Setting up a group discussion

When working in a group discussion, students will only be able to see the discussion topic for their group. They will also be able to interact with the members of their own group only. Use group discussion forums if you want to have students work in smaller groups for a project or to encourage more participation.

This guide will explain:

- [How to set up a group in Brightspace, create discussion areas for each group, and enrol students](#)

- [What your discussion forum looks like in the Discussions tool](#)

- [What the student experience in a group discussion is like](#)

How to set up a group in Brightspace, create discussion areas for each group, and enrol students

When you are in your Brightspace module/unit area, select **Groups** from the **drop-down menu Communication and Collaboration** (Figure 1).
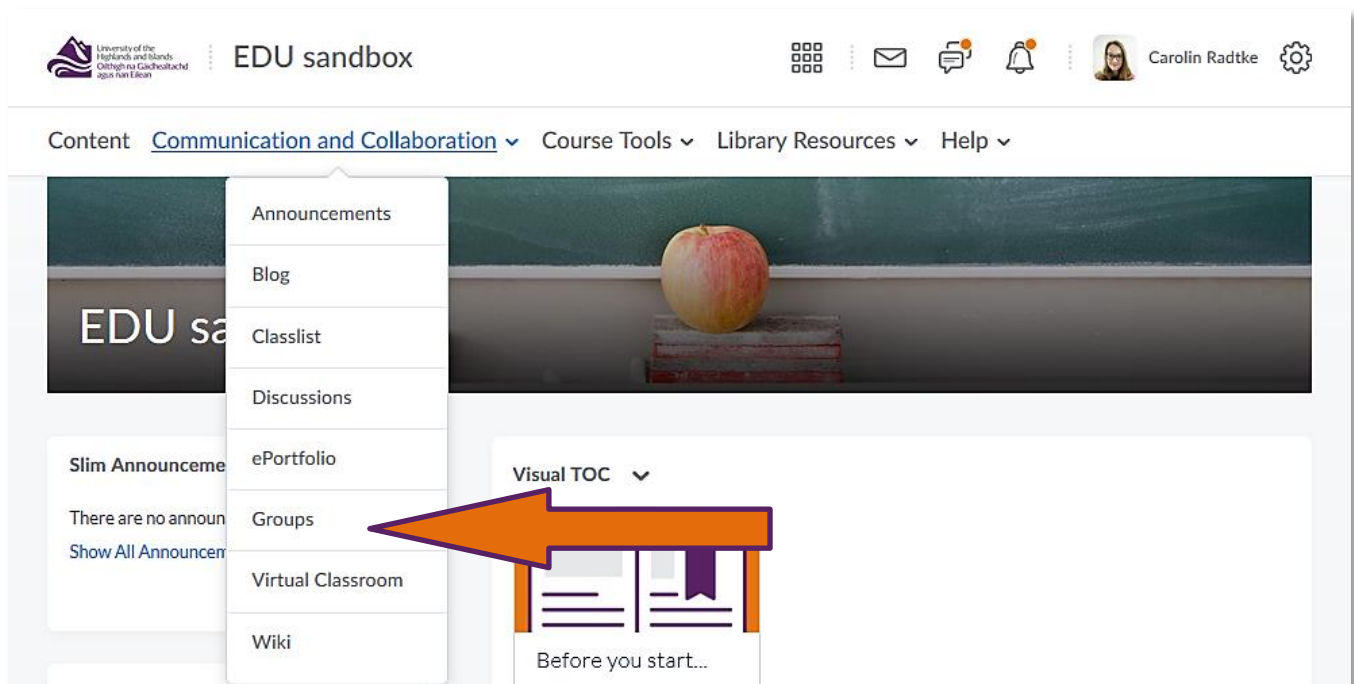

Figure 1: Brightspace module/unit homepage with the Communication and Collaboration drop-down menu

This will take you to the Groups tool in Brightspace. To start setting up a group, click on the blue 'New Category' button (Figure 2).
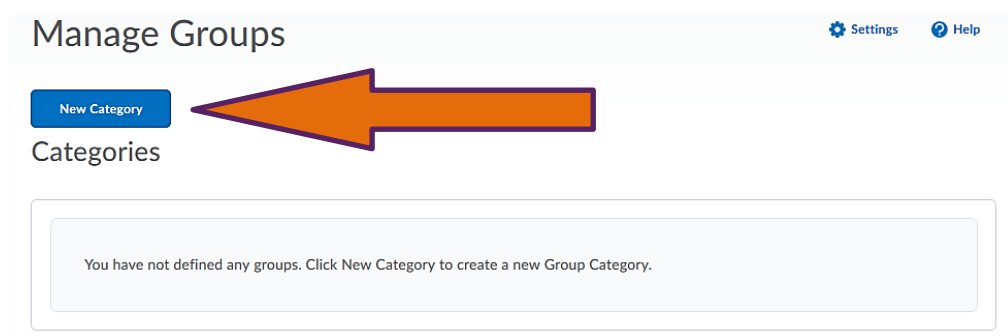

Figure 2: Manage Groups page with the blue New Category button

Give your category a **name** (1), provide a short **description** if you would like, and select the **enrolment type** (for more information about the different enrolment types, have a look at this Brightspace guidance on enrolment types) as well as the **number of groups** (2). For this example we will give the category the name 'Group discussion', and will select '# of Groups – No Auto Enrolments' which means that we will be able to determine how many groups we want to sit in that category (in this example 2), and that students will not be auto enrolled, which means that we will have to enrol them ourselves (Figure 3).

Figure 3: New Category page with title and description box as well as drop-down menus/boxes for the enrolment type and restrictions as well as number of groups
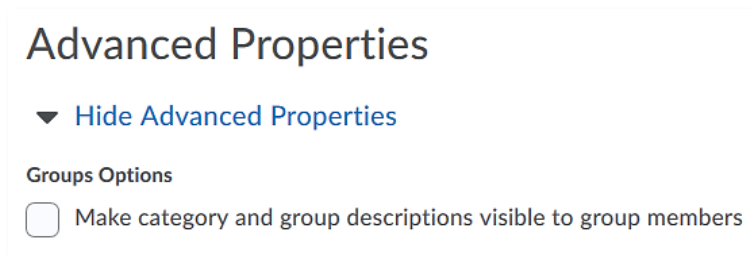
Advanced Properties

▼ Hide Advanced Properties

Groups Options

☐ Make category and group descriptions visible to group members

Figure 4: Advanced Properties area with Group Options check-box to make category and group description visible to group members

Under **Advanced Properties**, you have the option to make the category name and description visible to students. This might be particularly useful when you choose any option involving self-enrolment by the students (Figure 4).

Next, you will be able to select **Additional Options**. You could choose to set up **discussion areas** for the different groups. Students would only have access to the discussion topic or thread for their specific group and would only be able to interact with students from their group. You can also set up **lockers** which is a file sharing and exchange area for each of the different groups. Again, students will only have access to the locker areas for the group that they are enrolled on. In addition, you could set up group-specific **assignments**, where students could submit a group assignment and be assessed as a group (Figure 5).
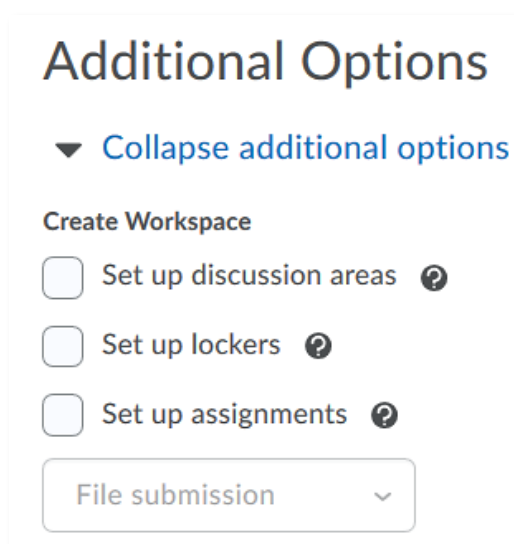
Additional Options

▼ **Collapse additional options**

Create Workspace

☐ Set up discussion areas ⊙

☐ Set up lockers ⊙

☐ Set up assignments ⊙

File submission ⌄

Figure 5: Additional Options area with options to set up discussion areas, lockers and/or assignments

Additional Options

▼ Collapse additional options

Create Workspace

☑ Set up discussion areas ⊙

Forum *

Sample discussion forum ⌄   [New Forum] **②**

① ⦿ Create new topic
Create a new topic to restrict with this group category.

○ Attach to existing topic
Create a group-restricted thread in an existing topic. **This option is only available for empty topics without previous group restrictions or posts.**
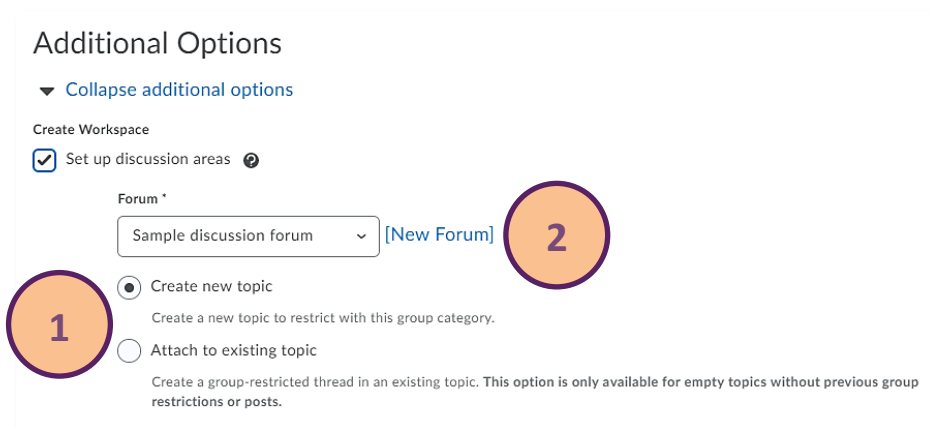
Figure 6: Additional options area with the option to set up a discussion area for the group category and its groups

To create discussion areas for your group, check the box next to **Set up discussion areas**. This will open further options. You could now associate this group category and its groups with an **existing discussion forum** which you

can select from the drop-down menu (1). If you go for this option, you could either create a new topic for this forum, or you could associate the group category and its groups with an existing topic in the forum. For more information on how to create and manage discussion boards in Brightspace, refer to our Brightspace [Discussion tool guidance](). For this example, we will select to create a Student view of their group thread within the group discussion with one topic for all students (2) (Figure 6).

Once you have clicked on the New Forum link (Figure 6), a pop-up window will open. You can now give your new discussion forum a **name** and can provide a **description**. When you are done, click the blue **Save** button at the bottom of the pop-up window (Figure 7) .

Figure 7: New Forum pop-up window

Note:

In this example, I will set up the discussion forum as a supplement for a group assignment students are doing. For more information on group assignments, refer to our [Groups Assignments guidance](). You can of course customise your discussion forum accordingly so it has a meaningful title and description.

Once you have saved your new discussion forum, you will see that it will automatically appear in the drop-down menu under Forum.

As this is a new discussion forum, you will now need to create the topic(s) for this forum. Leave the box next to **Create new topic** checked and click on the blue **Save** button at the bottom of the page (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Newly created discussion forum in the New Category set-up area

You will now be able to create your topic(s) for the discussion forum. You can either create **one topic with threads separated by group** (1), or **a topic for each group** (2). Once you have made your selection, click on the blue **Create and Next** button (Figure 9).

Note: If you have chose to Create one topic with threads separated by
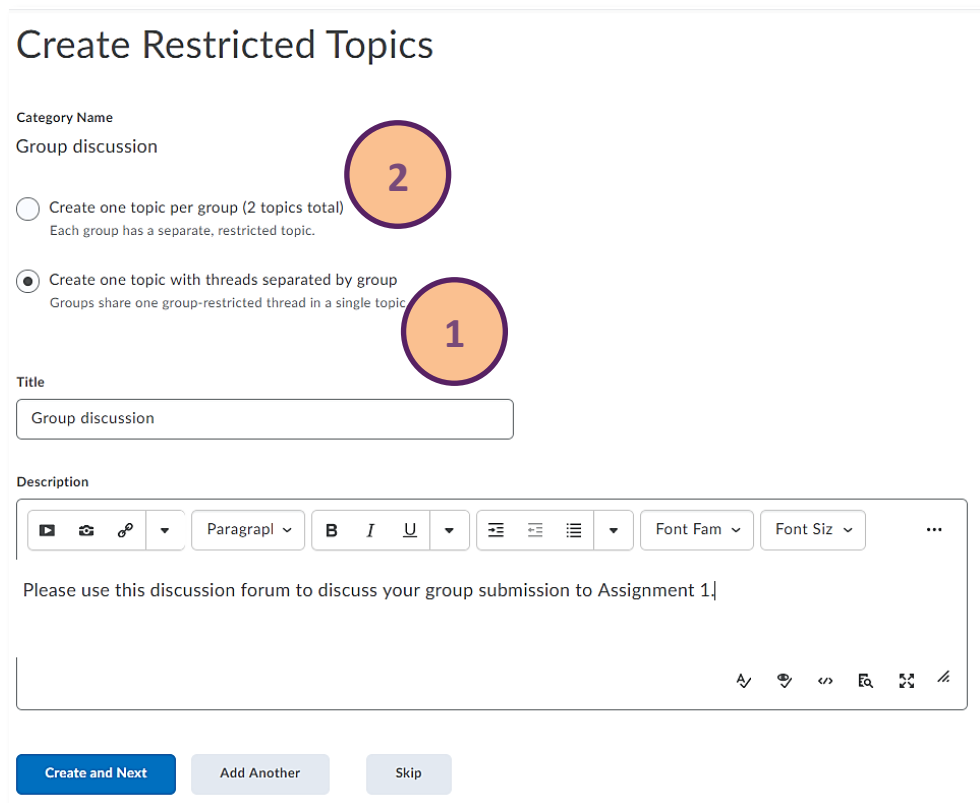
Figure 9: Create Restricted Topics area

group, we would recommend that you create the initial thread students can post to. More information can be found in the section on What your discussion forum looks like in the Discussions tool below.
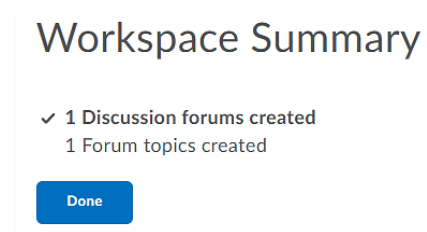
Figure 10: Confirmation of newly created forum and topic

You will now see a confirmation that your forum and the topics have been created. Click on the blue **Done** button (Figure 10).

Note: You will see a slightly different summary when you go for the option of creating a topic for each group. For some reasons, it says that the topics were not created but that is not correct. You will find the topics when you look at the forum in the Discussions tool. More information can be found in the section on What your discussion forum looks like in the Discussions tool below.

You will now be taken back to the Category set-up page. Here, you can make further changes, if these might be needed, i.e. **edit your description**, or **add a locker/group assignment folder**. When you are happy with your group category, click on the blue **Save** button at the bottom of the page (Figure 11).
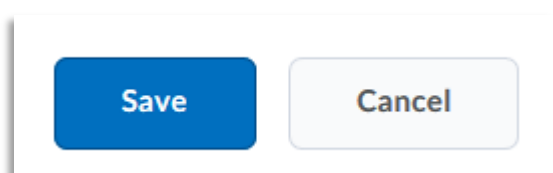
Figure 11: Blue Save button at the bottom of the page

You will now see your newly created group category and its groups in the Manage Groups area. On this page, you will also see how many members are enrolled in a group (1), as well as information on assignments, discussions and group files in the locker area (2) if you have enabled these features (Figure 12).
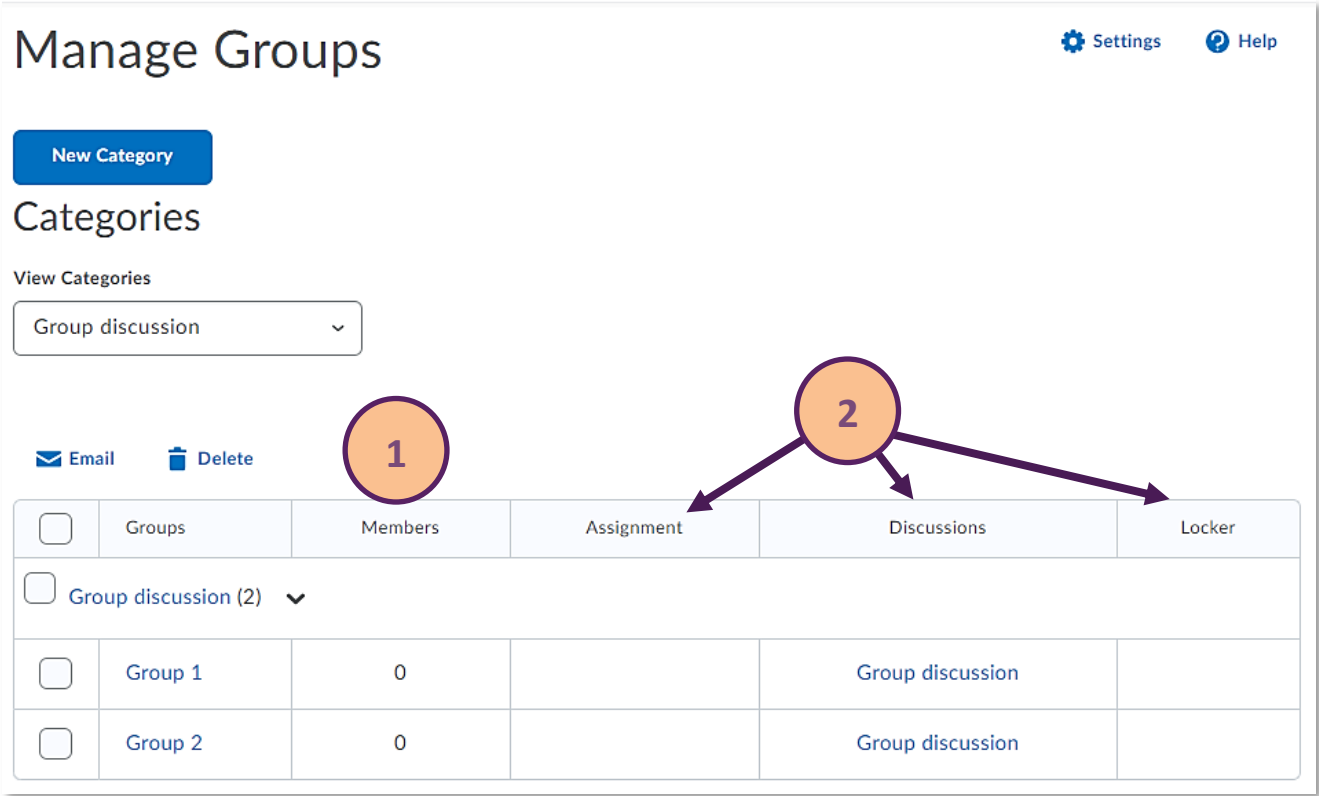

Figure 12: Newly created category and associated groups in the Manage Groups area

If you have selected the group type **# of Groups – No Auto Enrolment**, you will need to enrol students on the groups. To do so, select the drop-down menu next to the group name and click on **Enrol Users** (Figure 13).
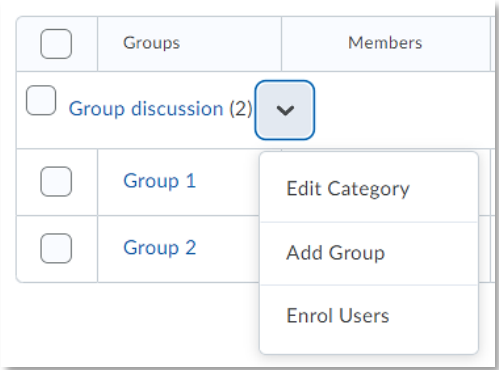
Figure 13: Group category drop-down menu with the option to Enrol Users

You will now be able to see your classlist against the groups that you have created. Enrol users on the groups by **checking the corresponding box** next to their name (Figure 14)

Figure 14: Enrolling students on groups

When you are done enrolling student, click on the blue

Save button at the bottom of the screen (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Blue Save button at the bottom of the page

You will now see the enrolment reflected in the Members column on the Manage Groups page (Figure 16)

Figure 16: Updated Members column on the Manage Groups page

What your discussion forum looks like in the Discussion tool

If you would like to see what your discussion forum and/or topic(s) look like in the Discussions tool, start by navigating to the Discussions tool. Locate the Navbar of your module/unit/course and select **Discussions** from the **Communication and Collaboration drop-down menu** (Figure 17).
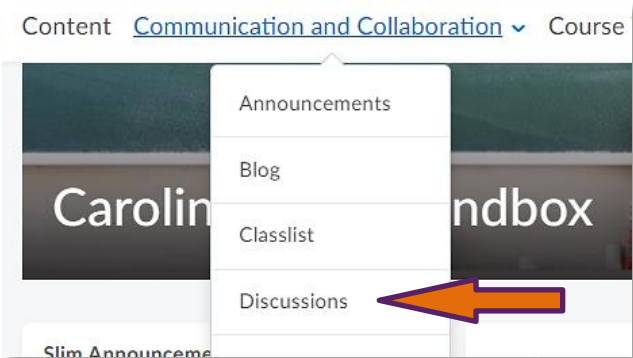
Figure 17: Communication and Collaboration drop-down menu with link to the Discussions tool

Locate your discussion forum you just created.

Figure 18: Group discussion forum with one separate topic per group

If you chose to create a topic for each group, you will see that there are multiple topics with the same name, however students will only be able to see the topic for the group they are enrolled on (Figure 18).

If you chose to create one topic with a thread per group, you will see that there is only one topic within the discussion forum. All students will see the forum and the topic but they will only be able to see posts from members of the group they are enrolled on (Figure 19).
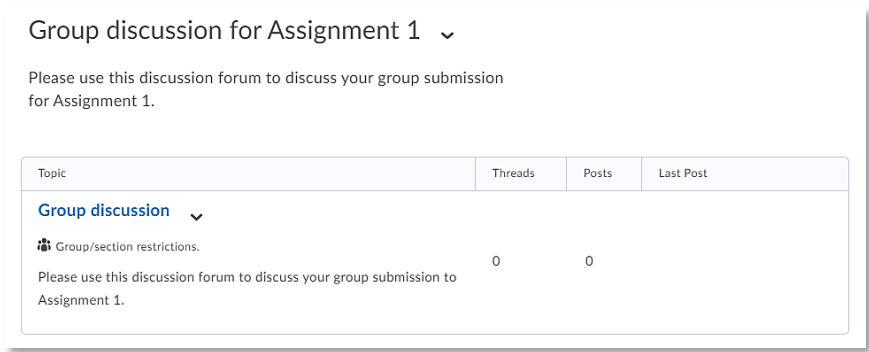

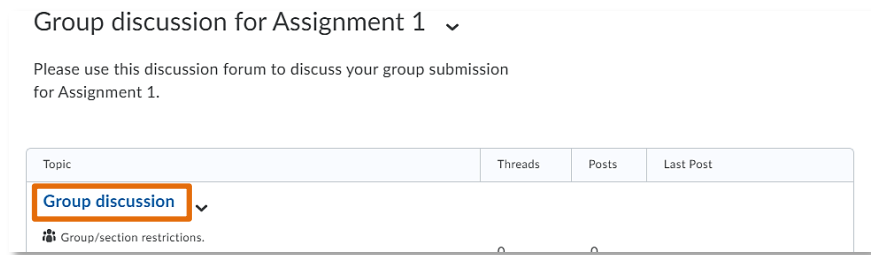**Figure 19: Group discussion forum with one topic all students/groups can access**

Figure 20: Discussion topic link in the discussion forum

If you would like to make the forum easier to manage for yourself, you can create a thread for each group and ask them to contribute to this thread only instead of creating a number of their own threads. To do so, click on the **discussion topic link** to enter the discussion board (Figure 20).

Click on the blue **Start a New Thread** button (Figure 21).
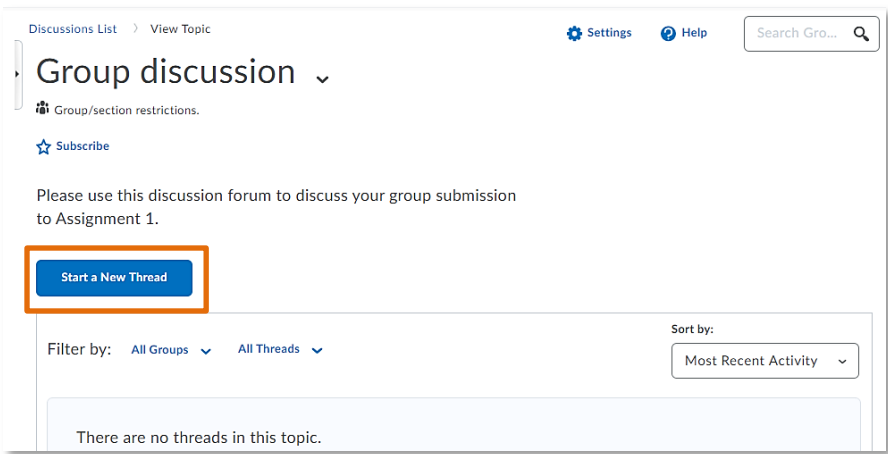
Figure 21: Group discussion topic with the blue Start a New Thread button
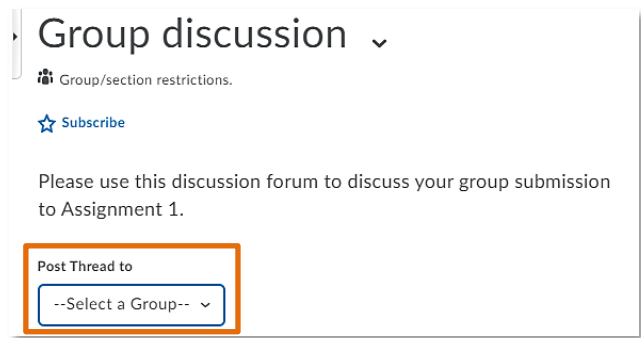

Figure 22: New Thread area with the option to create a thread for all groups or select groups

You will now be able to create a thread. If you want all students to start out with an identical thread, select **All Groups** from the drop-down menu under **Post Thread to**. If you would like to give groups different tasks, you could also post separate threads for any of your groups, though (Figure 22).

Next, customise your thread further with a **heading** (1) and **message** (2). You can also opt to **pin the thread** or **subscribe to it** so you get updates on when students post (3). Below, you can also **add attachments** if needed (4) and you could opt to **post this thread to other discussion topics** as well (5).

When you are done customising your thread, click on the blue **Post** button at the bottom of the page (Figure 23).

Figure 23: New Thread area with further options to customise the thread
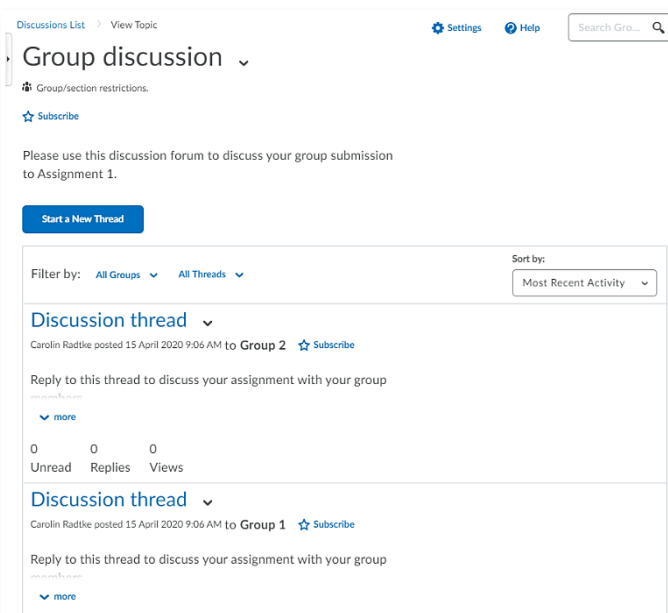
A thread has now been added to the topic for each group (Figure 24).

For more information about the Discussions tool, refer to our Discussion tool guidance.

Figure 24: Newly added discussion threads for each group

What the student experience in a group discussion is like

As mentioned before, students will only be able to see the topic or thread for the group they are enrolled on and will also only be able to interact with students from the group they are enrolled on.

If you have created a **group discussion with one separate topic for each group**, a student enrolled on Group 1 will also only see the discussion topics for this group (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Student view of group discussion with one topic per group

If you have created a **group discussion with one topic for all groups**, all students will see the topic (Figure 26). If you have also **created a thread for each group**, however, students will only see the thread for their group once they enter the discussion topic (Figure 27).

Figure 26: Student view of group discussion with one topic for all students

Figure 27: Student view of their group thread within the group discussion with one topic for all students

For more general information about the student experience in the Brightspace Discussions tool, refer to our Discussion tool guidance for students.