CHAPTER

10

Discussions and reviews

Your site has two places where learners talk in public: one running discussion for each course, and a Topics page for announcements and conversations that are not about any one course. Learners who finish a course can also rate and review it. This chapter shows you how to set each of these up, how to look after them day to day, and what to do when the automatic filter holds a post or a review needs an answer.

WHERE	TIME NEEDED	BEFORE YOU START	PLAN
A course's discussion: the **Discussion** link in the course builder's tab strip, or on the course page. Topics: **Manage → Topics**. Reviews: the bottom of each course page.	Five minutes to set up; a few minutes a day to keep up with	A published course, and ideally a few learners	Every plan

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How the pieces fit together

	Course discussion	Topics	Reviews
What it is	One running conversation per course	A list of separate threads for your whole site	A star rating and optional words, one per learner per course
Who starts things	Anyone allowed to post just writes	Only you, the site owner	Only learners who have finished the course
Who can reply	Whoever the course's setting allows	Anyone signed in to RacingOwl	Only you, with one public response
Your controls	On or off, who can view and post, close, release, delete	Pin, close to replies, put first on the home page, release, delete	Respond, hide, unhide

Everything written in all three is plain text: line breaks are kept, but there is no bold, no pictures and no attachments. A post can be up to 5,000 characters.

The course discussion

Each course has **one discussion**: a single running conversation, not a list of separate topics. There is nothing to name and nothing to file. Anybody who may take part just writes, and everything anyone adds sits on the same page, with replies underneath each message. People discuss the course here the way a class talks at the end of a session.

Opening it

You can reach a course's discussion three ways:

- from the course builder under **Manage → My courses**: the tab strip has a **Discussion** link with a small arrow beside the tabs. It opens the discussion on your site's public side, and works for a draft course too;
- from the **Discussion** link near the top of the course page on your site, shown whenever discussions are on for that course;
- from any notification about a post in it.

The page is headed **Discussion** with the course title under it and **← Back to the course** above.

Setting it up

Only people who run your site see the settings. They sit in a folded box near the top of the discussion page.

1. **Open the settings.** On the course's discussion page, press **Discussion settings**.
2. **Switch it on or off.** **Discussions on for this course** is ticked for a new course. Untick it to turn the discussion off. Nothing is deleted; learners see "Discussions are turned off for this course right now." and the **Discussion** link leaves the course page until you switch it back on.
3. **Choose who can view and post.** Pick one option in **Who can view and post** (see the table below).

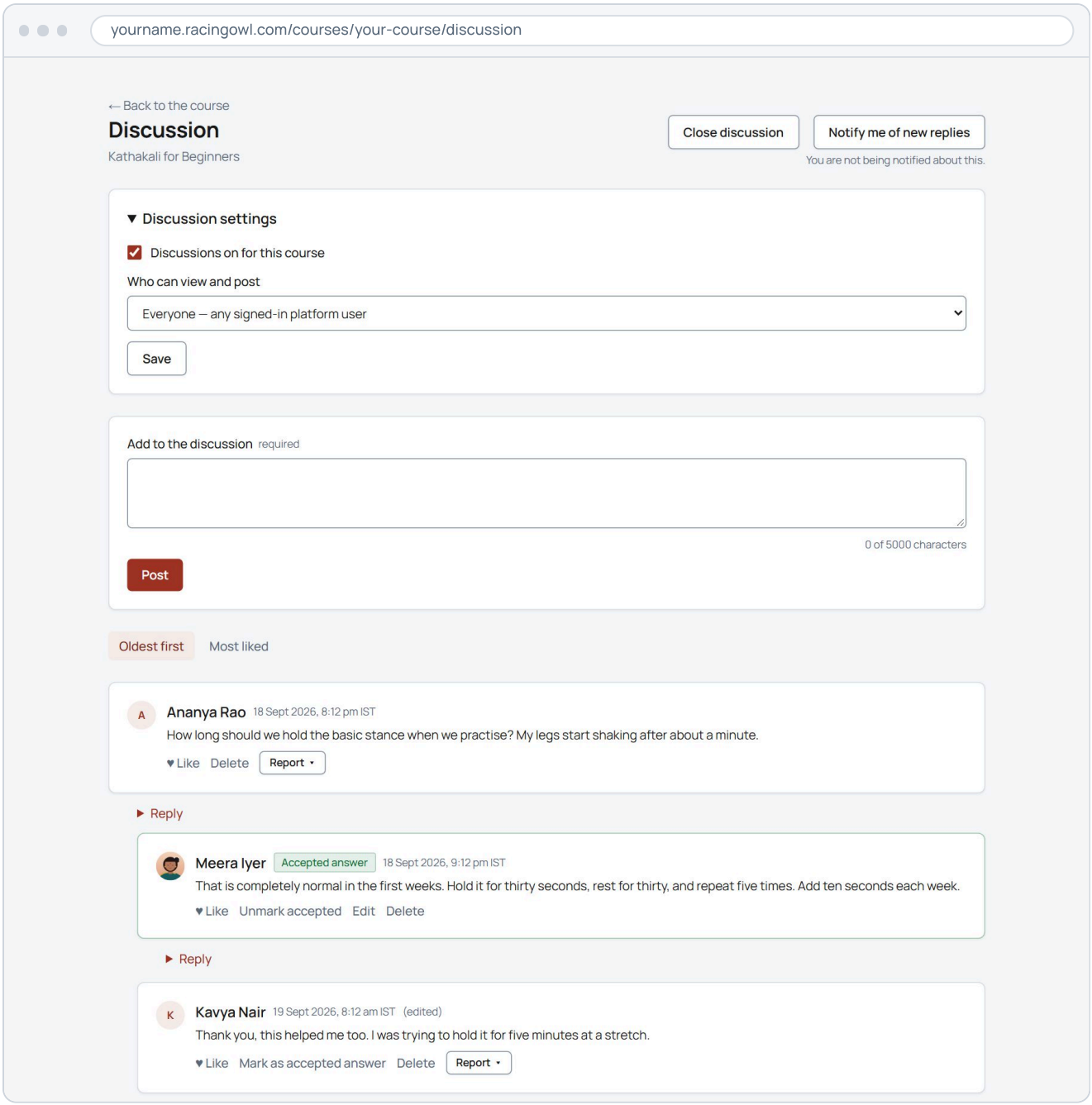
4 **Save.** Press **Save**.

Option	Who can read and write	When to choose it
Everyone — any signed-in platform user (the starting choice)	Anybody signed in to RacingOwl, including people who have not enrolled and people who learn on other sites	A course you want talked about openly, where the conversation itself helps sell it
Buyers only — enrolled learners (shown as **Enrolled learners only** on a free course)	Only people enrolled on this course	Most paid courses: the conversation is part of what they bought
Completers only — finished the course	Only people who have finished this course	An alumni space, or a course where you do not want spoilers

You and anyone else who runs the site can always read and post, whatever the setting.

> **IMPORTANT.**
> Posting is one of the acts that makes somebody a learner of your site. With **Everyone**, a person who learns elsewhere on RacingOwl and posts in your discussion joins your site and counts towards your plan's learners. If your plan is full, their post is refused.

Tightening the setting later hides older posts by people who no longer qualify. Their posts read "This post is not visible under the course's current discussion access setting." and come back if you loosen it again. Nothing is deleted.



A course's discussion as the trainer sees it: Close discussion and Notify me of new replies at the top, Discussion settings open, and a message with replies underneath.

WHAT YOUR LEARNER SEES.

The same page without the settings or the Close button: a box headed **Add to the discussion** with a **Post** button, then the messages, oldest first. Once there is more than one message, they can switch between **Oldest first** and **Most liked**. Somebody who is not signed in on your site is told the discussion is for people learning with your site, with a button to join and read it. Somebody who does not qualify under your setting is told they do not currently have access.

What each post shows, and what you can do with it

Every message is a card with the writer's photo and name, the time, and "(edited)" if they changed the words after posting. Replies sit indented under the message they answer. A reply to a reply is shown one level further in, with "Replying to @name" above it; the conversation never goes deeper than that, so it stays readable on a

phone.

Control	Who sees it	What it does
♥ Like	Anyone signed in	A like, with the count on the button. Press again to take it back.
Reply	Anyone who may post, while the discussion is open	Opens a reply box under that post. **Post reply** sends it.
Mark as accepted answer / **Unmark accepted**	On a reply: you, and the person who wrote the message it answers	Marks the reply that answered the question (see "Accepted answers" below).
Edit	The person who wrote it, only	Changes the words in place (see "Editing posts" below).
Delete	The writer, and you	Removes the words; the post says it was deleted and replies stay.
Restore	You, for a post you removed; the writer, for their own	Puts a deleted post back exactly as it was.
Report	Anyone signed in, on someone else's post	Sends the post to your Reports list (see Notifications and keeping your site safe).

Deleting and restoring a post

Press **Delete** under a post. You are asked "Delete this post?", with the explanation that its words are removed and the post says it was deleted, that any replies stay where they are, and who can put it back. Press **Delete** to confirm or **Keep it**. When you delete somebody else's post, they get a notification that it was removed.

To undo it, press **Restore** under the deleted post, and confirm "Put this post back?" ("Its words come back exactly as they were, and everyone can see it again."). A post you removed can be restored by you; a post somebody removed themselves can be restored by them. A post RacingOwl took down never shows a Restore button.

Closing a discussion

At the top of the discussion, **Close discussion** stops anyone adding to it. Everything already said stays readable, and learners see "This discussion is closed — nothing new can be posted, and everything already said stays here to read." Press **Reopen discussion** to let people write again. Closing is gentler than switching discussions off: people can still read the conversation, which is often useful for a course that has ended.

Hearing about new posts

Beside the Close button, **Notify me of new replies** makes you follow the discussion. From then on, every new post in it reaches your bell, and your phone if you have switched phone alerts on. The line under the button says whether you are being notified. **Stop notifying me** ends it. Posting in a discussion also follows it for you automatically. Replies arrive as notifications, never as emails.

> **TIP.**
> Open each course's discussion once and press **Notify me of new replies**. Otherwise you only hear about replies to your own posts, and a learner's first question on a quiet course could wait unseen.

People are also notified when somebody replies to their post, and when somebody mentions them by typing `@` and their name as it appears on their posts, written without spaces (for example `@PriyaSharma`). A mention only reaches people who have already posted in that discussion, and there is no pop-up list to pick names from.

The Topics page

Topics are for everything that is not about one course: announcements ("No class on Diwali"), a welcome thread, a question to the whole site, a notice about a new course. Open **Manage → Topics** (the hint beside it reads "Post an announcement"). It is the same page your learners reach from the **Topics** link in your site's menu, headed **Topics**, "Announcements and discussion from the team here — open to anyone signed in."

Starting a topic

Only the site owner can start a topic. Learners reply; they cannot start one.

1. **Open the form.** On the Topics page, press **Start a new topic**.
2. **Give it a title.** **Title**, 3 to 150 characters ("What's this about?"). This is what shows in the list and on your home page.
3. **Write the details.** **Details**, up to 5,000 characters, plain text.
4. **Post it.** Press **Post**. You land on the new topic's own page, and you are following it from the start.

The list of topics

Each topic in the list shows its title, a **Pinned** or **Featured** badge where it has one, who started it, the date of the last activity, and the number of replies. Three buttons change the order: **Newest** (by last activity), **Most active** (most replies) and **Unanswered** (no replies yet). Pinned topics always come first. **Search topics** finds topics whose title contains the words you type.

Your site's home page shows a small section, **From the discussion**, with a handful of recent topics and a **See all topics** link.

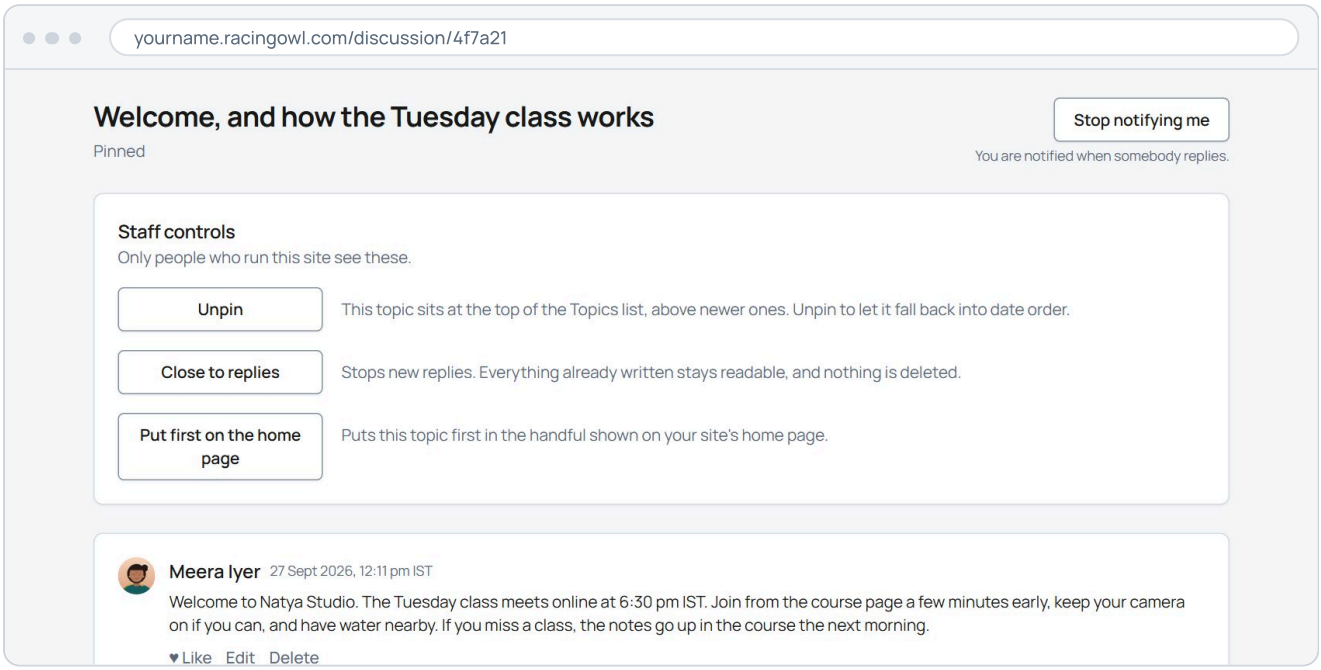
Looking after a topic: Staff controls

Open a topic and, as the person who runs the site, you see a **Staff controls** card ("Only people who run this site see these."). Each button has a sentence beside it saying where the topic stands now and what the button will do.

Button	What it does	To undo
Pin to the top	Keeps this topic at the top of the Topics list, above newer ones. Good for rules, a welcome, or a timetable.	**Unpin** lets it fall back into date order.

Button	What it does	To undo
Close to replies	Stops new replies. Everything already written stays readable, and nothing is deleted. The topic's heading then reads "Locked — no new replies".	**Reopen** lets people write again.
Put first on the home page	Every topic can already appear on your home page (the most recent few). This puts this one first in that handful. The topic gets a **Featured** badge.	**Unfeature** leaves the choice to whatever is most recent.

Only topics can be featured; a course discussion has no home-page place.



A topic's page as the trainer sees it: a pinned topic, so the Staff controls card offers Unpin, with Close to replies and Put first on the home page, each explained.

WHAT YOUR LEARNER SEES.

The topic with an **Add a reply** box and the replies. Anybody signed in to RacingOwl can reply, and replying joins them to your site. A visitor who is not signed in sees the title only: "Only the title is public. Join" your site "to read the replies — or just write one below." Writing a reply is itself enough to join.

Accepted answers

When a question has been answered well, mark the reply that answered it. It gets a green **Accepted answer** badge, so the next person with the same question can spot it at once.

- **In a course discussion,** each message can have its own accepted answer, marked on one of the replies under it. You can mark it, and so can the person who wrote the message.
- **On a topic,** the topic has one accepted answer. You, or whoever started the topic, can mark it on any reply (never on the opening post).

Press **Mark as accepted answer** under the reply. Marking a different reply under the same message moves the badge. **Unmark accepted** takes it off. The person who wrote the reply gets a notification, unless they marked it themselves.

Editing posts

Anyone, you or a learner, can edit their own post in place with the **Edit** link under it, rather than deleting it and writing it again. Press **Edit**, change the words in **Edit your post**, and press **Save changes**; **Cancel edit** closes the box without saving. A post whose words changed is marked "(edited)", with the time of the edit when you hover over it, so nobody is misled by a reply written to the old version.

You cannot edit somebody else's post. If a learner's post needs changing, ask them, or delete it.

The keyword filter, held posts and Release

RacingOwl reads every new post automatically, in course discussions and in topics. It looks for two kinds of language:

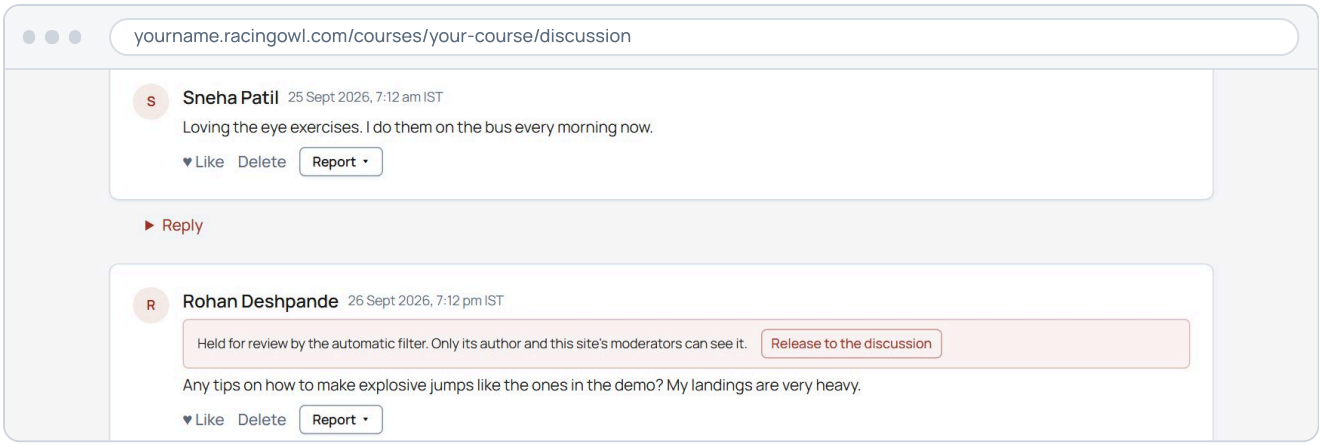
- **Language associated with dangerous or illegal content.** The post is **held**: it is saved, but only its writer and the people who run your site can see it. Everyone else sees "This post is held for review and is not visible to other readers yet." RacingOwl's own team is emailed, the post appears in your **Manage → Reports** list, and you get a notification. Nobody is told about the post as a reply until it is released.
- **Ordinary bad language.** The post goes up as normal, but it lands in your Reports list so you can look at it, and you get a notification.

Releasing a held post

A held post shows you a red strip: "Held for review by the automatic filter. Only its author and this site's moderators can see it." with a **Release to the discussion** button.

1. **Read it.** Filters are blunt; they catch innocent posts too, such as a cookery class discussing knives or a history lesson about a war.
2. **If it is fine,** press **Release to the discussion**. It appears for everyone, and the reply notifications it held back are sent as though it had just been posted. The filter's own report about it is closed.
3. **If it is not fine,** press **Delete** instead, then deal with the report under **Manage → Reports**.

Releasing says the filter was wrong about the words. If a learner separately reported the same post, their report stays open in your Reports list for you to close yourself.



A post held by the automatic filter, as the trainer sees it, with the Release to the discussion button.

> **WHAT THE WRITER SEES.**
> Their own post, in full, with a note: "Held automatically by the safety filter, not by a person. Your teacher will release it if it is fine." The wording is careful not to accuse them, because most held posts are innocent.

Anyone can also report a post by hand with **Report**, giving a reason and choosing **Off-topic or rude** or **Dangerous or illegal — needs urgent review**. Handling reports is covered in Notifications and keeping your site safe.

Ratings and reviews

At the bottom of every course page is a section headed **Ratings & reviews**. Only a learner who has **finished** the course can leave a review, and each learner leaves one review per course. A star rating from 1 to 5 is required; a title (up to 100 characters) and written words (up to 2,000 characters) are optional. Reviews go up straight away; you do not approve them first, apart from the automatic filter described below. Reviews always show the learner's real name and photo.

> **WHAT YOUR LEARNER SEES.**
> Before finishing: "Complete this course to leave a review." After finishing: a **Rate this course** box with **Your rating** (the stars), **Title (optional)**, **Review (optional)** and **Submit review**. Once they have reviewed, the box becomes **Your review**, where they can change it with **Update review** or remove it with **Delete my review**. Visitors who are not signed in are told to sign in once they have completed the course.

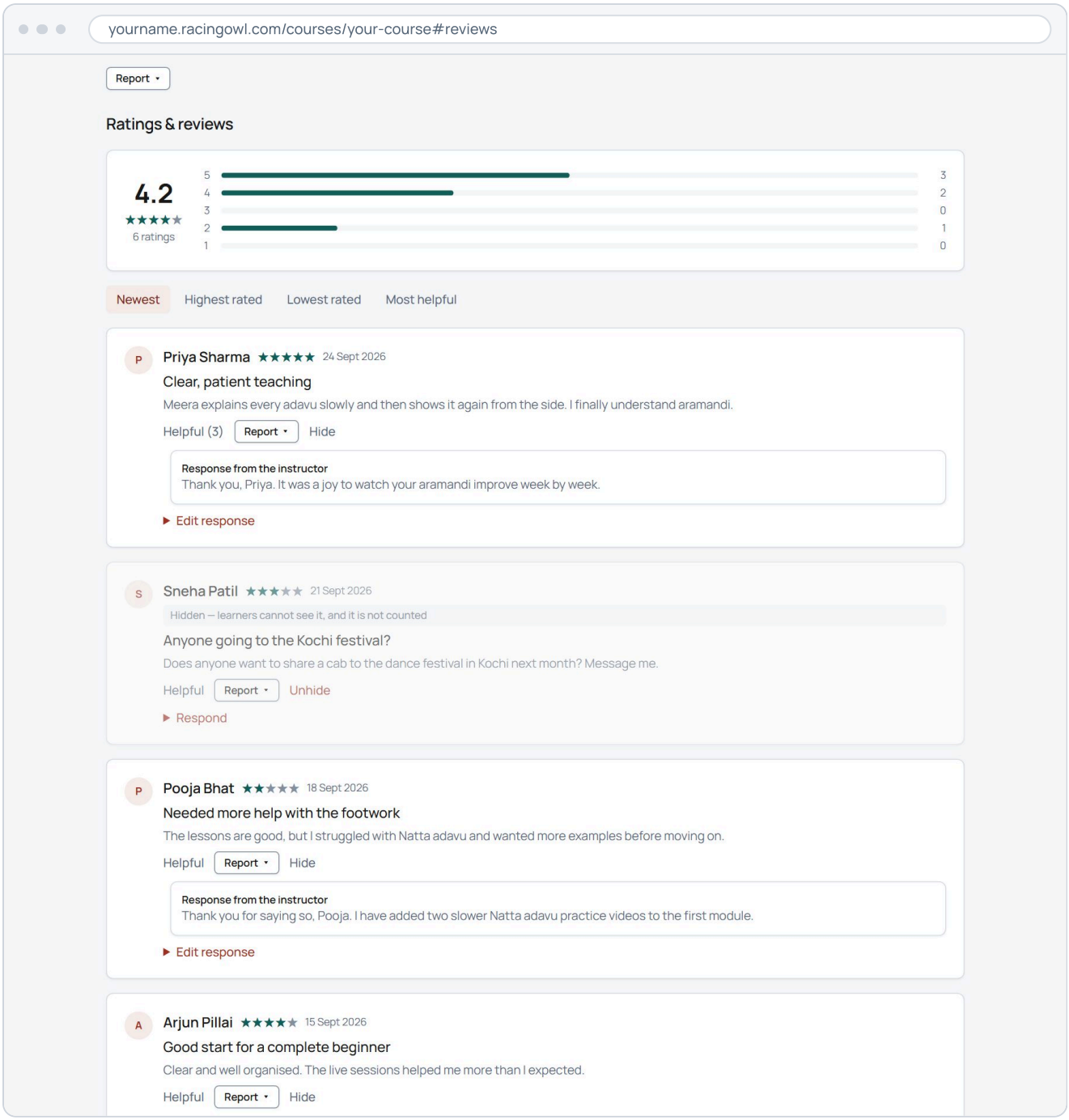
When a learner leaves their first review of a course, you get a notification with their name and the stars. Editing a review does not notify you again.

The star distribution

The section starts with a summary card: the average to one decimal place, a row of stars, the number of ratings, and five bars, one for each star from 5 down to 1, showing what share of ratings gave that many stars, with the count beside each. The distribution tells you more than the average: a 4.0 made of many fives and a few ones reads very differently from a 4.0 made of fours.

The same average and count appear beside the course title on the course page, on your course cards, as an overall figure on your site's home page, and on the marketplace, where learners can filter by rating. Hidden reviews are not counted in any of them.

When there is more than one review, learners and you can sort them: **Newest**, **Highest rated**, **Lowest rated** or **Most helpful**. Other readers can press **Helpful** on a review they found useful.



Ratings & reviews on a course page, as the trainer sees it: the star distribution, a review with a response from the instructor, and the Hide and Respond controls.

Responding to a review

You can post **one public response** to each review. It appears under the review, headed **Response from the instructor**, for everyone to read.

1. **Open the box.** Under the review, press **Respond**.
2. **Write your response.** **Your response**, up to 2,000 characters.
3. **Save.** Press **Save response**. The learner is notified that you replied.

To change it later, press **Edit response**; saving again replaces the old words. The learner cannot reply to your response.

> **TIP.**
> A calm, specific answer to a critical review often does more for your next buyer than the review itself. Thank them, say what you have changed or will change, and keep it short. Avoid arguing: other people read your response to decide what you are like as a teacher.

Hiding a review

You can hide a review from your own site if it needs it: an abusive review, one about something that is not your course, one that shares somebody's private details.

1. **Press Hide.** Under the review, press **Hide**.
2. **Read the warning.** "Hide this review?": it stops showing on the course page and stops counting towards the average, and the learner is told in their notifications that it was removed.
3. **Confirm.** Press **Hide** again, or **Leave it up** to change your mind.

The review stays visible to you, greyed out, with the label "Hidden — learners cannot see it, and it is not counted", so you can see the hide worked. To bring it back, press **Unhide** and confirm "Show this review again?". It goes back on the page and into the average, and nobody is notified.

> **IMPORTANT.**
> Hiding a review because it is critical is not what the control is for, and learners notice when only glowing reviews survive. Keep hiding for reviews that break the rules; answer honest criticism with a response.

Reviews the filter holds

Every review's title and words go through the same keyword filter as posts when they are saved. A review with dangerous language is hidden at once as RacingOwl's own hide and left out of your rating. You get a report notification and RacingOwl is told. You see it greyed out with the label "Hidden by RacingOwl" and no Unhide button: only RacingOwl can restore it. If you think the filter got it wrong, tell us through **Ask RacingOwl** (see Ask RacingOwl). A review with ordinary bad language stays up but lands in your Reports list.

Common questions

Q Can a course have several separate discussion threads, like a forum?

No. Each course has exactly one running conversation, on purpose: learners never have to decide where to post, and nothing gets lost in a sub-forum. For conversations that are not about one course, start a topic.

Q A learner says they cannot post in the discussion.

Check **Discussion settings**. With **Buyers only** they must be enrolled; with **Completers only** they must have finished. Check that the discussion is not closed and that discussions are switched on. If your plan is full, somebody new cannot join your site by posting either (see Managing your learners).

Q Can my learners start topics?

No. Only the site owner starts topics; everyone signed in can reply. Learners who want to ask something about a course can post in that course's discussion, or write to you privately in Chats.

Q Do I get an email when someone posts?

No. Discussion replies, mentions and new reviews come as notifications in your bell and on your phone if you have phone alerts on, never as emails. Follow each course's discussion with **Notify me of new replies** so you hear about every new post.

Q I deleted a post by mistake.

Press **Restore** under it and confirm. The words come back exactly as they were.

Q Can I delete a review?

No, only the learner who wrote it can delete it. You can hide it from your site, which takes it off the page and out of the average, and unhide it later.

Q Why is a review on my course greyed out with "Hidden by RacingOwl"?

Either the automatic filter caught its words, or RacingOwl hid it after a report. Only RacingOwl can restore it. Ask through **Ask RacingOwl** if you think it was a mistake.

Q Can I remove my response to a review?

You can change it at any time with **Edit response**, but the screen has no button to remove it altogether. If you need it gone, ask us through **Ask RacingOwl**.

Q Someone reported a post. Where do I see it?

Under **Manage → Reports**, with the most serious first. **Go and look** takes you to the post. See Notifications and keeping your site safe.

Related: Notifications and keeping your site safe, Chats with learners, Managing your learners, Creating your first course.

> **THE REST OF THE GUIDE**
> This is chapter 10 of 17 of the RacingOwl Trainer's Guide. The full guide, every other chapter as its own PDF, and the online version are at racingowl.com/trainer-guide. Stuck? Press **Ask RacingOwl** at the bottom right of any Manage page.