PARTICIPATING IN WEBBOARD CONFERENCES

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You can participate in WebBoard conferences in two different ways. First, you can read and post messages directly at the WebBoard site using your web browser. Second, you can read and post messages indirectly using your email program. The latter option involves editing your user profile (explained in our other documentation on Introducing WebBoard).

You can also mix and match the two methods. For example, when you are at school you may find that visiting the conference area with your browser over Dominican's network is fast and easy. However, when you are traveling or working from home, the slower connection can probably make participating by email cheaper and more convenient. Still, using a browser is the recommended method, since it allows you to keep tap more easily of all message threads within a conference.

Types of Conferences and Messages

Before getting into all the nuts and bolts of posting messages, take a few minutes to review some basics about WebBoard's conferences and messages. Any board on a WebBoard site can have four different types of conferences:

- Public conferences let anyone read and post messages.

- Moderated conferences have one or more persons exercising editorial control. Anyone can post, but the messages are reviewed before being posted. A moderated conference helps keep discussions focused.

- Private conferences are limited to specific users who are authorized to read and post messages. Private conferences allow you to discuss confidential or nondisclosure topics. Private conferences appear in the Conferences list only for authorized users. Instructors may create private conferences for various group projects in the class, allowing access only to those students working in the group.

- Read-only conferences are used to distribute official information to WebBoard users, such as policies or announcements. You can read, but not post messages to a read-only conference.
Note that the conference types can also be mixed. For example, a private conference might also have a moderator to move the discussion along.

WebBoard conferences can have two different types of messages:

- **Topic messages** start a new thread of a discussion within the overall subject of the conference. You can start a new topic at any time and you should start a new topic if your message is not a direct response to a previously posted message.

- **Reply messages** respond to an existing topic or reply message and keep the current discussion thread going. Replies are always indented under the message being replied to in the Conferences list.

As you read and start posting messages, these differences will become more clear.

**Participating through a Browser**

When you participate in conferences through your browser, you can take full advantage of WebBoard's many message posting features. You can read multiple messages at once and understand where the discussion has already been before jumping in. You can also preview your messages, spell check them, post anonymously, and include file attachments. You can also edit or delete messages you have already posted. These tasks and more are described in this section.

**Posting a Topic Message**

When you post to a conference, you are either adding to a current topic or starting a new topic. If you have something to contribute to the general theme of a conference (say, to ask others for good afternoon tea spots), but it doesn't relate to the existing topic, then you can start a new topic. If you are the first visitor to a conference, you will also need to post a new topic message. This section describes how to post a new topic message. Responding to existing messages is described later.

To post a new topic, follow these steps:

1. Select a conference by clicking the conference name or expansion box († to the left of the conference name). Here is what a typical conference listing looks like:
2. Choose from one of three ways to display the Post form.

- From the WebBoard menubar, click **Post**.

- From an open message, click **Post** on the message menu. This is located as a hyperlink directly above the message itself, as shown below:

  ![Message Example]

  **From: Ken Black (kblack@email.dom.edu)**
  **Date: Sunday, September 13, 1998 09:33 AM**

  Hello everyone -

  Please use this particular WebBoard conference to introduce yourselves. Since this is likely the first class for many of you, it may prove beneficial to know who else shares the same interests, backgrounds, or even commute(!) with you at your beginning academic program.

- From the WebBoard menubar, click **More** to display the More Options menu, as shown below:

  ![More Options]

  On this menu, click **Conference Profiles** to display a list of all conferences. Click the conference to which you want to add a new topic. From the
conference profile, click Post a message to this conference. Needless to say, this is the most cumbersome method to post a new topic!

After doing any of the above, you will see the following screen on the right side (if you are using frames):

3. Enter the new topic name in the Topic field. Keep the topic name short.

4. Choose any of the following options by checking the appropriate box(es) in the menu at the top of the message posting form:

- **Convert line breaks to HTML breaks** to automatically turn line breaks into carriage returns or blank lines. If you deselect this option, all lines in your message are run together.

- **Preformatted text (No HTML)** to turn off HTML features. This setting is helpful when you are inserting text from another source. However, you should leave this box unchecked if you want to include a Web address within the body of your message. (For example, you want your readers to check out Yahoo! at [http://www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com).) Including a Web address will automatically create a hyperlink that your readers can click on.

- **Anonymous** to post anonymously. Your name is not attached to the posting. Not recommended for a class-related discussion group!
• **Preview** message to review your message before you post it. It's highly recommended you click on this box if the next choice is disabled--it's always good to take one last look at a message before posting it.

• **Preview/Spell check** to review and spell check your message--this is the default setting.

• **Attach File** to attach a file to your message. (Explained in more detail below.)

5. Type in your message. You can include HTML tags for formatting as well as links to other web pages and images. Note that any links you include must have the full URL, such as `http://www.mysert.com/linked.html`. Some WebBoards may not allow active links in messages. If you have a question about this feature, contact the WebBoard administrator.

6. When you complete your message, click **Post**. Depending on which options you have selected, WebBoard either posts your message immediately or allows you to preview it (with or without spell checking). Previewing and spell checking are discussed in the following sections.

In a moderated conference your message may not be posted until the moderator reviews and verifies it.

When the new message is posted, the Conferences list refreshes automatically, showing the new topic. WebBoard users subscribing by to the conference’s mailing list also receive the message the next time they check their email.

**Previewing your Message**

You can preview messages before you post them to ensure that they say what you really intended. Message preview comes in two flavors: without spell checking and with spell checking. Previewing without spell checking allows you to see any HTML properly converted, while previewing with spell checking allows you to catch and correct misspelled words.

To preview your message without spell checking, follow these steps:

1. Check **Preview** on the Post message form.

2. Enter the topic name, your message, and click Post. WebBoard displays your message exactly as it will appear to other users on WebBoard.

3. If you are dissatisfied with your message and want to change it, click Back on your browser. If you are using a Netscape browser, you can also right-click your mouse, and click Back to get to the previous frame.
4. Once you are satisfied with the appearance of your message, click **Post**. Your message is immediately posted to the conference and WebBoard displays it in the Message window.

**Spell-Checking Your Message**

You can spell-check any message you post on WebBoard by using WebBoard's built-in dictionary. Each instance of a misspelled word is flagged as a link, which displays a list of suggested replacements. You can select a replacement or enter a different word. If you change misspelled words, you will see another preview of your message before posting it.

To spell-check your message, follow these steps:

1. Check Preview/Spell check on the Post message form. This is the default option.

2. Enter your message, and click Post. The Message Preview window opens. Your message is spell-checked, with each occurrence of misspelled words being flagged as a link.

   Spell-checking does not convert HTML tags to HTML (as plain Preview does). Rather, many HTML tags are flagged as misspelled words. You should ignore these during spell checking. To preview the HTML in your message, use Preview without spell checking enabled.

3. Click on each misspelled word to see WebBoard's suggestions for corrections. You can either select a word from the list or enter a new one in the textbox.

4. Click **Done** to return to the message preview. The corrected word is shown in the message. Repeat Steps 4 and 5 if necessary.

   If you are a WebBoard administrator, manager, or moderator, the spelling correction form also includes a button allowing you to add the misspelled word to the dictionary. This feature is handy for adding words such as proper names, HTML tags, or abbreviations.

5. If you are dissatisfied with your message after correcting the spelling errors and want to change it, click Back on your browser to redisplay the original Message form.

6. Once you are satisfied with your message, click **Post**. Your message is posted to the conference.
Attaching Files to Your Message

Attaching files to your WebBoard messages is a handy way to give users ready access to information that doesn't fit well in a text message. For example, you may want to provide a spreadsheet or video clip for other WebBoard users to review. You can attach one or more files to a message posting.

Your browser must support file attachment capability (Netscape Navigator 2.0 or higher; Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 with plug-in or higher) for uploading files. Almost any browser can download file attachments. Additionally, those who want to open the files must have the same or similar applications to open them. Keep in mind, for example, that if you posting a document formatted with Microsoft Word that your recipients must also have Microsoft Word in order to view the attachment. A better option may be to post a duplicate of your attachment in plain ASCII (text-only) format if possible, which anyone will be able to retrieve and read.

File attachment capability is not available at all WebBoard sites or for all conferences. The WebBoard administrator determines whether or not file attachments are allowed and can also restrict the number of attachments per posting and the size of attachments. If you have difficulty, contact the WebBoard administrator.

To attach a file to your message, follow these steps:

1. Check **Attach file** on the Post message form, as shown below:

   ![Post a New Topic in "Exercises"
   Topic: Copy of Exercise 5
   □ Convert line breaks to HTML breaks
   □ Pre-formatted text (No HTML)
   □ Anonymous

   Here is a copy of exercise five in Microsoft Word format.

2. Type in your message, and click **Post**. If you selected Preview/Spell check or Preview, complete the preview and click Post. The Attach a File form opens, as shown below:
3. Click the appropriate Category radio button for the file you wish to attach. The category you select causes WebBoard to display the corresponding icon next to the file attachment link in your posting, which gives other users a quick idea of the file type. The categories are as follows:

- **Unknown** if you do not know what type of file this is. Experience has shown us that this is actually the safest option to click—even if you are well aware of what type of file it is you are posting. In most cases, assuming you have not changed the three-letter extension to a file name (such as `.doc` for Word documents, or `.avi` for video files), your recipients will have no difficulty with the file.

- **Document** if this is a text file.

- **Image** if this is a graphics file.

- **Audio** if this is a sound file.

- **Multimedia** if this is a multimedia file.

- **Application** if this is an application.

4. Enter the name of the file in the File to upload field.

**OR** - Click **Browse** to select the attachment you want to upload from your directories. A File Upload dialog opens. Navigate through your directories to select the attachment. If there is no Browse button, your browser does not support file attachments. Click Open to continue, or click Cancel to cancel the upload, which has the effect of immediately posting your message.
5. Enter the description of the file attachment in the File description field. It should be fairly descriptive, such as *Homework assignment in Microsoft Word format.*

6. If you want to attach more files, click the **Upload another** radio button.

7. Click **Upload Now** to attach the file to your message. Depending on the size of the file and speed of your connection, this process may take a few minutes. Your message is immediately posted to the conference. The attachment appears as a hyperlink at the end of the message. An icon indicates the file type.

8. If you clicked **Upload another**, the Attach a File form appears again. Repeat steps 3-7 for each file attachment you want to upload.

**Posting a Reply Message**

You can post a reply to any message within a topic. For example, if a topic has 10 messages, you can reply to the first message or to the tenth message. Whenever you reply to a message, your new message is indented under that message in the Conferences list to show other readers the thread of the conversation. Replies are displayed chronologically within each topic. You can also reply to a posting privately, by sending an email message to the original message poster. This section describes these two types of replies: public and private. In addition, note that posting a reply message uses many of the same basic steps as posting a topic message; these steps were the topic of the previous section.

**To post a public reply**

To reply publicly to the message you are currently reading, use one of the following options:

- Select **Reply** from the menu at the top of the message you wish to respond to.
- Select **Reply/Quote** from the menu to include text from the original message.

Both of these options are shown in the same message below:
WebBoard displays a message creation form for you to complete. The form is the same as the one for posting a new topic except the topic from the current message is displayed. You can use this topic or change it. Otherwise the form works the same as described in "Posting a Topic Message" earlier in this chapter. Please refer to that section for details.

**To send a private reply**

Rather than post a reply to the whole conference, you may prefer to send a reply only to the individual who posted the message. Some replies need to be shared with all the participants of a conference, while others are appropriate only for the individual who posted the message. WebBoard lets you reply privately to the message author by email. Note that if a message was posted anonymously, you can not send a private response.

To reply to the author privately to the message you are currently reading, use one of the following options:

- Select Email Reply from the menu at the top of the message you wish to reply to.
- Click the poster's email address link in the From field of the message.

WebBoard launches the email program associated with your browser with the recipient's email address included (but not the topic or any text from the message posting). You must enter a subject and your response. You may also wish to cut and paste the WebBoard posting to provide context for the recipient.

Sending email replies uses your web browser's email capability. Your browser must be set up to send email; WebBoard itself does not provide this email capability.

*If you have questions about WebBoard, contact Dominican's WebBoard Administrator, Ken Black, at ext. 6512.*

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