Canvas: A Quick Primer

Disclaimer: This is a technical tipsheet, not one with pedagogical suggestions for online teaching. It does not cover every aspect of Canvas; just a recommended path for preparing to use your Canvas course to communicate with your students in a remote way.

Every course has a course in Canvas, by default.

Your students can't see that course unless you publish it.

How to publish your course

On the right side of your Canvas course, click the Publish button.

If you have published your course, there are two buttons, Unpublish and Published, so you can publish and unpublish your course as much as you want.

Choose your home page

When you publish your course, you have to choose what content will display as your homepage. You'll be given a list.

For the purpose of this set of instructions, choose Module List.

This will allow you to be very specific with what your students will see on the front page.

Modules are boxes you can choose to display your content in. We'll get to Modules a bit later.

Assignment Groups

Most assignments will fall into specific groups that fit easily into your grading structure.

For example, a course might have homework as 10% of the grade, quizzes 15%, and each of three exams 25%, totaling 100%.

You could create an assignment group for homework, and specify that homework is 10% of the overall grade.

Create an assignment group for each of the categories in your grading schema in your syllabus by clicking the button +Group in the Assignments area.

Gradebook

Your gradebook only holds grades for assignments. Everything (homework, quizzes, exams) is an assignment.

Thus, if you want a column for a specific grade, you need to create that assignment.

Create an Assignment

To create an assignment, you can choose the +Assignment button on the Assignments page.

- Use the description box at the top to describe the assignment.
- If you had an assignment that was a paper turned in, you could specify that in the Assignment creation form as an "On Paper" assignment.
- If you had an assignment that required a student to submit an electronic copy of an assignment, they could do that here as well, by choosing Online submission. If you wish to restrict what types of online documents are submitted, you could restrict it to pdf or docx, but may want to consider allowing jpg, gif or png files as well, to allow people to take pictures from a cell phone.
- Points are a simple way to weight something, but you don't need to think about how to spread points around to make it work with your course grading schema; you can do that with an assignment group. (See assignment groups above.) The number of points you choose will weight it within the Assignment Group. So if one assignment in Homework is 10 points, and another one is 20 points, the second assignment is weighted double.
- You should have already created Assignment groups in the previous step. Assign each assignment to a specific assignment group by choosing that field, right below points.
- Click Save when you are done. This creates an unpublished assignment. It will be in your gradebook, but greyed out so students can't see them.
- Assignments are not seen by students unless they are published. To publish an assignment, click Save and Publish at the bottom of the assignment creation page, or click the check mark to the right of the assignment in your assignment section. Published assignments are no longer greyed out in the gradebook. They have a green check mark on the right side.

Create a Module

Once you have created an assignment, it will show up on your assignments tab (to the left of the window) if you have published it. If you haven't published it, it will be greyed out, but you'll still be able to see it. Your students won't.

If you want to make your students aware of it as soon as they log in, you'll want to put it on the front page.

To put specific content on the front page, you create a module to hold that content.

- Click on the modules tab, and click + Module.
- Name your module whatever you want. It can be a week number, the topic, homework, etc.

- Then click the + button on the right side to add content from what you already have available in the class. If you have created a homework assignment (see above), you can find that add it here.

Modules need to be published just like assignments or your students won't be able to see them, so at the bottom of the page, click Save and Publish.

Now, you should see your content on the front page of your site. Create as many modules as you wish. Click and drag them to position them on your page.

Likewise, you can put many different types of content into any module you create. If you have a PDF, such as a syllabus, you can upload that in your files area, then click the + sign and add it to a module.

Log Files

It is easy to see what your students or TAs are doing from the log files.

- From the People area, find the name of the student or TA you want to see.
  Click on that student's name.
  A window will appear on the right side. Click on the student's name again.
  You can now see their Access Report on the right side. This will show you the list of student online activities.
- If you want to see your gradebook history, to see what grades your TA has added/changed, click Grades, then Gradebook (left side, just above the student names), then Gradebook History. Type in your TA's last name and select it.

Troubleshooting

- If a student complains about being unable to reach an assignment or resource, here's some tips to share.
  - Verify if other students are able to access it. For a quiz or assignment, are there grades? If so, you know it is NOT the assignment/resource.
    - If other students are experiencing the same issues, check the publication status of the course, the module, or the assignment.
  - Has the student tried the same access in a different browser?
  - Have the students tried rebooting the computer?
  - Have the students tried removing the cookies/cache from their browser? Link to help doc: https://kb.wisc.edu/12384
  - Are they trying to do this with an iPad or other tablet? Or cell phone? Not all functionality works through browser based access on those devices. Using the Canvas app, available through the various app stores, may be a better option.
  - Have they tried another computer?
    - I know this may not be possible in a situation where they are restricted to their home, but they may be able to borrow a roommate's computer to try.

Home Computer Setup

Possible additions to your home setup:
- **headset (with microphone)**
- **external mouse**
- **camera on phone for creating pictures of handwritten content**

Any computer is capable of working in Canvas.

However, if you intend on producing videos or want to participate in online web conferencing to be available to your students, be aware of a few things.

Your laptop may come with a built-in microphone and webcam, and in most cases, that can work fine. However, a microphone that is built into the laptop will also pick up noises such as you typing, or your children playing in the next room.   A desktop may not have a webcam or a microphone; you may need to add them.

A headset (with a microphone) would give better clarity to your speech and be less distracting. If you have a desktop, a headset may be the only way to have a microphone work to communicate using your system.

You can find these on Amazon or most big box stores.   I would suggest having one with a USB connection, as not every machine has a place to plug in an audio plug. There are also bluetooth headsets, which most laptops can use. Not every desktop has a bluetooth connection. Bluetooth allows wireless connections to your computer, which can be very convenient. They also must be charged, which can be tedious.

 You may need to specify your computer to use your headset instead of your built-in microphone in your operating system's audio control panels or preferences.

I also prefer to use an external mouse when I am producing content via webcast. This is simply easier to "drive" during a screencast and you don't have to maneuver your mouse via your laptop touchpad.

If you intend on producing content for your students, having the ability to take a picture with a phone or tablet may be important. You can write out your content on a piece of paper and take a picture. Or you can use TeX to produce something and upload it.

Producing content using an iPad or Android tablet may be the best way to create content. See below.

Using a personal iPad or Android Device to create handwritten notes or lecture videos

The Department has 10 iPads in use in certain classes to allow instructors to hand write equations and notes on, to project from, and to create content to share. People may have similar devices at their home that may include a pen or pencil to ease handwritten content creation.

We use two apps for this type of functionality on our department iPads. These or similar apps may be of use for personal machines.

- Department iPads use the Explain Everything app to do this. It is available to personal users for a fee. Instructors use this during classes in the place of writing on a board and then can save and export the accumulated notes to distribute to the class.
- Microsoft OneNote. One Note is a free program that we get because of the UW Microsoft site license. You'll need to sign in with your UW netid and password.   You can download a Microsoft One Note app and use that to create notebooks of handwritten content which you can share, or export electronically. This would be a useful app to add to a personal tablet.
    - How to share a One Note Notebook: https://kb.wisc.edu/75955
    - It may be possible to use a web-conferencing app to share a screen that had a One Note Notebook open and work collaboratively on a shared One Note notebook over this web conference. This bears some testing.
    - This may be a good way to work collaboratively with other faculty as well.

I have used the "screen record" with a mic function on my iPad with OneNote to create a video of me writing out a recipe and explaining as I write, which would be very similar to writing on a chalkboard.

Installing the Canvas App to a personal iPad or Android tablet

Canvas does offer a separate app for iOS and Android devices. It is recently out of beta, but does appear to function in most respects similar to the web version.

There's several versions of the Canvas app.
- Canvas Student: What your students would download for their own devices.
- Canvas Teacher: What an instructor would download for their own devices.
- Canvas Parent: This is used in K-12 instruction and would not be downloaded.

If you notice differences in functionality between your computer and a tablet, please let me know so I can report them for correction.

UW Additional Tools for Canvas

There are several different tools you can enable in canvas to make maintaining contact with your students easier.

Piazza

Piazza is a discussion forum for your class. In this application, students can ask questions to other students as well as the TAs and the instructors.

This would allow other students to reply to the question, and maybe help clear up a misconception. Or might notify you about a problem in understanding and let you correct the situation.

Piazza should be turned on as a resource to your students.

Learn more about Piazza: https://at.doit.wisc.edu/learn-uw/piazza/

How to turn on Piazza: https://kb.wisc.edu/luwmad/page.php?id=63736

Kaltura Mediaspace

Kaltura is a way to create and distribute video for your class. It is not expected that you'll be asked to immediately start changing how you teach overnight.   However, if you did want to experiment with recording short videos for your students, this would be how we'd do it. Generally, this is done from a laptop or tablet that has both a webcam and a microphone.

Learn more about Kaltura: https://at.doit.wisc.edu/learn-uw/kaltura-mediaspace/

Generally, when making a video of yourself to share on Canvas, it is important to not record videos of long duration. 5-10 minutes is the most appropriate size for most recordings. Making a smaller recording is easier for the viewer to parse and you won't lose your audience.

> **How to make a video of yourself talking to the students from your webcam.**
>
> These instructions can help you record a video of yourself via webcam to share on your Canvas site.
> https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=91930
>
> **How to share your computer screen while narrating in a video**
>
> In order to share your screen, you'd need to use Kaltura Capture. This is a tool supported by campus that is available from outside of Canvas at https://mediaspace.wisc.edu/.
>
> Here's some step by step instructions for using Kaltura Capture:
> https://kb.wisc.edu/90536
>
> **How to embed your Kaltura content to your Canvas course:**
>
> After you complete the production of your video on Kaltura Capture, you can use these instructions to embed your video into a module on your site.
> https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=62951

Note that there are alternative ways to make a video to share content. This link discusses different methods.   https://kb.wisc.edu/luwmad/page.php?id=71116

Web Conferencing

It is possible to hold a web conference in the place of a standard classroom lecture or discussion section. There are several tools on this campus that can help with this functionality.

Link: https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=45390

However, the capability to establish and run such a feature may not be easy and difficulty varies depending on which tool you want to use.

BB Collaborate Ultra

THe Blackboard Collaborate Ultra app is the most easily used conferencing app from Canvas and would allow an instructor with functioning video and audio to host a lecture or discussion section.

First, make sure BB Collaborate Ultra shows up on your left menu.

> If you don't see it, go to Settings, then Click Navigation from the tabs near the top.

> If BB Collaborate Ultra isn't in your top set of menu items, you'll need to find it from the bottom set and drag it to the top set.

 If you are interested in using BB Collaborate Ultra, it is **HIGHLY** suggested you test the app out first before you commit to using it.

> To access BB Collaborate Ultra, go to your course and click on the link for BB Collaborate Ultra.

> Note that you can easily start a web conference here, by clicking Join Course room.

> When you first connect, the BB Collaborate app will test to make sure your audio and video settings are active.

> Link: https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Get_Started/Navigation

> Your students should be able to see the BB Collaborate Ultra link on the left menu and they can use their phone or computer to join the web conference.

> You can share content or your screen using BB Collaborate Ultra. You can also share a whiteboard to diagram or write an equation. The whiteboard doesn't seem to have an option for erasure.

Here's the link for a more comprehensive help document for BB Collaborate Ultra: https://kb.wisc.edu/page.php?id=65251