

Forum User Guide

Categories, topics, and posts

What is a forum?

A forum is an online discussion site. It's sometimes also called a community, message board, discussion board, or bulletin board. It may contain several categories, consisting of subcategories, topics, and individual posts. The content on a forum is often created by the users or members of the forum. They are used for support, to share ideas, and for a variety of different topics.

How is all this structured?

The forum as a whole contains various categories (broad subject areas), which themselves contain subcategories (more specific subject areas) that contain topics (conversations or discussions) that are made up of individual posts. The administrator creates the categories and subcategories, and members of the forum typically create topics which other members reply to with posts.

When viewing a category, you'll see a list of topics with each topic showing a preview of your first unread post in the topic. If you've read the whole topic, you'll see a preview of the last post in the topic.

A topic only belongs to one category, but can have multiple tags.

How do I find my way around?

When you click on a category or a subcategory name, you are taken to the list of topics it contains with each topic showing a preview of your first unread post in the topic. If you've read the whole topic, you'll see a preview of the last post in the topic. A topic is a conversation between members or guests. Each topic starts out as a single post and grows as replies and comments are added by different users.

To start a new topic simply click on the *New Topic* button (you may need the right permissions to do this).

Topics can be ordered in many different ways. The default is to have the topic with the most recent activity at the top. But you can easily change this ordering, for example, to have the topic with the most posts at the top. Simply click on the *Top* link in a category.

What are pinned topics?

Pinned topics are topics determined to be important by moderators or administrators. They are listed at the top of the topic list and remain *stuck* at the top of the listing, even if they haven't had any posts recently. Their purpose is to keep important information visible and accessible at all times.

How do I read and reply to a topic?

To read a topic, click on its title. Clicking a topic title will take you to your first unread post in the topic. Each post in a topic is created by a member or a guest. You'll see some brief information about the member who created the topic to the left of the post.

To post a reply to an existing topic, click on the *Reply* button. If this button does not appear, it could mean that you are not logged in as a member or that you do not have permission to reply, or that the topic has been closed to new replies.

There will also be a *Reply box* at the bottom of the page. This is where you can quickly enter a reply as well. If you click the *Quote* link on any posted message, the content of that post will automatically be added to the *Reply box* for you to reply to that particular quoted post.

How do I find out more about members?

To view information about a particular member, click/hover on the username of that user. Clicking the username will take you to their public profile page. If you are not redirected to the profile page of that user, it could be because you do not have the appropriate permissions to view the profiles or that member is already deleted.

How do I mention/tag a user in a post?

To notify someone about your reply, mention their username while creating a post. Type @ and a few letters of the username to see the dropdown with the usernames matching your criteria. Select the username from the dropdown you want to mention. In case you don't know a particular username just enter the first letter of the username and then let the search do the rest.

Searching

You can search for topics, posts, and members by entering the keywords into the search box or by clicking the search icon located at the top of the page.

You can use operators such as quotes, *OR*, and the negative sign to narrow your search. For example: "planet in space" OR interstellar -alien

You can perform an advanced search by clicking on the down arrow in the search box and selecting it from the menu. This allows you to fine-tune the search based on the user, categories, dates, number of replies, and more.

Signing up

How do I sign up for the forum?

The administrator will probably require you to sign up to make full use of the features of the forum. Being signed up gives you a unique username and identity on the forum. Signing Up is free unless otherwise specified and offers some or all of the following features depending on how the administrator has configured the forum:

1. Posting new topics
2. Replying to other peoples' topics
3. Editing your content
4. Sending private messages to other members
5. Subscribing to content
6. Create a unique signature to use in posts
7. Upload a custom avatar

You can sign up by clicking the *Sign up* link near the top of the page. You will be asked to choose a username and password, and enter a valid email address. You may be asked for your birthdate to determine your age. In addition, there will be some other fields in which you will be invited to respond, some may be mandatory. Depending on how the forum is configured by the forum owner you may be able to bypass some or all of the signup steps.

You will be required to agree to the terms of service or forum rules before registration can be completed. A link will be provided allowing you to review the forum rules before agreeing.

Once this is complete you will either be fully registered or in some cases, you may receive an email notification from where you must follow a link to confirm your email address and complete the registration. Finally, in some cases, the administrator may require a waiting period while they verify and approve your account.

Note: Entering your email address will not leave you open to spam as it will not be shared with other forum users, only the administrators will have access to view your email address.

You may choose to sign up with your Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, Twitter, or Github if enabled by the forum owner.

Logging in and out

How do I log in to the forum?

Click the “*Log In*” link in the top right corner of the page to log in to the forum. Click the link to activate the login box.

Enter your username and password with the option to *Keep me logged in* then click *Log In*. Keep me logged in allows you to stay logged in instead of your session with the forum timing out after a default of 15 minutes without activity.

A short message *Logging in...* will appear until the login process is completed then you will see your Messages and User Options available on the top right where the login link was prior.

Alternatively, you may be able to log in using your Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, Twitter, or Github account if enabled by the forum owner.

I forgot my password, what can I do?

If you've forgotten your password and are not able to log in to the forum you can click on the *Forgot password* link appearing in the *login* box.

You will be taken to a new page where you can enter your *username* or your *registered email address*. An email will be sent immediately to that email address with final instructions on how to reset your password.

Since passwords are saved in an encrypted format in the database there is no way to retrieve your actual password, it will be replaced with a new password only.

You must be able to receive emails to your registered email address for this to work. You may need to check your spam filters and folder if you do not see this email in a few minutes.

How do I log out from the forum?

Clicking on your *Avatar* image will provide a dropdown menu. Select the *Log Out* link on this menu to log out. Logging off will remove all cookies from your computer and you will be logged out of the forum. This will also remove *Keep me logged in* cookies.

Managing your account

How do I change my profile settings?

You can change your account settings by clicking on your avatar image in the right corner of the forum. This will provide a dropdown menu. From here select *Settings*.

On the settings page, you will see five sections. Account Info, Preferences, Notifications and Delete account. These are:

- Account Info - You can change your Username, Password, and Email Address from this section.
- Preferences - Following a topic allows you to receive an email notification when a new reply is posted on the topic. Instead of automatically following topics you post in, you can choose to automatically follow topics you create, all topics, or no topics at all from here.
- Notifications - This tab controls how you will be notified of new content you are interested in.
- Delete - Your account can be deleted from here. At the Website Toolbox, deletion is a permanent action. If you are deleting your account, it cannot be restored.

How do I change my avatar?

To add/change an avatar for your account, click the *Avatar* image located towards the top-right of your page and select the *Edit Profile* link from the dropdown. Once in your user profile, click the *Upload an avatar from your computer* link and follow the instructions on the screen.

How do I edit my signature?

You can set and change your signature by clicking the *Avatar* image located towards the top-right of your page and selecting the *Edit Profile* link from the dropdown. Locate *Signature* to edit/change your signatures.

You can also use images in your signature. Click the *Insert Photo* icon on the signature editor to add an image.

This option may be disabled by the Administrator.

How do I manage my notifications?

You may manage your notification settings by clicking your *Avatar* image in the upper right corner and by selecting *Settings* from the dropdown. On this page, you may select your *Email Notifications* (turn it on, make it daily or weekly, or choose to get it through the message center

only). You may also set what notifications you would like to receive like for messages from users, users mentioning you, etc.

What is reputation?

Reputation is a way of rating users depending on the quality of their posts. If the administrators have enabled reputation, then the like icon will be visible in posts.

You can build your reputation on the forum by posting informative and constructive content. This in turn will encourage people to follow your posts, press the like button on different posts and they could even subscribe to your content.

How do I gain a reputation?

The number of likes minus the number of dislikes your posts receive becomes your reputation score.

Communicating with other members

How do I send messages to other members?

If the administrator has enabled the Messages option, registered members may send each other private messages to communicate outside of the general forum discussions without disclosing their email addresses.

Messages work a little like an email but are limited to registered members of the forum only. You may be able to include smileys, images, and other attachments in messages that you send.

You may send a message to a member of this forum by clicking the *Send a New Message* link in the top left section of your Message Center, or by clicking the *Message* button that is visible on the *User Profile* of a member.

When you send a message, a copy of it is automatically saved to your *Inbox*.

Creating content

How do I create forum topics?

A topic in a forum or group can hold one or more posts of various content types such as traditional text-based posts, shared pictures, links or videos, or polls.

To create a new topic, click on the *New Topic* button when browsing a forum. You will be presented with a screen where you must give a title (or subject) of the topic. When you have

completed your post you may preview or post the new content. Upon pressing *Post* a new topic will be created.

How do I add photos?

You may add photos to topics, or posts for which you have permission to do so. If you see the *Insert Photos* icon, represented by the camera icon, you may click on it either when creating a new topic or posting a reply.

To upload new photos press the *Insert Photos* icon and browse to the images you wish to upload. You may add multiple images by using standard *SHIFT+Click* or *CTRL+Click* options to select multiple files.

When finished, press *Post* or *Post Reply* to post the shared photos.

How do I attach a file to my post or message?

You may have permission to attach files and images to your posts. If you have permission you will see a paperclip icon under the content area while creating a new topic or replying to the post. Pressing this icon will bring up the file selection box. Browse to find the file(s) you wish to upload. You may use the standard *SHIFT+Click* or *CTRL+Click* shortcuts to attach multiple files. When you have completed the post submit it as normal and your file(s) will be attached to your post.

How do I add links and videos to posts?

You may post links or videos if you have permission to do so. If you see the *Insert Link* button in the editor toolbar you may click on it either when creating a new topic or posting a reply.

After clicking on the *Insert Link* button in the editor you will have the standard message box as well as an additional URL field that begins with `https://`. Enter or paste in the full URL to a web page.

If you wish to share a video from hosting sites like YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, Metacafe, and Facebook, simply mention the video URL (address) in your post. Whenever the post is displayed, the URL will automatically be converted into an embedded video that can be played without having to leave the page.

You can also upload the video as an attachment to a post. When the post is viewed, the video will automatically be displayed as an embedded video within the post if the user's browser and operating system support streaming that type of video.

How do I create a poll?

If you are creating a new topic you may be able to post a poll if the Administrator has given you permission to do so.

Polls allow you to post questions to other users of the forum. Other users will be able to vote for one (or more, if you allow) choices and a summary of the results will be displayed at the start of the topic after you or they vote.

To create a poll, click on the *Poll* tab when creating a new topic.

Enter the poll question. By default, you will see two options for answers and you may add additional options by pressing the *+Add option link*.

The *make voter names public* option allows all users to see who voted for what answers in the poll. If this is not checked only the Administrator will be able to see who voted.

The *allow multiple-choice* option will allow users to select more than one answer when voting.

Optionally, you may set whether you want to close the polls or not. Click the *close voting* link and some new fields will appear. You can choose a specific date or number of days or never as per your requirement.

Note, the topic will remain open, however, no new answers will be allowed in the poll after the timeout date.

You may complete the rest of the post as normal and press *Post* when done to post the poll to a new topic. The administrator, category moderator, and the user who has started the topic can add a poll to his/her post by clicking on *Add Poll* option in the dropdown option next to his/her post.

How do I follow an important discussion?

You can follow a category or topic by clicking the bell icon located across from the title. Each time someone replies to the discussion, you will get a notification email and also an alert in the notifications section.

If you wish to stop following the category or topic, click the bell icon again.

How do I reply to posts via email?

When you receive an email notification about a post or private message, you can reply to that post very easily without visiting the forum by simply replying to that email notification. The forum will receive the email reply and post it in response to the correct post.

Only replies to immediate email notifications of new posts or private messages are posted on the forum. Replying to digest emails or notifications which are sent daily or weekly will not post a reply on the forum since they list multiple topics.