

Discourse Notes

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General thoughts / notes on use

General Impression

Discourse is a solid forum software. It appears to be geared toward a general audience, with many large companies using but also with good support for non-paying users. The framework is set to be mostly a single package, with many customization options in the gui, which is upgraded to new versions. (Although it does support some plugins.) It may not be as pretty as some of the other options out there, and has less user customization, but has good back-end support. There are a lot of administrative features which can customize user capabilities, and are designed for anti-spamming.

One thing that sets it apart (good or bad) is the use of Trust Levels (explained below) to allow tiered levels of controls. There also appears to be a greater level of support with GitHub integration than other (free) forum platforms.

Pros:

- Github integration options (both sign-on and embedding code)
- Gui-controlled backups
- Many configuration options for security and permissions. Good explanation of the many “knobs” in the gui itself.
- Good support for do-it-yourselfers (Non-paying users) - good documentation and community response to questions
- Great features included in installation package

Cons:

- Could be a little prettier
- More user-controllable options would be nice
- Adding users is closely linked to email. It would be good to have options to allow creation and validation of accounts in the Admin GUI. (Instead of having to rely on emails and/or back-end code manipulation)
- It would be nice to be able to give permissions to individual users at the category level
- Only one level of subtopic allowed
- Customization at the code-level is minor (not so bad when the package is as inclusive as this is, though)

Platform/Language

- Ruby
- Rails
- Linux
- Docker

Key Features

Trust Levels (user permission controls)

- The capability of each user is based on **Trust Levels**. Higher trust levels have more permissions granted. The trust levels are briefly as follows:
 - **0** - new user. Very limited number of posts and capabilities
 - **1-2** - fairly typical user. Still limited in number of posts, but generally have full capabilities for a typical forum user. These trust levels are earned via interaction with the site, and once gained cannot be lost (without manual admin intervention).
 - **3** - Advanced user, with much higher capabilities. Has access to categories that are reserved for moderators/admins typically. This level is granted for those who

have interacted favorably a fair deal with the site, and continue to do so. If a user starts to become less active, this trust level can be lost after a grace period.

- **4** - Leader in the community, with nearly universal capabilities. These users have access to everything except for a few specific parameters that are reserved for ONLY moderators and/or admins. Currently level 4 is available by invitation only.
- For more details, see:
<https://meta.discourse.org/t/what-do-user-trust-levels-do/4924>
- Moderators and Admins are marked by a shield icon next to their user names (currently, both use the same icon). If a user is both, there will be 2 shields. Admins have full capabilities
- For more details on User Types, see this:
https://meta.discourse.org/t/description-of-various-user-states-in-discourse/35171?source_topic_id=6307

Other features of Interest

- There is capability to embed the comment threads in a non-discourse webpage.
- There is capability (separate from sso) for integrating sign-in with the following websites - each configures separately so you can pick and choose:
 - Google
 - Twitter
 - Yahoo
 - Instagram
 - Facebook
 - **Github**
 - There is capability for “single-sign-on” (sso) from external website (custom)
- Allows Amazon server setup (s3) and data storage
- There are a TON of customizable elements (it’s actually a little overwhelming). However, nearly all of the elements have really good explanations next to them in the settings, so it is easy to figure out most everything for a new user.
- There are a fair amount of good statistics available by default under Admin, but Discourse is also compatible with Google Analytics (I need to test this feature on a public server)

Community

- Main site: <https://www.discourse.org/>
- Forum: <https://meta.discourse.org/>

Installation & System Admin Notes

Installation

- We installed/tested version: **v1.8.0.beta5 +211**

Please see the Discourse Installation document for more details on our installation.

Discourse “Crash Course” Instruction Manual

For Everyone

Getting Started

Getting an Account

The first thing you will need to do is get an account. Note that the amount of content available without logging in and the exact ways allowed to set up an account can be changed by administrators. (Admin Note: go to Admin → Settings → Login, and Admin → Settings → Users to set various parameters.) Note that your email is the most important aspect of your account. For instance, if you are signing in using an alternate authorization (such as github) your emails must match for it to work!

If someone has invited you, you will get an email with a link in it. Follow the link to confirm and set up your Discourse account. If no one has invited you, you should be able to register at the login page. Note that your account will still need to be validated for you to have permissions. (Also, remember that not all permissions will be available right away - see the Trust Levels discussion above).

The home page

Once you are logged in, you will go to the home page. The default is to show a list of topics, their categories, which users have been active, the number of replies (number of posts, minus the initial one), the number of views, and how long ago the latest activity it.

The default sorting for this is by date (most recent activity), but it can also be sorted by Category and by amount of activity in the topic/thread(“Top”). Choosing Category will somewhat change the view of things, but will leave the information.

User Menu

At the top right of the screen is your user icon (default is first letter of your username). Clicking on this will open your User Menu. The User Menu has the following options:

- User profile - brings you to your profile page that has stats about your Discourse use
- Bookmarks (banner icon) - brings up a list of your bookmarked posts
- Messages (envelope) - brings up your Messages (both public and private)
- Preferences (gear icon) - brings up your user preferences page, where you can change your username, email, icons and personal settings.

Below these, there is a list of your notifications and the logout button.

Main Menu (a.k.a. “The Hamburger Menu”)

Next to the user icon on the top right, there is a dropdown menu (called “hamburger menu” by the developers). The menu contains the following options (Topics with a * are only visible to admins):

- Admin *
- Settings *
- Flags *
- Latest - lists posts by latests
- New
- Unread
- Top - lists posts by most “favorite”s
- Badges - shows all badges (earned for various actions, such as using an emoji for the first time, or editing a post for the first time). Ones you have earned will have a checkmark.
- Users - lists users with active posts
- Groups - lists groups
- Tags (if enabled)
- Categories (clicking this will list all categories and their colors) - all categories are listed below
- About
- FAQ (Note: FAQ will be listed at the top for Admins, at the bottom for general users)
- Keyboard Shortcuts

Search

The third icon is a search box. You can search for categories, topics, posts, or users.

Categories

Describe the general type of topic. The maximum number is set in Settings by an administrator (default is 20?). Each category has a unique color to identify it. Every topic belongs to **one** category. (If you have cross-category information, tags can be used.)

There are both top-level categories and subcategories. Each category can have one level of subcategories (but multiple subcategories at that 1-drop level). The level of category is shown by the color badges. Solid colors are top-tier categories, and two-tone are subcategories (the colors being for the parent category and then the subcategory).

Note on naming: As far as tables on topics are concerned, only one category name is listed. (i.e., a topic under “OpenWIS Project / Releases” will simply be listed in the category “Releases”.) Note that subcategories can share names with other subcategories so long as they have a different parent. Be aware of this while naming subcategories (I suggest naming them as “Parent - SubCategory”).

The default categories are as follows:

- Staff (admins/moderators only)
- Uncategorized (catch-all for things not assigned a category)
- Lounge (restricted to those with Trust level 3 and higher - plus admins)
- Site Feedback (for people to discuss the forum [Discourse site] itself)

By default, Categories are displayed in order of activity. **If you want to keep the display in a set order**, go to **Admin** → **Settings** → **Basic Settings** and click “fixed category positions”. You can then arrange the positions manually on the categories page.

Adding Categories

By Default, only Admins can create categories. However, this can be changed so that Moderators can create categories (if this is enabled in Admin -> Settings -> Security).

To start a category, you can select categories from the main menu. On the category page, click on the menu icon, and choose new category. Then you will need to set the **General** settings (at least; see below for more):

1. Choose a name for the category [Note: subcategories under different top-level categories can share names. See above for details]
2. Choose if the category is top-level or a subcategory. If it is a subcategory, then choose the parent category from the dropdown (leave set to ‘(no category)’ for a top-level category)
3. (Optional) Choose an alternative text to use as the category url (the slug). (Note: the slug by default is created using ascii, but it can also be set to percentage encoding or disabled (Go to Admin -> Settings -> Other as an admin to change)) The slug does not have to match the category name at all (but it probably should for sanity’s sake).
4. Choose the color (All categories should have a unique color; subcategories should be unique under the parent and not match the parent). This is the same as the “background color” (used for some settings)
5. Choose a “foreground color” for text over the background color (used in some settings)

Category Properties / Editing Categories

You can edit permissions for the category by going to that category, then clicking on the “edit” button.

- General: Change what you used for initial settings (see above)
- Security : You can set who can see/reply/create in the topic by **Group**. (Groups can be added by going into **Admin** → **Groups** and then clicking the “New” button.) . You can also set which **tags** can be used in the category in the editing settings.
- Settings:
 - Set a time limit for the category to be active (and set if topic cannot be closed before the last topic is that old)
 - Allow/disable badges
 - Do not show the category on the home page
 - Show category list .. (recommended!)- This will remove the drop-down selection of subcategories in a parent category’s page, and will replace it with a full listing of the subcategories and their description. It will also remove the listing of subcategories from the dropdown (“hamburger”) menu.
 - Make new topics wikis by default
 - Allow featured links
 - Default sort setting (various)
 - Default view setting (Latest or Top)
 - Number of Topics shown on category page
 - Position (if enabled) - where on list the category is listed
 - Post new topics via email - enable this in Site Settings (Admin → Settings → Email)
- Images - set category logo and background image
- Topic Template - create a template for new topics
- Tags - identify tags/tag groups that can ONLY be used in this category (no other categories)
- Delete - ONLY IF THERE ARE NO SUBCATEGORIES

Topics

Basically, these are the question or statement that gets the forum started. There are parameters which set the minimum number of characters allowed in a post starting a topic. Each topic belongs to one or more categories (with uncategorized being the default).

There are the following topics automatically created:

- Welcome to Discourse (Uncategorized) - the words for this are set up during code setup
- READ ME 1st Admin Quick Start Guide (Staff) - starting guide for Admins
- Assets for the site design (Staff) - used for adding images to website (other than posts)
- Privacy Policy (Staff) - Discourse privacy policy
- FAQ/Guidelines (Staff) - FAQ for using Discourse

- Terms of Service (Staff) - ToS for Discourse
- Welcome to the Lounge (Lounge) - explains lounge category and usage

Under each topic, there are the following options (* are restricted):

- Admin Options (wrench)*
 - Select Posts
 - Delete Topic
 - Close Topic
 - Auto close (after a certain set of time following latest post)
 - Pin topic - make it appear at the top of lists
 - Change timestamp
 - Archive topic
 - Make Unlisted
 - Make Private Message - this removes the topic from users views and puts it into your messages (to undo this, go into your message (envelope) under your user menu, select the message with the topic's name, go to Admin Options, and choose "make public")
- Bookmark - bookmark the first post of this topic
- Share - get the url to share to this topic
- Flag - flag the topic for one of the following reasons
 - Inappropriate / offensive content
 - It's spam
 - Misc: The content should be in a different category, possible violation of terms of service, etc.
- Generate Invites to the topic (either via email or username)*
 - By auto-generated Invite (the system sends an email). This can also include access to specific groups
 - By generating a link that is good for the email specified
- Reply

You can also set the level of notification you will receive for a Topic you have posted in:

- Watching (filled w/ !) - get notifications about all posts and count of new posts [Default if Topic creator]
- Tracking (filled circle) - get a count of new posts, and notifications if you are mentioned (see below), or someone replies to your posts [Default if not Topic creator]
- Normal (empty circle) - get notifications if someone mentions you or replies to your post
- Muted (filled w/ X) - do not get notifications or show in "latest" lists

Adding Topics

To create a Topic, press the “New Topic” button at the right side of the page*(check for mobile settings). This will bring up the posting box. Fill in the fields of the box: give it a name, a category, and write a first post setting the topic. To publish the topic, press “create topic” at the bottom of the posting box.

Tags

(IMPORTANT: tags must be enabled in the admin settings, before they can be added! To do this, you must be an admin. Go to **Admin** → **Settings** → **Tags** and click on the checkbox at the top of the list (“enable tags on topics”). Also make sure that the other settings are set as appropriate for your forum on this page.)

If tags are enabled, when you create a topic, you can choose a number of keywords (tags) to associate with that topic. Note that by default, all users can use existing tags, but a user must have Trust Level 3 or above / Admin to create tags. (This can be changed in Admin → Settings → Tags.)

To set tags, simply type in the word you would like to associate into the tags bar (below the text box, and above the “create topic” button). Wait a moment for the word to appear in the drop-down above and then select it. **(Note: use only number/letters for tags, plus “-” or “_”. No spaces.)**

Note that some tags may be reserved for use in a single category (see Category Properties / Editing Categories, above).

To look at existing tags, from the navigation menu, go to Tags. This will list all tags currently in use (either by count or name). Click on the tag name, and it will bring up a page with all the topics which are currently using that tag.

Posts

Posts are replies to a topic (or replies to other replies). To create a post, simply Reply to a Topic or a post in that Topic, by clicking the “reply” button.

Note that to weed out spammers and create a better flow, there are minimum character requirements for replies. (Simple agreement is supposed to be done with (hearts)). This is a little annoying until you get used to it. But there are good tools showing you how many more characters you need, at least. (And these character limits can all be changed by the Admins).

At the bottom of each post, you have the following options:

- Like (heart) - used to respond to general liking what a person says, or a “yes” reply to the topic (Note: you can’t like your own posts!)
- Link (chain) - get the url to link to this post
- Edit (pencil) - Edit your own post. Most users can only edit their own posts (Admins can edit all posts)
- Flag (flag) - same as flagging a Topic
- Bookmark (square flag/banner) - save this post reference in your bookmarks (you can see them by selecting the bookmark under your user menu at the top of the screen)
- Delete (trashcan) - Delete the post. (Again, unless you’re an admin, this only applies to your own posts!) (Note: A “deleted” post will be automatically hidden at the time the delete action is taken. However, there is a delay between when a user chooses to delete a post and when the post is permanently removed.)
- Admin Actions (wrench)*
 - Add staff color - make background highlighted to show post is by staff
 - Rebuild HTML - use for debugging
 - Change ownership - change the owner of the post (note, this does NOT retroactively change notifications!)
 - Make Wiki

Adding images to post

To add an image, click on the upload icon on the posting box toolbar. Then, choose a file from either your local computer or on the web to load into the post.

Mentioning / Getting a user’s attention

To mention a person (like on Twitter), just write @username in the post / Topic you are writing!

Favorites

The favorite (heart) button is to be used for posts that you like, or as a way to acknowledge a response from another person (without filling up the topic with “yes” or “thank you” reply-posts). The number of favorites a user may give per day is dependent on the user’s Trust Level (admins and moderators have infinite)

For Admins

Configuration Views and Options

Note: for all settings (all except Dashboard below), a yellow box means that the setting has been changed from the default.

All Options marked with ** are also accessible to Moderators.

Dashboard **

- # of posts for today, yesterday, last 7 days, last 30 days, total
- Click on data type for a graph (can customize dates)
- There is a fair amount of useful data displayed (I won't list everything)
- Advanced Traffic - w/ status, http info, etc.
- Shows alerts with any errors (like we have with the email config)
- Shows top referral information (we can't test this - no outside communication)

Settings (also linked from top menu for admins)

The following options are listed on the side and include the following features (these are generally summaries, and not a precise list):

- Required
 - Contact info, site info, images for logos
- Basic setup
 - Language,
 - # topics/category
 - Suggested tracking
 - Google Analytics setup
 - Top menu items* (*both menu items and order)
 - Post menu items*
 - Share w/ social media
 - Category styling
 - Set # for topics
 - Enable badges
 - Set staff to be able to have private communications (“whispers”)
- Login
 - Parameters (email, invite only, allow anonymous, etc.)
 - Setup for login with external accounts (Google, twitter, yahoo, instagram, facebook, github)
 - Single sign-on setup
 - Email domain blacklist
 - Email domain whitelist (domain admin must use)
 - Logout timer
 - Forgot password strict, etc.
- User
 - Set user parameters
 - Min password length
 - Edit emails
 - # of invites / posts etc. allowed
 - Trust levels allowances
- Groups

- Lists directory
- Posting
 - Set post length limits, time limits,
 - Filters for content
 - Editing grace period (amount of time edits can be made before a new post is created)
 - Formatting for posts
 - Approval / notifications
 - Maximum number of messages allowed
- Email
 - Format digests
 - Set pop3 settings
 - Email security settings (black/white list, bounce parameters tolerated, etc.)
- Files
 - Set parameters regarding allowance of files attachments and images
- Trust levels
 - Set requirements to gain a given trust level
 - Set what levels are required for certain actions
- Security
 - Misc security features
 - Cross-origins allowed
 - Set option to only allow admins to work from certain IPs
- Onebox
 - Setup Onebox (a library which allows media previews for input urls)
- Spam
 - Set how long it takes to hide "spam" posts
 - Set sensitivity parameters for defining spam
 - Set number of flags needed to trigger reactions
- Rate limits
 - Set numbers of posts, flags, invites, etc allowed for a user per day
- Developer
 - Set technical parameters designed for development work
- Legal
 - Set urls to legal disclaimer documentation, etc.
- Backups
 - Backup frequency
 - Settings for backup files
 - Number of backup files allowed
- Search
 - Set search parameter settings for optimization
- Other
 - Activity-based changes in display
 - Version

- Topic notices
- Several catch-all
- User preferences
 - Set defaults for users
- User API
 - Generates API keys
 - Set parameters for API
- Tags
 - Controls filters on tags
 - Tag lengths
 - Tags reserved for staff-only
 - # of tags shown
 - Order of tags
- Plugins
 - Allow polls
 - Set parameters for polls, etc
 - “Details” plugin
 - Set daily preference report

Users **

- Lists user, email, stats on interaction, when created
- Users listed by status: active, new, staff, suspended, blocked, suspect
- Icons for admin and moderator (see above notes)
- Admins can impersonate a specific user for debugging
- Clicking on a user gives the following details:
 - Basic info
 - IP address - last used and registration address
 - Permissions and current status (trust level, suspended, etc.)
 - Group membership
 - Activity statistics

Badges

- shows the available badges. You get them for doing specific stuff.

Groups

- Edit groups
 - Possible to set groups by registration email domain
 - Can set Trust Level by groups
- Default groups = admins, moderators, staff, trust_level_x (x=0-4)
- Can add people to groups en masse

Emails

- Show email settings
- Preview digest email (for inactive users)
- Modify templates to use for emails* (*this links to page under Customization)
- Show information about sent emails (user/to/email type/reply key)
 - Also for: skipped (w/ info on why skipped), bounced, received, rejected

Flags ** (linked to top menu for admins)

- Shows info on active and old flags

Logs **

- Staff actions
- Screened emails (reject these emails for registration)
- Screened IPs (addresses to either automatically block or allow [blacklist / whitelist])
- Screened urls (these urls are those used in posts made by a user marked as a spammer)
- Error logs [Admin Only] (Note: this brings you to different page in the same tab)

Customize

- Colors: create schemes
- CSS/html
- Text content (for popups that come up with welcome messages, new user instructions, etc.)
- Email templates (see above)
- Custom user fields (fields that can be used when registering new users for additional information)
- Emoji
- Set permalinks
- Set embedding settings (codes for embedding in static webpages /feed/crawler)

API

- Create API key (for each user)

Backups

- These are backup files created (timing of these is set under Settings: backups)

Plugins **

- Lists plugins currently active in discourse (I think)

“How-to”

Adding Users (Standard Way)

There are multiple ways to add users to Discourse. Here are a few of them:

- A new user can create an account at the sign-in sheet
- Go to a Topic OR go to Admin -> Users
- click the Invite button
 - Type in at least 1 email address of a person you want to invite
 - Choose to send an email or copy the invite link (and manually write an email from any email server)
- A user at Trust Level 2 or higher can “invite others to this topic” to share a topic and invite potential users who do not have accounts

User End-starting an account

- The user will accept the invite via clicking validation link
- This link lets them in 1x, and they can set up their profile account via User account (icon) _ > gear icon
- Password is set via email sent by system to set/reset [Note: if you can log in via github, don't actually need to do this to get in...]
- They will get an email that will send them to a password generation page, where they can create their password
- (Password resets work the same way as the initial password set.)

To check if Users have been successfully added, go to Admin → Users. Sometimes the Users post-list setting does not update new users right away, especially if they have had limited interaction with the site.

[Cassie User Note: We had some problems with our initial email configuration, so emails are not going out. Discourse has picked up on this error, and it shows me on my dashboard when I'm logged in to my admin account. (My account had to be manually approved by Marc - who installed Discourse - because the emails weren't getting sent out). This is something to look out for, as user passwords are set via sent-out emails. This was eventually resolved on the code end (Marc will have to explain)]

Resetting Passwords

The normal route for a user to change the password is to click on their user icon, go to Preferences (gear), and then click on the “send password reset email”. However, this assumes they can get into their account.

Admin can “become” that user by going to Admin → Users → (click on user) → (click “Impersonate” button). Once you are impersonating them, you can follow the above steps to send them a password reset email.

Backing up data

Data backups are automatically carried out by the Discourse system. The frequency of the backups and the number of backup files which are saved are configured in **Admin** → **Settings** → **Backups**

You can look at and download the current backup files (or create a new backup) by going into **Admin** → **Backups**. You can also upload old backup files to restore settings here. (Note: you will first need to go to Admin → Settings → Backups and click on the “Allow restore” checkbox!)

Additionally, although there is nothing readily apparent in the software, it seems possible to move to a different server using the backup feature:

<https://meta.discourse.org/t/move-your-discourse-instance-to-a-different-server/15721>

Adding Images for site customization

To make available:

1. Go into the Staff Category (admins and moderators only)
2. Go to the topic: Assets for the Site Design (this topic is used to store any graphics such as logos, favicons, etc.)
3. Reply to the topic
4. In the reply, upload the image (there is an upload icon in the reply box toolbar, or you can drag-and-drop)
5. Post the reply (hit the “Reply” button at the bottom of the reply box)

To use in the site design:

1. Go to the reply with the image you want, and right-click on the image to get the path
2. Go to Settings:Basic Settings (../admin/site_settings/category/required)
3. In the appropriate box (logo url, favicon url, etc.), paste the image path (each item has a good description, including image size/shape requirements and recommendations)

Enable login from Github

Login from Github allows the user to use their login from Github to log into Discourse. Once configured, a login with github button will appear on the sign-in screen.

- If the user is already logged in to github and has a Discourse account (with the same email!), pressing the login with github will automatically sign them in (no password needed).
- If the user has a matching Discourse account, but is not signed in to github, the user may sign in to Discourse using github username/password

- If the user does not yet have a Discourse account (for our forum) with an email matching the github account, then a prompt will appear to create one using the same email as used for their Github account (usernames do not have to match)

To allow Github sign-in, first an application must be made in Github. To do the following:.

1. Sign in to github (preferably, using an account sharing an email as a Discourse admin)
2. Register a new OAuth application (<https://github.com/settings/applications/new>), and fill in with the following:
 - **Application name** = Anything you want; make it recognizable (ex: "discourselogin")
 - **Homepage URL** = this is the domain-level url of your Discourse forum (ex: "http://discourse.myserver.com")
 - **Application description** = brief description (ex: "logs into Discourse via github credentials")
 - **Authorization callback URL** = what you put in for Homepage URL + "/auth/github/callback" (ex: "http://discourse.myserver.com/auth/github/callback")
3. Once Registered, go into the Application (**Developer Settings** -> **OAuth Applications**), and copy the **Client ID** and **Client Secret** codes
4. As an Admin, sign into Discourse.
5. Go to: Admin -> Settings -> Login
6. Select "enable github logins"
7. Paste the Client ID and Client Secret codes you copied from github into the **github client id** and **github client secret** fields, respectively

(References: <https://discourse.pro/t/topic/25> , <https://meta.discourse.org/t/configuring-github-login-for-discourse/13745>)

Embedding Discourse Topics on other websites

Discourse comments can be added to an existing static website using a javascript code plugin.

There are two different ways to add the comments:

- A. Create an option for a user to create a new Discourse Topic associated with that page (and after creation, show the comments on that thread). [see Figure 1]
- B. Show comments from an existing Discourse Topic (Note: this will NOT load the initial post in that topic, only the subsequent ones.) [see Figure 2]

There are a few things to keep in mind about this code:

- You can only show one Topic/thread per page
- The *first* post of an existing Topic will not load onto the page (see Figure 2b for example).
 - If you are loading a specific Topic and want to show the first post, you will have to cut/paste the comments of that post into the page manually. (Alternately, you can always just link to that post).

- The first post of a GitHub-generated Topic will be a duplicate of the page where the comments go (or an excerpt, if the page is long) - therefore it wouldn't make sense to load it into the page.
- **You can only create ONE new Topic per url.** If you create a new topic using the embedded script, the created Topic will be associated with that URL.
 - **So if you delete that thread, you CANNOT start again with a new “create a Topic”** option for that url. (If you try, you will get error messages instead.) (Note: there *are* theoretical ways around this, but they are very complicated, risky, and involve going into the hard code of your Discourse.)
 - However, If you create a new Topic and later decide you want to replace it with another one, you can (by using the instructions for showing an existing Topic).
 - You can show a Topic associated with one url on a different url (but you cannot change the association)
- You can create as many new topics in Discourse as you want, and change out the code to load them as many times as you wish (but you can still only display 1 Topic at a time)

In order to embed a Topic in a page, do the following (as Discourse Admin):

Part 1: Configure Discourse to accept the pages for embedding

1. Go to Admin -> Customize -> Embedding
2. Click “Add Host”
3. Enter in the domain-level url into Allowed Hosts (first field) (ex: “www.myserver.com”)
4. Add any additional path information (you can use wildcards. .* will allow everything in the domain). (ex: “/test/*”)
5. Copy the provided Javascript code

Part 2: Set up the Javascript to embed comments in the static page

There are two options to do this, depending on if you want to: (A) create a new Discourse Topic (that will be associated with this specific url), or (B) plug in an existing Discourse Topic. The default directions/code are set up for Option A.

1. First, for either option, you will paste the provided default code into the html of your web page where you want the comments to appear (Javascript provided in Discourse: Admin -> Customize -> Embedding)

Option A:

2. Change the ‘REPLACE ME’ in the code `discourseEmbedUrl: 'REPLACE_ME'` to the url of your page. *Note that the match between the loaded url and this code must be exact matches.* (Example: `discourseEmbedUrl: 'REPLACE_ME'` --> `discourseEmbedUrl: 'http://www.mysite.com/test/discourse_test.html'`)(Note: you can use variables for the url, such as markup language. It does not have to be hard-coded)

Option B:

2. Go to the Discourse Topic you would like to post, and look at the url. After the slug for the topic title in the url, there will be a number. This is the Topic ID. For example, the Topic with the url www.mysite.com/t/comments-plugin-test/40 has the **Topic ID = 40**. (If there are additional numbers, like www.mysite.com/t/test-topic-number-5/20/2 , you only want the first number, not those after the "/". The numbers after the / refer to the comment "position" [2=first comment, 3=second comment, etc.]
3. In the Javascript, change ***discourseEmbedUrl***: **'REPLACE_ME'** to: **topicId: N** [where N is the topic number]. (Example: for the above topic, ***discourseEmbedUrl***: **'REPLACE_ME'** --> **topicId: 40**)

Figure 1a: GitHub Pages page with Discourse plugin (new topic) [Note: Everything *inside* the is produced by the Discourse plugin]

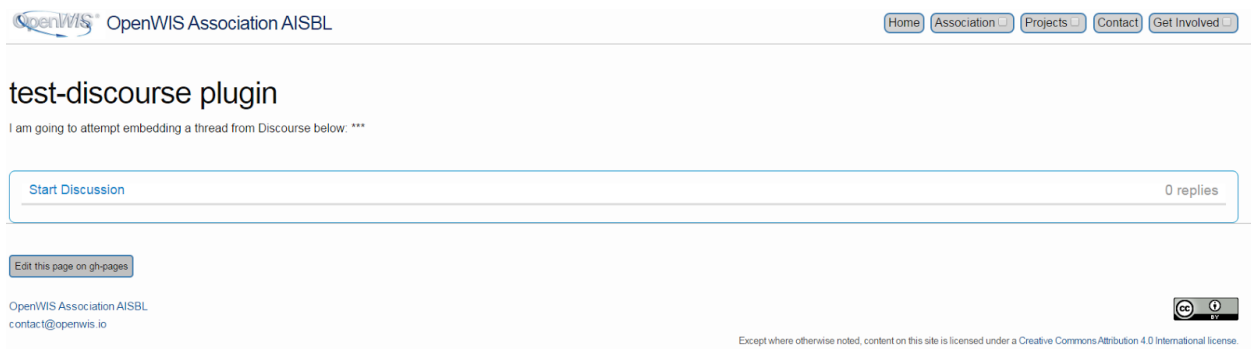


Figure 1b: Generated Discourse Topic created from interacting with the GitHub page

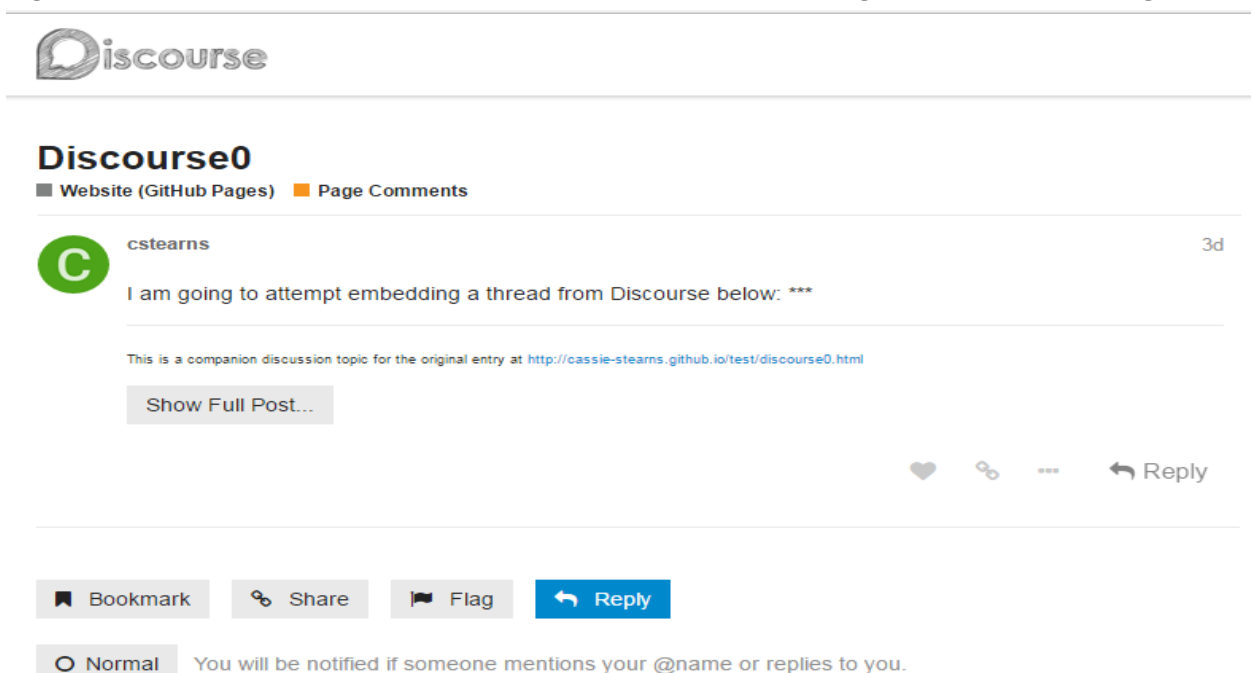


Figure 2a: GitHub Pages page with Discourse plugin, showing existing Topic (ID number 40) [Note: Blue box and first 2 lines of light blue text (Loading Discourse... and Click "Continue"...)] is part of the GitHub Pages site; everything from "1 reply" and below inside the blue box is from the Discourse plugin]

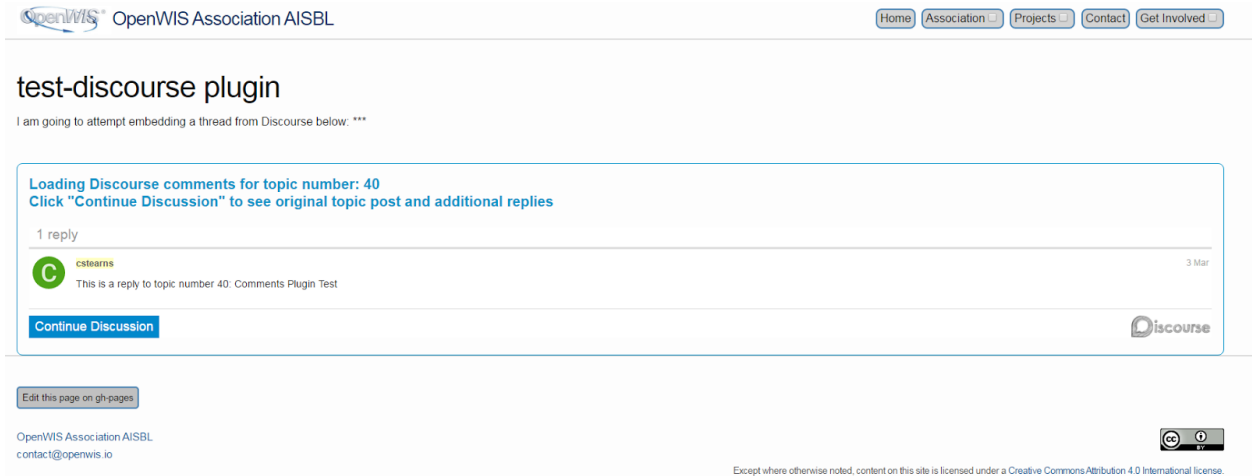
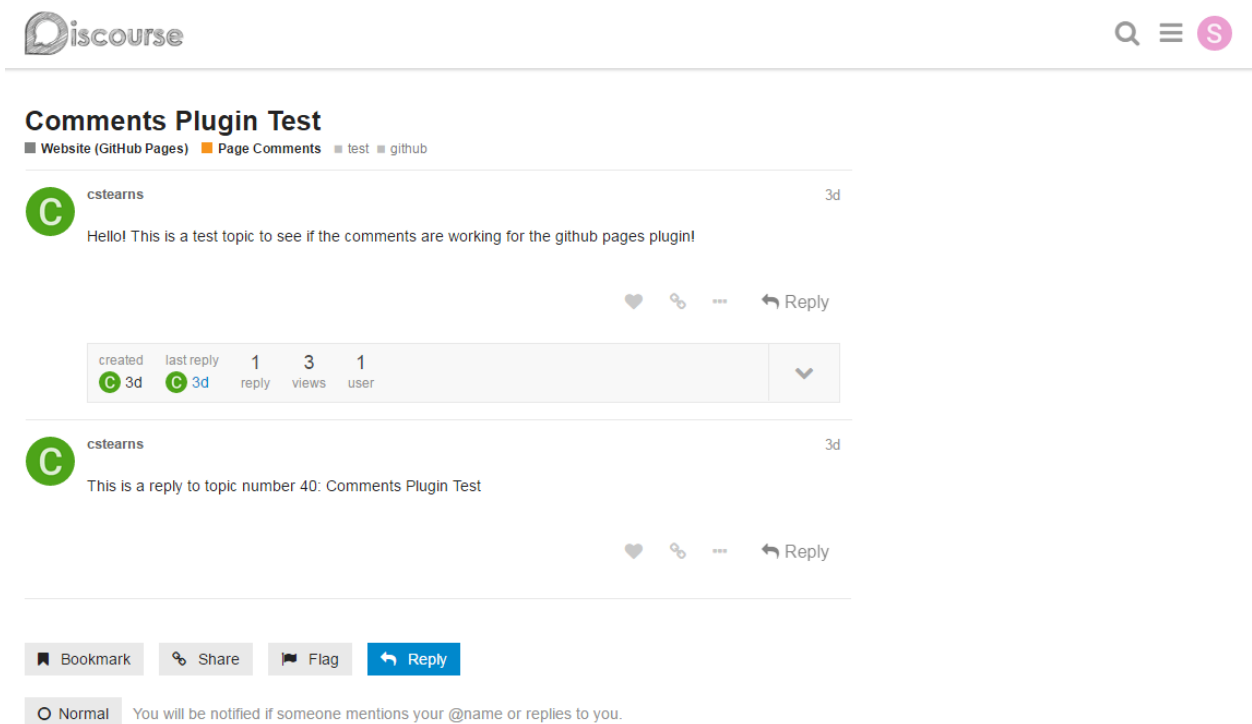


Figure 2b: Existing Discourse Topic (ID number 40) - Note that the first post in the thread is not shown in the plugin (Figure 2a).



Alternate Part 2: Code in Github Pages websites

In Github Pages, there is another way to install the comments, rather than adding the Javascript to each page, and then making the changes according to Option A or B as described above. There is more work upfront, but this will save a lot of trouble in the long run if you want to have comments on many pages.

1. Create the following code in a file called `_include/discourse.html` :

```
<div class="wrapper">

{% if page.discourse %}
<div class="comments_block">

{% if page.discourseid != 0 %}
<!-- Put any scraping code here -->

<div class="discourse_title">Loading Discourse comments for topic number: {{
page.discourseid }}<br />
Click "Continue Discussion" to see original topic post and additional replies<br />
<br />
</div>
{% endif %}

<div id='discourse-comments'></div>
<!-- discourseEmbedUrl: 'http://140.90.90.171:4000/test/discourse.html' -->
<script type="text/javascript">

DiscourseEmbed = {};
DiscourseEmbed.discourseUrl = 'http://metocean.afvt.mdl.nws.noaa.gov/';
{% if page.discourseid == 0 %}
    DiscourseEmbed.discourseEmbedUrl = '{{ site.url }}{{ page.url }}';
{% else %}
    DiscourseEmbed.topicId = {{ page.discourseid }};
{% endif %}

(function() {
    var d = document.createElement('script'); d.type = 'text/javascript'; d.async = true;
    d.src = DiscourseEmbed.discourseUrl + 'javascripts/embed.js';
    (document.getElementsByTagName('head')[0] ||
document.getElementsByTagName('body')[0]).appendChild(d);
})();
```

```

function showComments(topic) {
  var comments = document.getElementById('discourse-comments');
  var iframe = document.getElementById('discourse-embed-frame');
  if (iframe) { iframe.remove(); }
  iframe.id = 'discourse-embed-frame';
  iframe.width = '100%';
  iframe.frameBorder = '0';
  iframe.scrolling = 'yes';
  comments.appendChild(iframe);
  iFrameResize({}, iframe);
};
showComments({{ url }});
</script>

</div>
{% endif %}

</div>

```

2. Make sure that your **_layouts/default.html** file has the following where you want the comments to be loaded (usually just above footer):

```
{% include discourse.html %}
```

3. In the yml of the top of a page you want to add the discourse comments to, add the following lines:

```

discourse: true
discourseid: N

```

- Change the N to the Topic ID (see OptionB above) of the topic you would like to load.
 - So for Topic 40, you would set *discourseid: 40*
 - If you would like to instead make a new Topic (a.k.a. Option A), set N=0
4. (Optional Styling) - If you want to have the appropriate colors and borders, define them.
 - a. In **_sass/_layout.scss** :

```

.comments_block {
  display: block;
  padding: 1em;
  border: 1px solid $comments-color;
  border-radius: 0.5em;
}

```

```
.discourse_title {  
  font-weight: bold;  
  color: $comments-color;  
  font-size: 1.25em;  
}
```

b. In **css/main.scss** :

```
$comments-color: #0093c9;
```