

Five Things to Know When Setting Up Your Canvas Course

Canvas, as a Learning Management System (LMS), allows you to facilitate online learning experiences by sharing content and getting students to act on that content through different learning activities, such as discussions, group assignments, or peer review submissions. Canvas also includes different options for assessing student learning and providing individualized feedback. As you begin teaching in Canvas, consider the following “five things to know” when setting up your course:

- **You can create a dedicated home page.** Think of this as a collective space to share course information, store your syllabus, or post a welcome video, photo, or tutorial on how to work in your course. Viewing this home page as your course entry point -- one where students “land” each time -- may be helpful for deciding what’s important for students to see. For a working example, download or view the Saint Louis University Course Template, located in the Canvas Commons, which you can then import and modify for your individual needs.
- **Build content through pages, organized by modules.** Pages allow you to share content, files, videos, links, and other course materials. The rich-content editor is what allows you to build and design this content. Organizing these pages through modules, or learning units, is then a way to structure direction and flow for your students. If you don’t use modules, there’s no organizing structure for them and they’re left with a series of pages to sift through on their own.
- **Publishing is a three-step process.** When you begin building your course, every page, link, file, assignment, or quiz you create is “unpublished.” You’ll need to publish this content and the respective module it’s located under in order for students to have access. You also need to publish your entire course site (by clicking the publish button on your home page) before it goes live to give students access to your course on their Canvas dashboard.
- **You can customize what tools and links appear in your course.** By default, you inherit a Canvas course that contains multiple tools and links on the left-hand Course Navigation Menu. Consider only linking specific tools or course areas that you intend for students to use, and hide those they will not interact with. Doing so improves the navigation of your course. In addition, it may not make sense for students to have access to certain links, such as the Pages tab, especially if you’re building content through modules.

Resources

- Canvas Community. (2019). Course home page customization (instructors). Retrieved from <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Video-Guide/Course-Home-Page-Customization-Instructors/ta-p/384161>.
- Canvas Community. (2020). Pages overview (instructors). Retrieved from <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Video-Guide/Pages-Overview-Instructors/ta-p/383193>.
- Canvas Community (n.d.). What are modules? Retrieved from <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Basics-Guide/What-are-Modules/ta-p/6>.
- Canvas Community. (n.d.). How do I manage course navigation links? Retrieved from <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Instructor-Guide/How-do-I-manage-Course-Navigation-links/ta-p/1020>.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).