages Screen](image)

**Create a Topic**

As an instructor, you will want to create your own topics. You may want a separate topic relating to a particular unit or chapter of course content. By default, when you add a topic, it becomes a **public** topic.

1. Click the **Create Topic** button in the options section on the right side of your screen. The **Create Topic** screen displays.
2. Type the name of the topic in the text box. (For class, type **Post Questions Here**.)
3. Click **Create**. The new topic displays in the **Discussions** section as shown below.

Notice that three check boxes allow you to designate the topic as private, to allow anonymous postings (which is not recommended), or to lock the topic. A **private** topic allows only selected students to access it. A **locked** topic allows no access, which means that no messages can be posted to it.

![Topic Options](image)
Compose a New Message

Topics are initially empty. As the instructor, you will want to make an initial posting in each topic to present the purpose of that discussion.

1. Click the Compose Message button in the Discussions section. The Compose Discussion Message screen displays in a separate browser window as shown below.

2. Select the appropriate topic from the Topic drop-down listing, if necessary. (For class, choose Post Questions Here.)
3. Provide a subject and content for this message. (See below.)
4. Click the **Preview** button to see what the message will look like when posted, when you’re finished previewing your message, click **Close**.

5. If needed, make changes. Try making changes by clicking on the HTML Editor button. Through this view, it is easy to add formatting.

6. Click the **Post** button in the lower left-hand corner of the open window.

7. Click the **Update Listing** button. Compare your screen with the picture below. (You should notice that there is 1 unread message in the “Post Questions Here” section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Unread</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Anonymous</th>
<th>Locked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Questions Here</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Update</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TIP:** Both the subject and the body of a message must be filled in before a message will be accepted in a topic. Blank subjects or messages are not allowed!

**Read a Message**

By default, the Discussion area displays all **unread** messages in all topics. The subject of the message displays in a slightly larger font and is followed by the name of the topic to which the message was posted, the name of the person who posted the message, and the date and time the message was sent. Messages can be read by clicking on the message link. The check box before the message allows you to mark the message for moving or deleting.

1. Click on the desired **Topic** link.
2. Click on the magnifying glass (View thread) icon next to the message you wish to read. The message displays in a new window, as shown on the next page.
3. Notice that there are four options available for responding to this message. Refer to the table below for a brief description of these options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reply</strong></td>
<td>Sends a response to the current message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reply Privately</strong></td>
<td>Opens a Compose Mail Message screen so you can respond by sending a private email message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quote</strong></td>
<td>Includes the original message with the reply. By default, WebCT does <em>not</em> include the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Download</strong></td>
<td>Allows you to save the message to your local computer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TIP:** Messages are presented by threads; to view in chronological order, click **Unthreaded**.

**Reply to a Message**

To reply to a message, use the **Reply** or **Quote** button in the message screen. The **Quote** option allows you to include a portion of the original message to clarify the context.

1. Click **Reply**. The **Reply to Message** screen displays as shown below. Notice that the reply screen lists the name of the topic to which you are replying and its subject. In addition to posting your reply, you can preview or cancel your reply, control whether or not you want the lines of text to wrap, and attach files to your reply.
2. Type your reply in the Message text box. (For class, type *Can anyone tell me how to submit an assignment?*)

3. Click the Preview button near the bottom of the screen. The preview screen displays and allows you to preview the message before it is posted.

4. Click the Close button to return to the previous screen. Make any corrections, if necessary. Be sure to check for typos. *There is a spell checker in the HTML Editor!*

5. Click the Post button. The browser window closes and the Discussion Messages window redisplay.

**Refresh the Message Listing**

In order to see the reply, the message listing must be refreshed. To do so, click the Update Listing button.

1. Click the green arrow (expand thread) to see your reply. A “thread” is defined as a message or a topic and all of its responses. When a thread is expanded, the arrow points down. If you click on the arrow again, it will point inward and the thread will collapse. New messages are marked with a closed envelope to the left of the subject. If you view the message, it will show as an open envelope.
Message Navigation
WebCT provides an easy way to navigate through topic messages. At the bottom of the message window are icons for Previous Thread and Next Thread. Between these are Previous Message and Next Message. If available, clicking on Previous Thread causes the first message of the previous thread to display in the bottom frame. Clicking on Next Thread causes the first message of the next thread to display in the bottom frame. Clicking on Next Message displays the first reply to the current message while clicking on Previous Message displays the message of which the current message is a reply.

Compile Messages
The Compile feature allows you to save several messages to a single file. For example, as an instructor, you may want to view all the contributions a particular student has made to a topic. To do so, simply select the messages you wish to include and select Compile from the drop-down listing. The Compile feature is available to students as well as instructors.

1. Switch to Student View, if necessary.
2. Click to set a ✓ next to the messages you wish to compile. (For class, select all messages.)
3. Click Compile. The Compiled Messages screen displays as shown below.

Print Compiled Messages
You can print compiled messages directly from the browser. This is practical only if you don’t need to save the messages to a file.
1. Click **File, Print**.
2. Click the **Print Button**.
3. Close the browser window.

**TIP:** To save compiled messages to file and retain the formatting, choose **File, Save As** from the Menu bar.

---

**Delete a Message**

As an instructor, you may find it necessary to delete messages because they are inappropriate or contain erroneous information. Instructors/designers have the *unique* ability to delete messages that have been posted to Discussions.

1. Switch to **Designer Options**, if necessary.
2. If you’re not already there, click on **Discussions** under the course menu and click on the desired topic. (For class click on **Post Questions Here**.)
3. Make sure to expand the thread.
4. Click to set a ✓ in the box next to the message(s) you wish to delete. (For class, select any message.)
5. Click the **Delete** button in the **Actions menu** at the bottom of your window. A warning box displays.
6. Click **OK**. The screen refreshes and the selected message disappears. Notice that the numbering does not reorder.

---

**Move a Message to a Different Topic**

It is possible that a student will post a response to the wrong topic. If this happens, the designer can easily move the posting to the correct place.

1. From the **Discussion Messages** screen, select the topic that contains the message(s) to be moved.
2. ✓ The message(s) to be moved.
3. Look at the **Actions menu** at the bottom of your window. From the **Move to:** drop-down listing, select the desired topic where you want the message moved.
4. Click **Go**.

---

**Create a Private Topic**

To create a private topic, first add the topic and assign it private status. Then assign members to it.

1. From the Discussions screen click the **Create Topic** button in the options section on the right side of your screen. The **Create Topic** screen displays.
2. Type the name of the topic in the text box. (For class, type **Late Assignments**.)
3. Click **Create**. The Discussion screen reappears.
4. From the Discussions screen, ✔ the private option for the desired topic you wish to make private. (For class ✔ Late Assignments).

5. Click Update.

6. ✔ The box to the left of “Late Assignments” and then click Manage Members on the right side of your screen. The Manage Members screen displays.

7. Click Select Members.

8. Select the members you wish to add to the group:
   a. to select members individually, select their Status check box.
   b. to select all members, ✔ the box to the left of Status.

9. Click Update. The Private Topic screen appears with a table containing the members.

10. Click Done.

Adding Attachments

One of the most useful features of Discussions is the ability to include files along with the messages you post. Typical examples of attachments include sound files, graphics files, word processor files, or spreadsheet files.

1. From the Compose Discussion Message screen (in Student View), complete the Subject and Message text boxes.

2. Click the Browse button near the bottom of the screen.

3. Navigate to the location of the desired attachment.

4. Select the file and click Open.

5. Click the Attach File button in the WebCT message window. The screen updates to show that the file has been attached.

6. If you decide to delete a file that has already been attached, simply select the file by clicking its check box and the click the Remove Attachments button. (You can use the check boxes to select multiple files to delete.)

7. Click Post. The main Discussion screen displays.

Discussions Summary: Discussions is one of WebCT’s main communications tools. It supports asynchronous, threaded discussions also known as computer conferences.

- The icon for Discussions changes when new messages are posted.
- Discussions are “threaded” so messages within the same subject stay connected visually in outline format.
- Topics can be public or private.
• Users can attach files. (i.e., images, word processing files, spreadsheets, etc.)
• Supports HTML within postings so messages can contain hyperlinks, bold, italic, or other formatting.
• The Compile feature allows multiple postings to be viewed, printed, and saved as a single file.

**WebCT Mail**

Another asynchronous communication tool within WebCT is Mail. Mail is considered private communication. Messages can only be sent and received within the confines of WebCT. There is no need for students to acquire an external email account. The mail system provides three main functions: the ability to send, read, and search for mail messages. The structure of the mail system is similar in layout to that of Discussions.

**Access Mail**

Mail can be accessed from the Communication link on the homepage. If there is new mail in your Inbox, the mail icon will be surrounded with “highlights”. New mail will also be indicated on your My WebCT page and is accessible from there by clicking on the hyperlinked text.

1. Click the Communication link on the homepage.
2. Click the Mail link. The Mail screen displays as shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Compose message</th>
<th>Search</th>
<th>Message settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have no new messages in your Inbox.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that Mail contains three folders by default. The Inbox holds incoming mail, the Outbox stores a copy of out-going mail, and Draft stores a copy of mail that has not yet been sent. All is not really a separate folder—it merely allows you to see all messages in every folder.

**Compose a Mail Message**

To create a new mail message, use the Compose Message button. By default, WebCT utilizes word wrap.

1. Click the Compose Message button. The Compose Mail Message screen displays in a separate browser window as shown on the next page.
2. Click the Browse button near the top of the screen. Another browser window opens and displays the name of the instructor and any students that have been added to the course.

3. Select the name of the person(s) to whom you wish to send mail.

4. Click Select. The login name (User ID) appears in the Send to text box.

   **TIP:** You can send a message to multiple recipients. Click the Browse button and use the Shift or Ctrl keys to select more than one person. Names will display in the Send to box separated by commas.

5. Complete the Subject and type your message in the message box.

6. If you would like to attach a file, click Browse and navigate to the location of the file and select it, then choose Open.

7. Click the Attach File button. The file is attached to the mail message and the filename displays as a hyperlink.

8. Click the Preview button to preview the message. Notice that a gray Attachments button appears above the message as shown below.

   **TIP:** If you receive a message with an attachment, you will see the paperclip icon next to the message. Click on it to see a list of the attachments and then click on the file you want to view.


10. If necessary, edit the message.
11. Click the **Send** button.

TIP: WebCT requires a mail message to contain both a subject and a message. If either is missing, WebCT will not send the message!

12. Notice that the Folder list does **not** automatically update.
13. Right-click in the frame and choose the **Refresh** option. The screen updates to display the sent message.
14. The message you just sent is actually stored in your **Outbox**.
15. Click the **Outbox** link in the folder listing.
16. If necessary click the **All** button next to **Display**. The Outbox displays and shows all outgoing messages.
17. To read the contents of a sent message, make sure the message thread is unthreaded and click on the hyperlinked name.

A summary of the command options you have in the Mail tool is listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outbox/Select folder</th>
<th>Allows you to choose a message folder.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move to/Select folder</td>
<td>Allows you to choose a folder to move a message to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show all/Show unread</td>
<td>Shows all messages or only those that haven’t been read yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaded/Unthreaded</td>
<td>Sorts messages by topic or lists them individually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compile</td>
<td>Creates a file for downloading containing selected messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark All As Read</td>
<td>Marks the selected messages as having been read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delete</td>
<td>Deletes messages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Read a Mail Message**

The contents of a mail message can be read by clicking on the hyperlinked **subject**. The message displays in a new window.

1. In the Folder Listing, click the **Inbox**.
2. To read the contents of a message, make sure the message is unthreaded and click on the hyperlinked name.
3. Click on the subject of the mail message. The contents displays in a separate window as shown on the next page.
The buttons along the bottom of the message window give you several options. You can:

- reply to the sender.
- forward the message to another WebCT user.
- quote the message in a reply to the sender.
- download (save) the message to your own computer as a text file.
- close the message.

4. Click on the **See Attached** link to view the attachment. A new window displays.

5. Click the link of the attachment you wish to open. The file displays on the right side of the window.

6. If you wish to download the attachment to your own computer, click the **Download** button.

7. Click the **Save** button and navigate to the location where you wish to store the file.

8. Click **Save**

9. Click the **Close** button to return to the message.

10. Click the **Close** button to close the message.

**Forward a Message**

You may want to forward a message to another person within the course. The original message is included, and you have the option to include additional comments and/or change the subject.

1. Navigate to the message you wish to forward and open it.
2. Click the **Forward** button. The *Compose Mail Message* window displays.
3. Complete the **Send to** text box.
4. Change the subject, if desired. (However, it is recommended to retain the original subject for clarity.)
5. Include a comment in the message box if you wish. (Click to set the insertion point before the first word and press Enter several times. Then use the ↑ on the keyboard to position in a blank space near the top of the screen. Include your message here.)
6. Click Send. The mail is sent and a copy is placed in the Outbox folder.

Reply to a Message
You can reply to a message by clicking on the Reply button. By default, WebCT does not include the original message. If you want to include a copy of the original message, click the Quote button.

1. Navigate to the message to which you wish to reply and open it.
2. Click the Reply button. The Compose Mail Message window displays.
3. Type your message in the text box.
4. Click Send. The mail is sent and a copy is placed in the Outbox folder.

TIP: The Quote function allows users to include all or a portion of the original message with a reply. This may provide some context to those who are reading the reply.

Mail Summary: WebCT mail is a private and contained within the course.

- Asynchronous, anytime and anywhere as long as there is Web access.
- Browse feature displays names of all students and the instructor.
- Supports file attachments.
- Supports HTML for hyperlinking and formatting.
- Allows search of messages by subject, date, and other criteria.

Log Out of WebCT
Exit WebCT by clicking on the Log Out link at the top of the page.