

# Heuristic Evaluation Of Coursera

## Findings and Recommendations

### Summary Results

I used Nielsen's Heuristics to evaluate the usability of the Coursera discussion forum.<sup>1</sup> Overall, I found that the most severe violations revolved around user freedom, and in particular the ability to quickly access desired information. For example, users cannot "jump" from one weekly discussion board to another, they must leave the board and go to a different week to access that week's discussion forum. Users also do not have the option to quickly view all of their discussion board activity, nor is there a default notification setting that tells users when others engage with their posts, such as views. The interface generally violates the efficiency and flexibility of use heuristic. Overall, I recommend making the system less cumbersome to use with buttons that allow the user to access information more quickly.

### Key Findings

**Finding 1: There is no option to view all of one's discussion board activity.**

**Severity:** 3/4

**Heuristic violated:** User control and freedom, efficiency and flexibility

There does not appear to be an option to "display all my posts" immediately on the discussion forum dashboard. Users may want to quickly scan their posts for replies or to review what they posted, and it is not obvious how to do that on the first page.

**Recommendation:** When users view the discussion forum in their dashboard, there should be a sidebar button to view one's discussion board activity.

**Finding 2: There is no notifications button in the discussion forum.**

**Severity:** 3/4

**Heuristic violated:** Visibility of system status

There is no obvious icon on the first page that indicates “notifications” or replies to the user’s discussion threads. The user may want to quickly read replies, and this capability is not obvious.

**Recommendation:** There should be a notifications button when users log onto the discussion forum that alerts users to replies to their posts and views of their posts.

**Finding 3:** Language on the discussion forum is inconsistent.

**Severity:** 2/4

**Heuristic violated:** Consistency and standards

**Recommendation:** The system should not use the term “subforum” and should instead automatically group discussion posts that are similar into topics organized by descriptive headers.

**Finding 4:** Some discussion buttons are not intuitive.

**Severity:** 2/4

**Heuristics violated:** Match between system and real world and consistency and standards

The “New thread” button should say “New discussion.” In the real world, we would say we want to start a new discussion about a topic. “New discussion” would also be consistent with “discussion forum.”

**Recommendation:** Change the button to say “New discussion.”

**Finding 5:** There is no option to browse weekly discussions quickly.

**Severity:** 2/4

**Heuristic violated:** User control and freedom, efficiency and flexibility

There is no apparent option to jump from week to week. The user must go back to the discussion forums page to jump from week 3 to week 5, or to even move to the next week.

**Finding 6:** There is no help guide for the discussion forum.

**Severity:** 2/4

**Heuristic violated:** Help and documentation

There is no obvious help guide for using the forum. There is only a guide for conduct on the forum. The help button on the forum takes users to a general help interface, rather than for help with the forum specifically.

**Recommendation:** Add a link to a help guide on every page accessible from the discussion forum.

**Finding 7:** There is no quality control feature.

**Severity:** 2/4

**Heuristic violated:** Error prevention and aesthetic and minimalist design

There is no apparent quality control constraint on the content that users may post on the discussion boards. Users are currently able to post threads with titles that do not clearly communicate the content, as well as titles that have typos. The current interface allows users to post thread titles that have typographical/spelling errors.

**Finding 8:** The discussion forums display too much information at once.

**Severity:** 1/4

**Heuristic violated:** Aesthetic and minimalist design

The weekly forums display too many threads at once and may overwhelm the user. The current discussion forum lists 15 threads at a time.

**Recommendation:** Each weekly forum should only display 10 threads by default, and users should have the option to view more than 10 at a time.