Checklist: Creating Your First Canvas Course

Checklist Instructions
Follow these step-by-step instructions to build your first course in the Canvas LMS as efficiently as possible, and use the checkboxes to keep track of each task you complete along the way!

NOTE: Most steps in this checklist have an associated location in Canvas. Those locations are noted in brackets [ ] throughout this document to help you quickly navigate to each one.

Pre-Checklist Activities
Before you get started, visit the Canvas Learning Center, and access the Canvas Learning Path. The Learning Path will provide the context and how-to resources you’ll need to complete the steps in this checklist.

Instructors should fully engage in their course design process before beginning this checklist. This document makes the assumption that you, the instructor, have previously completed the design and development of the following items for your course:

- The content to be included in your course syllabus (e.g. text of course policies & expectations)
- Some course content (e.g. pdf files, videos, images)
- An assessment plan and all major assessments (e.g. quizzes, tests, project prompts, rubrics)

First Steps

NOTE: Login to psu.instructure.com to begin.

1. **Update your Canvas profile and notification settings [ACCOUNT]**
   - Update your Canvas profile.
     - This profile will be visible to other Canvas users, including students.
   - Customize your notification settings.
     - These settings will apply across your entire Canvas account.

2. **Request Canvas course shells for practice and course design [DASHBOARD]**
   - Request your Canvas “practice course” (also referred to as a “sandbox”).
     - Your sandbox will be created automatically when you select the “practice course” button from the dashboard. Use this space to play with options and explore possibilities in Canvas before making changes to any of your actual courses.
   - Request a “master course.”
     - Master courses should be used as a development area for your “live” courses. You can design each master course and then copy it into one or more "live" course shells. *NOTE: We recommend not including due dates for any assignments, quizzes, or other activities in your master courses.*

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# Design Your Master Course

**NOTE:** All of the following steps should be completed within your new master course.

## 3. Review your course assessment plan and all planned content

- **Check for alignment between your planned content and assessments.**
  - Be sure that your assessment plan includes: all planned assessments, specific point values, grading scales, and weighting information (if applicable).

## 4. Create a syllabus page [SYLLABUS]

- **Create your course syllabus page using the built-in syllabus feature in Canvas.**
  - If you already have a syllabus document, it is still recommended that you create your course syllabus page using the built-in syllabus feature available in your course.

  If your course uses PSU Library Course Reserves (E-Reserves), direct your students to access the Library Course Reserve Search and search for the instructor’s last name to access these materials. This link can be included here in your syllabus or in one of your course modules (in a later step).

## 5. Create an organized module structure for your course [MODULES]

**NOTE:** In this step, you will be building the “skeleton” of your course. You will create empty modules to determine the flow of your course now, and add relevant items to these modules in a later step.

- **Create an “orientation” module.**
  - This module will be used to introduce your students to relevant course tools, including specific features of Canvas.

  Some colleges and departments are developing their own versions of these orientation modules for faculty to import into their courses. Please check with your local Canvas support to find out if you already have access to a pre-made orientation module.

- **Create additional modules for each week or unit in your course.**
  - It is recommended that each module should represent a specific week or unit in your course. Modules should be created in chronological order from top to bottom/beginning to end.

## 6. Upload existing content files into Canvas [FILES]

**QUICK TIP:** Any time you create or upload something in Canvas, **do so in only one place.** You can then easily link back to the item (a file, page, assignment, etc.) in other parts of your course, eliminating the need for duplication.

- **Upload any external files you would like to provide to students in your course: e.g. images, documents, prepared presentation slides, lecture notes, videos, etc.**
  - If you have not already optimized your files for accessibility or addressed any permissions/copyright issues, do so before uploading the files to Canvas (as needed).
### 7. Create course content with free-form content pages [PAGES]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Create a course orientation page (or pages).</td>
<td>These will be included in the orientation module you created in a previous step.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Create additional pages for any content you want to provide to students throughout your course.</td>
<td>Pages allow you to provide content to your students in a wide variety of ways. In any course page, you can include text, images, files (like those you uploaded in a previous step), videos, embedded items from outside sources, and more.</td>
<td>Be sure to include concise, descriptive titles for all course pages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Optimize all course pages for accessibility.</td>
<td>Design each page with accessibility in mind, and check pages for common accessibility issues after saving.</td>
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### 8. Create a grading scheme for your course [SETTINGS]

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Customize the course grading scheme to ensure alignment with your assessment plan and any specific requirements set by your college or department.</td>
<td>“Grading scale” may be a more familiar term for this aspect of your course. In Canvas, a grading scale is referred to as a “grading scheme.”</td>
<td></td>
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### 9. Create an organized assessment structure using assignment groups [ASSIGNMENTS]

**NOTE:** Like modules, assignment groups can also be empty at first. Your goal in this step is to build the structure you will need to organize the various course assessments you will create in the next few steps.

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<tr>
<td>☐ Create assignment groups based on your assessment plan.</td>
<td>If you plan to weight the grades in your course, note that assignments in Canvas can only be weighted based on their assignment group, so keep this in mind as you determine the number and nature of the assignment groups for your course.</td>
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### 10. Create rubrics for all planned assessments [OUTCOMES > MANAGE RUBRICS]

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<tr>
<td>☐ Create your rubrics using the built-in rubric feature.</td>
<td>If using Canvas outcomes, create outcomes first, and then create rubrics by importing specific outcomes into each rubric.</td>
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### 11. Create group sets for student collaboration [PEOPLE]

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<tr>
<td>☐ If you will be using student groups in your course, create your group-sets now.</td>
<td>Since there are no students in your master course, there is no need to create the actual student groups at this stage, but creating the group-sets will allow you to create group assignments and discussions.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
12. Create all course assessments [QUIZZES, DISCUSSIONS, AND ASSIGNMENTS]

NOTE: As you create your assessments, it is very important to use the built-in option to set a due date for each assignment, quiz, or discussion you create! Typing the due date into the assignment description is not recommended and will prevent the date from appearing on students’ calendars or in their notifications.

- Create quizzes (exams), graded discussions, and other assignments as needed.
  - Ensure that the point values of each assessment are consistent with your assessment plan.
  - As you create each assessment, you will have the option to select the appropriate assignment group (created in a previous step).
- Attach the appropriate rubric to each assessment.
  - As you create each assessment, attach the appropriate rubric (created in a previous step), and check that the total points in the rubric are equal to the point value of the assignment to which it is attached.

13. Complete your course modules [MODULES]

- Add content and assessments to your course modules.
  - Return to the modules you created in a previous step. In each module, add the appropriate assessments, content pages, and any other items students will need to successfully complete the module (e.g. external links).
  - If your course uses PSU Library Course Reserves (E-Reserves), direct your students to access the Library Course Reserve Search and search for the instructor’s last name to access these materials. If you did not add this link to your syllabus in a previous step, you can add it to your “orientation” module now.
- Publish all course modules.
  - Publishing a module automatically publishes any items included within that module.
- Customize students’ access to modules or module items as needed.
  - You have the ability to hide certain content from students based on date or prerequisite. Make any of the following adjustments to your module items as needed:
    - Lock entire modules until a specific date or based on prerequisites.
    - Unpublish specific pages to hide them from students completely.
    - Set or adjust availability dates for assignments and quizzes.

14. Review your syllabus page [SYLLABUS]

- Check your syllabus page, and make adjustments as needed.
  - Now that you have created your assessments and at least a portion of your course content, it’s a good idea to revisit your syllabus page to check for consistency with the rest of your course.
15. Customize your course

<table>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Create a course home page.</td>
<td>[PAGES] If desired, create a new page to use as your course home page, and select the option to “use as front page.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Select your course home page.</td>
<td>[HOME] If you created a new page to use as your home page in the previous step, select “the pages front page” as your home page. If not, select a different home page from the list of options available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Customize your navigation menu.</td>
<td>[SETTINGS] Enable, disable, and reorder course menu items based on your decisions throughout this course design process. It is recommended that you minimize the number of items in your course menu by deactivating unused or redundant menu options. This will streamline course navigation for you and your students.</td>
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</table>
Prepare & Publish Your New Course for the Upcoming Semester

NOTE: All of the following steps should be completed within the actual Canvas course you will be using in the coming semester (not your master course).

16. Copy/Import your Master Course into your new course shell for the coming semester

- Find your new course shell in your Canvas account.
  
  [DASHBOARD]
  
  New course shells should appear in your Canvas account automatically in advance of the coming semester. If your course is not visible on your Dashboard, you may need to find it under “courses” in the global navigation menu.

- Import your Master Course into your new course shell.
  
  [SETTINGS]
  
  Select “Import Content into this Course”, and choose the option to “Copy a Canvas Course.” Find the name of your master course (where you completed all of the previous course design steps) and click the Import button.

17. Customize the settings in your new course [SETTINGS]

- Modify essential settings in your new course.
  
  Use the following guidelines to update your course settings, and remember to click “Update Course Details” to save:
  
  - **Time Zone:** Eastern Time
  - **Starts:** Enter the appropriate start date and time for the course.
  - **Ends:** LEAVE THIS FIELD BLANK.
    - Check the box for “users can only participate in the course between these dates”
  - **Grading Scheme:** Check “Enable Course Grading Scheme”; then select “View Grading Scheme” to verify that it aligns with your assessment plan. Make updates to the grading scheme if necessary.
  - **Visibility:** Make sure the appropriate options are selected for your course.
  - **More Options:** Select “More Options”, and verify that the appropriate options are selected for your course.

- If students need to be able to view your course syllabus prior to enrollment, select the option to make your syllabus public.
  
  Check for specific requirements from your college or department.

18. Manage the people and groups in your course roster [PEOPLE]

- Add individuals (non-students) to your course roster as needed.
  
  You have the option to add these individuals to your course as Course Admins, Designers, TA’s, Teachers, or Observers.

- If you will be using student groups in your course, create those groups now.
  
  Your group-sets should have migrated over from your master course, but you will still need to create the actual student groups within each group set.
19. Add due dates, and review your live course

☐ Add due dates to all assignments, quizzes, and discussions in your course.

[ASSIGNMENTS, QUIZZES, & DISCUSSIONS]
This is a very important step, because the due dates you select in the settings for each assessment will appear in multiple parts of the Canvas interface to help ensure students’ awareness of expectations and deadlines.

After adding your due dates, review your course calendar, and create additional calendar events (e.g. student conferences) as needed.

Changing a due date in the course calendar automatically changes the date in the assignment settings and in the course schedule displayed on your syllabus page.

☐ Review gradebook, and make adjustments as needed.

[GRADES]
All course assignments should appear as columns in the gradebook automatically. You may choose to make adjustments to your gradebook organization at this time.

20. Prepare your course announcements [ANNOUNCEMENTS]

☐ Create a “welcome” announcement to welcome students to your course.

In this announcement, direct students to the course orientation module you have created along with other essential introductory pages for your course (e.g. your syllabus).

Students will not see this message until you have published your course.

☐ Create additional course announcements as needed.

You have the option to create multiple course announcements in advance. You can choose the appropriate publish/availability dates for each announcement, and it will be posted automatically at the chosen time.

21. Publish your course [HOME]

☐ Publish your course.

Publishing your course will make it visible to everyone on your course roster.

22. Welcome your new students via email

☐ Send a “welcome” email to your students (outside of Canvas).

Some students may not know how to access your course in Canvas right away, so it is important to contact your class via email in order to provide access instructions before the course start date.

23. For Canvas Early Adopters: Redirect students from ANGEL to Canvas

☐ Enable your course in ANGEL, and create a redirect to Canvas.

See this knowledge base article for the specific steps to create the course redirect.
Flowchart

First Steps

ACCOUNT
Update your Canvas profile and notification settings

DASHBOARD
Create your Canvas practice course/“sandbox”

Request a “master course”

Design Your Master Course

SYLLABUS
Review your course assessment plan and all planned content

Create your course syllabus page

MODULES
Create course structure using modules

Complete your course modules

FILES
Upload existing content files into Canvas

PAGES
Create course content using pages

SETTINGS
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Create other course assignments

ASSESSMENTS
Create an organized assessment structure using assignment groups

RUBRICS
Create rubrics for all planned assessments

PEOPLE
Create group sets for student collaboration

QUizzes
Create all course quizzes

DISCUSSIONS
Create all course discussions

Prepare & Publish Your New Course for the Upcoming Semester

DASHBOARD
Find your new course shell in your Canvas account

Import your Master Course into your new course shell

Customize the settings in your new course

SETTINGS

PEOPLE
Add individuals (non-students) to your course roster as needed

Create student groups

CALENDAR
Review your course calendar events

GRADES
Review your gradebook

ANNOUNCEMENTS
Create course announcements

HOME
Publish your course

Send a “welcome” email to your students (outside of Canvas)

Enable your course in ANGEL, and create a redirect to Canvas

Create a course home page

Select your course home page

Customize your navigation menu