

Commenting on BioLogos: A User's Guide

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I. Creating Your Account

Visitors to The BioLogos Forum need to set up a user account and log in to it to access our commenting features. Accounts can be created in two different ways, though both types of accounts will receive the same privileges on their site, so long as they remain in good standing (for more on account standing, see III.d).

a. Registering with BioLogos.org

If you would like to create an account for The BioLogos Forum, select the “Don’t Have an Account?” option under the Log In page or navigate to <http://www.biologos.org/member/register>. From there:

1. Enter your username (which you will use to log-in to the site). Usernames must be at least four characters and may not include vulgar, racist, hateful, or offensive language. Usernames containing any of these will be automatically deleted.
2. Choose a password for your account. While we only require passwords to be 5 characters long, we recommend that users choose a unique, secure password of at least 8 characters in length, containing both upper- and lower-case letters as well as numbers 0-9.
3. Choose a screen name for your account. Please note this name will be visible to all users when you comment, and as with usernames, offensive screen names will result in immediate deletion of the account in question.
4. Input a valid email address. Only one account may be created per address, and users must click an activation link sent to their email addresses before they can post on The BioLogos Forum.
5. (optional) Input a personal URL to include with your account.
6. You must accept the Terms of Service for the site.

Upon completion of your form, an activation email will be sent to the email address you entered. You must click the activation link for your account to be approved. If the email does not arrive, please check your “Spam” folder or contact the site administrator.

b. Registering with a Pre-Existing Account (i.e. Facebook, Google, etc.)

If you already have a valid account through Facebook, Google, Yahoo, AOL, or OpenID, you may log-in to The BioLogos Forum using it. To do so, simply click the “Log In” button under “...with your Facebook, Google, or other social account. Then, click the type of account you wish to use and follow the on-screen instructions.

Please note: the one account per email address rule also applies to social account log-ins. If you have previously created an account with BioLogos.org with one email address, any social accounts also associated with that address will link to the same account. More importantly, if your account is suspended by a moderator, logging in with any account associated with that email address will not remove that ban.

II. Setting Your Preferences

After you have created your account, you should take a moment to update your personal and privacy settings. These settings can be updated at any time through your Member Control Panel (accessed at <http://www.biologos.org/member> when logged in).

a. Edit Profile

The fields under the “Edit Profile” page allow users to share a bit more information about themselves with the rest of the commenting community. Though entirely optional, completed fields will display under your member page when visitors click your user name from comments or the member list. This excludes fields marked with a superscript “1”, which will only be shared with The BioLogos Foundation and will not be made public.

Finally, your avatar, which displays next to any comments you make, can be viewed and updated by visiting the third-party site Gravatar.com.

Please note that the use of vulgar or offensive language or avatars in public profiles will result in an immediate account suspension.

b. Email Settings

The fields under “Email Settings” allow you to update your account’s email address and set your preferences for email notifications when you subscribe to threads or receive private messages.

c. Username and Password

The fields under “Username and Password” allow all users to change their Screen Name (which displays above their comments) and for users who have registered their account through BioLogos.org to update their password.

Please note that the use of vulgar or offensive language in your Screen Name will result in an immediate account suspension.

d. Edit Preferences

This page allows users to opt in or out of the site’s private messaging system, which allows users to send each other personal messages for discussing posts.

e. Localization Settings

The fields under “Localization Settings” allow users to update their time zone and time formatting preferences for the site.

III. Making and Following Comments

Once you have registered and configured your account, you are free to begin commenting on posts in The BioLogos Forum. However, please take some time to read our [“Ground Rules for Commenting”](#) before posting, as any comments found in violation of these rules will be removed and can result in moderation or suspension of your user account.

a. How to Comment

Comments can be found at the bottom of blog posts on The BioLogos Forum. Beginning April 13, 2011, if you are not logged in, you will see a reminder to do so before you will be able to comment.

To make a comment, simply type your thoughts into the commenting box under the heading “Add Your Comment”. You may add text-formatting and links using the tools provided in our editor. Please take the time to proof-read your posts for clarity and formatting, as there is currently no way to edit your comment once submitted. Poorly formatted comments may be removed by the moderator.

While you are able to paste text into the editor, we ask that you do so with caution, as pasted text from certain programs, such as Microsoft Word, can introduce errors when posted. If your pasted text looks odd, please highlight it and select the “Remove Formatting” button in the editor, located on the far right of the box and denoted by a red “X”.

If you would like to receive email notifications when other users comment on the same post, please make sure the “Subscribe to this Comment Thread” option is selected. You may manage and cancel any subscriptions under your Control Panel.

When you are happy with your comment, press the “Submit” button.

b. Nested Comments

If you would like to respond directly to another comment, you may do so by selecting the “Reply to this Comment” button under it. This will pop-up a window directly under the comment where you can type your response. Upon submitting the comment, your response will appear directly below the original. Comments may be nested up to four levels deep.

We ask that users do not use the public commenting system for personal arguments or debates, but instead conduct such discussions (so long as they remain friendly and civil) through our private messaging system. Lengthy personal back and forths between users will be removed if they do not benefit other readers.

We also ask that users adopt the nested reply system instead of copying and pasting the entirety of earlier comments. This allows for a cleaner, more intuitive commenting experience and does not require readers to scroll up and down pages of comments to read discussions.

c. Flagging Comments

While we would like to think that everyone who comments on The BioLogos Forum will approach the discussions in a civil manner in keeping with our “Ground Rules for Commenting”, we realize that some users will violate the rules. As such, we have added a new community tool to report comments that are out of line.

To flag a comment, simply select the “Flag Comment” option under it. In the box that opens, choose your reason for reporting the comment, and if you would like, include a short description detailing why you feel the comment should be removed. These flags will be seen by the site’s moderators, who will be able to review the comment in question and remove it if need be.

You are only allowed to submit one flag per comment, and abuse of the flag system may result in a demotion of your account status.

d. Account Status

To further foster a positive atmosphere for discussion on The BioLogos Forum, we have adopted a new account standing system for users. Accounts may fall in one of three categories:

1. In Good Standing
2. Warned
3. Banned

By default, member accounts will be marked as “In Good Standing”, denoted by a green circle next to the user’s screen name when they comment. Users in good standing will be allowed full access to the commenting features on the site, including private messaging and comment flagging.

Accounts that receive multiple complaints for violating the terms of service or commenting rules will have their status demoted to “Warned”, denoted by a yellow circle next to their screen names. Warned accounts will not be allowed to send private messages or submit comment flags, but will still be given the ability to comment on the site.

A warned account that continues to violate the terms of service or commenting rules will be demoted to “Banned”, denoted by a red circle next to their screen name. These users will no longer be able to comment on The BioLogos Forum, in addition to the penalties afforded warned users. !!!!!!!!!!!!!

Users can restore the status of their account by continuing to follow the ground rules for The BioLogos Forum and by contacting the moderator with an explanation and apology.

Screen names with a “MOD” icon next to them denote that the comment comes from a site moderator.

e. Thread Subscriptions

When posting a comment on a blog post, users have the option to “Subscribe” to the discussion by checking the box marked “Subscribe to this comment thread”. You can change whether this option is

selected by default under your “Email Settings” in the control panel. Upon subscribing, you will receive email alerts when new comments are made to the blog post.

To stop these alerts, visit your Control Panel at <http://www.biologos.org/member> and select “View Subscriptions”. To unsubscribe from a post, select the box marked “Unsubscribe” next to the correct title, then click the “Unsubscribe” button.

f. Ignore List

While we hope our visitors can find common ground for discussion with everyone, we realize that certain readers may not get along with every commenter. To alleviate the tension this might cause, we are introducing an Ignore List, which will allow readers to block comments from certain commenters from appearing in their comment feeds.

Comments from ignored commenters will still display as normal for other users, but will display on your screen with the message that “You are ignoring this user.” To view their comments again, simply remove them from your Ignore List.

To ignore a commenter:

- 1) Select the “Ignore Member” button on their public profile page (accessible by click on their name in any posted comment).
- 2) Click “Add Member” under the “Manage Ignore List” section of your control panel, then type in the user’s screen name (be aware this is case sensitive).

To remove a commenter from your ignore list, select the check box next to their name under “Manage Ignore List” and click delete.

We ask that users not make it a habit to ignore every commenter with whom they may disagree, but rather only those with whom they find having a fruitful, civil dialogue to be extremely difficult.

IV. Sending Private Messages

The latest update of The BioLogos Forum’s commenting system introduces a brand new private messaging system, which will allow users to carry on back-and-forth discussions without taking over public commenting spaces and without disclosing their personal email addresses to others. The new system is entirely optional, and users are able to opt-out of the system, disabling both the sending and receiving of messages. To prevent users from abusing the system, each account is limited to sending 10 private messages per day.

To view the Private Messaging options, click the red plus-sign next to “Private Messages”. Note, if you have opted out of messaging, this red plus will not appear.

a. Composing Messages

You can begin composing private messages in one of three ways:

1. Select “Compose New Message” under the “Private Messages” sidebar header. Under the “To:” field, enter the screen name you wish to send a message to.
2. Click the “PM” button on a user’s public profile.
3. Click the “PM” button next to the user’s name on the site’s Member List (please note that for options 2 and 3, these buttons will not appear if the user has opted out of messaging).

Once you have selected your recipients, you may craft the message as you would any other email. Messages are limited to 6000 characters, and may include links and text formatting. Once you have completed your email, you may use the built in spell checking tools and preview the message before sending. You may also select whether to save a copy of the message in your sent folder.

PLEASE NOTE: Any private messages sent must adhere to the same guidelines as do public comments, which means they must not include vulgar, hateful, or otherwise offensive or malicious content. While we will not read your private correspondence, any account that is reported and confirmed to have violated these guidelines will receive an immediate suspension.

Also note that any links included in comments or private messages are not endorsed or approved by BioLogos, and users should use discretion and follow them at their own risk.

b. Reading and Deleting Messages

Received messages will appear in your “InBox”, which is located under the “Private Messages” section. Messages will be listed in order by date received. To read the message, just click the title to open it. You can also reply directly to the message once it is opened.

To delete the message, simply select the “Delete” button when viewing the full text, or click the checkbox next to the post in your InBox and then click “Delete”. Please note, deleted emails will initially be moved to your “Trash” folder and will still count against your storage limit of 60 messages until your empty your trash folder.

Users may create custom folders in addition to their InBox and Sent folders. These can be created and named under the “Edit Message Folder” (folders may only be created one at a time). Again, messages stored in custom folders will still count towards the user’s storage limit of 60 messages.

c. Buddy List and Block List

Users can maintain a “Buddy List” of others with whom they frequently converse in order to easily send them messages. To add a new member, click the “Add Member” button, enter the user’s Screen Name, and then write a short description (optional) to denote who the user is. Click on a user’s name in the Buddy List will automatically begin a new message with their address listed in the “To:” field. To delete someone from your Buddy List, click the check box next to their name, and then click “Delete”.

Users can also maintain a list of “Blocked Users” who will not be able to send them private messages. This list is separate from the “Ignore List”, meaning that users on the “Ignore List” can still send you

private messages, while comments from members on the “Blocked List” will still display normally. Screen Names will have to be added to both lists to disable both features.

Adding members to your “Blocked Users” list is identical to adding members to your “Buddy List”. Click the “Add Member” button, enter the user’s Screen Name, and then a short description (optional) to denote who the user is. To delete someone from your Blocked Users list, click the check box next to their name, and then click “Delete”.

d. Reporting Offensive Messages

If you receive a vulgar, hateful, mean-spirited, or otherwise offensive or malicious message through the private messaging system, please contact The BioLogos Forum’s moderator (moderator@biologos.org). In your message, include the screen name of the user who sent you the message, as well as a copy (preferably a screen shot) of the message in question, along with the date it was sent.

e. Opting Out

If you would like to opt out of the private messaging system on The BioLogos Forum, select “Edit Preferences” under the “Personal Settings” header and uncheck the “Accept Private Messages sent to you by other members of this site” box, then click “Update”.

Please note that by opting out of receiving private messages, you are also opting out of the ability to send messages to other users.

V. Known Issues

- The BioLogos Forum is optimized for Internet Explorer 7+, Opera, Firefox, Safari, and Chrome. If you experience issues with the commenting system or site and are not running the latest version of one of these browsers, please update your browser.
- Occasionally, comments typed into the reply box in Safari and Chrome will appear cut off. This is a known issue with these browsers, but will not affect the final text when it is displayed.
- Text copied from external programs like Microsoft Word may introduce formatting errors in your text. We recommend users type their comments directly into the comment box, but if you must copy and paste text from another source, we ask that you use the “Remove Formatting” button.
- Users that register via Facebook, Google, or other third-party social accounts will be listed as OpenID users in the Member List instead of in Good Standing. In terms of privileges, however, both groups are identical.