

Canvas Best Practices: Getting Started

Use this guide to help set up Canvas courses at the beginning of the academic year. Canvas is a powerful Learning Management System (LMS) that facilitates online learning, communication, and collaboration between instructors and students. Adhering to best practices ensures a smooth and efficient course setup, maximizing the platform's benefits.

When using technology, ensure that you follow all school and school system policies and procedures.

Planning and Preparation	Tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Simplify your dashboard by favoriting the classes you will utilize and cross-listing where possible. You can favorite a class by clicking the star icon next to the class name. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cross-listing reduces the number of courses you must update and allows students in multiple classes to communicate about a topic on discussion boards and other similar sites. ● Rename courses to be descriptive for you and your students. (e.g., “ELA 24-25”, “Biology: Period 1”, or “Mrs. Johnson’s Homeroom”) ● Add a picture to your course card to engage your students and make your course easily identifiable to students. 	<p style="text-align: center;">How can I organize my classes and my dashboard?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cross-listing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">How to upload a course image</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create modules by week, unit, or topic for easy navigation. ● Use consistent and descriptive titles for modules. (e.g., “Lesson 21: Hunting the Edge of Space” instead of “Lesson 21”) ● Consider using “Requirements” and “Prerequisites” to release content logically and to prevent students from becoming overwhelmed. ● Indent related pages as you would an outline to group related content together. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Creating and Editing Modules</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Setting Module Prerequisites</p>

Planning and Preparation	Tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a home page that best fits your students' needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Course activity stream: displays current course activity (e.g., announcements, discussions, assignments, and conversations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pros: Real-time updates without the need to dig resemble social media feeds or news updates, which can be familiar and engaging. ■ Cons: It can be overwhelming if it has frequent updates, and students still need to navigate to individual modules or pages for organized content. ○ Course modules: displays a list of all modules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pros: Course modules provide a clear structure, keep everything in one place, and are very customizable. ■ Cons: Course modules offer structure, customization, and centralization, but require students to check other areas for announcements and due dates, which can be overwhelming in large quantities; however, hiding or prerequisite releases can help alleviate this. ○ Assignment list: displays a list of all assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pros: Setting the assignment list as the home page automatically shows students upcoming, due, and overdue tasks, helping them prioritize without manual updates from you. ■ Cons: One drawback to using the assignment list as the home page is that students may focus primarily on graded assignments and overlook essential instructional content such as readings and videos. ○ Syllabus: displays a dynamic hub of course information, including a course summary and due dates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pros: This is an excellent option for showing the “big picture” and keeping important information about the course in one place. It also includes an automatically updated assignment list with due dates. ■ Cons: Students must navigate to modules or the calendar to access learning materials. ○ Teacher-created page: displays anything the teacher designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pros: Teacher-created pages in Canvas are fully customizable, allowing for welcome messages, graphics, links, and buttons to content. ■ Cons: Creating teacher-designed home pages in Canvas does not offer automatic updates, requiring manual building and formatting. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Setting Up Your Home Page</p>

Organization and Design	Tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aim for the fewest clicks possible when designing your navigation path. ● Limit the number of course links in the navigation menu on the left. ● Create a consistent theme for your site by using key colors and images, including a banner on your homepage to make it engaging and cohesive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Canva is an excellent tool for creating images, and you can get a free educator account. ● Use the built-in accessibility checker in Canvas to help keep your content accessible to all learners. ● Choose easy-to-read fonts and sizes, use bold text for emphasis, etc. ● Include graphical cues to signal assignment types and pictures to engage students. 	<p>How do I create buttons in Canvas?</p> <p>How do I organize content for students?</p>

Creating Content	Tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Canvas automatically forces external links to open in a new tab. You can disable this feature by adding the Redirect Tool and editing the redirect options. ● Keeping students within your Canvas site helps to ensure they are on task and keeps students safe online. 	<p>How do I give students access to external sites within Canvas?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion boards are valuable tools to allow asynchronous discussions between students. ● Enabling the option that forces students to reply to a post before allowing them to see others' encourages independent thought before collaboration. ● Allowing students to “like” other students' posts is an engagement tool that will motivate them to read their peers' posts and revisit the discussion board after they write their responses. ● Always set clear expectations regarding appropriate online behavior before opening a discussion board. ● Be sure to monitor and moderate responses. 	<p>Creating a Discussion Post</p>