

Instructional Design @ UCC

Canvas Good Practice Checklists

This documents outlines a number of good practices when creating a course in Canvas. The document is broken up into several areas of course design and delivery, each area includes a checklist to help you verify that your course is following the guidelines.

Finally, at the end of the document, all the recommendations made in the Canvas Orientation Course for Teachers are listed for reference.

Should you need support with any aspect of course design or planning mentioned below please [contact the Instructional Design team.](#)

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1. Building your course: what to include

When building a course, you are strongly advised to work from a template so that all modules (Canvas courses) in the programme have the same look and feel.

There are a number of course templates available in Canvas Commons that you can apply or alternatively you can develop a template specific to your College/ School/ Department/ Programme etc and share it with your colleagues using the Canvas Commons feature. ([Canvas Orientation Course: 4.9 Reusing Existing Content](#))

Your course should include the following elements:

- ✓ **An introduction to your course.** Including the syllabus, module guide, assessment list and intended learning outcomes.
- ✓ **Send a welcome message.** Set expectations and give a clear outline of your academic module. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 3.6 Keep things clear](#))
- ✓ **Add teaching information** Including timetables, staff contact details and drop-in hours, list of assignments and due dates as appropriate.
- ✓ **Consider content structure.** Most users will take advantage of content that is visually available (at the top of a page; in readable fonts) and accessible through just one or two mouse clicks. The important part is to be consistent and provide a coherent learner-centred structure for your content. ([Canvas Orientation Course: 3.3 Consider the Content](#))
- ✓ **Create links within Canvas Modules** Canvas modules are a very nice way to guide students through course materials. It is good practice to list every element that you create in a Canvas module (all discussions, assignments, pages). This means you can then disable the various options in the navigation menu and it makes things much simpler for students.

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- ✓ **Course navigation.** Hide unnecessary links from the course menu to ensure that students don't get lost or see things you'd rather them not see. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 3.2 Think about Navigation](#) and [4.8 Customise your course layout](#))
- ✓ **A digital list of course readings.** Provide links to the UCC Library resources you reference. Ensure that where possible links are to electronic versions of the material.

2. Publish your Course

- ✓ **Check Student View:** Does the course look right? Go into your Course Settings, then [Student View](#), and check through your course. Did you publish every item that you want students to see?
- ✓ **Check assignments:** Are the points and weighting correct? Check assignment due dates and points. Double check the [weighting](#) that you've assigned to assignment groups.
- ✓ **Have you [hidden total grades columns](#)?** You probably wish to have this on until you are ready to release the grades it will hide any total columns in the grades page and needs to be managed separately to assignment grade release.
- ✓ **Hide unnecessary navigation links:** You may want to [hide navigation links](#) such as Files if you have already linked to the files in other areas in the course. If you are not using certain menu items, you are also advised to hide them. The resulting course will be simpler for students to navigate.
- ✓ **Do you wish to display announcements on the home page?** If you wish to do this you can [set recent announcements to display at the top of the home page](#).

- ✓ **Home Page is finalised:** Have you [chosen a Home Page](#) that suits your course. A good home page is welcoming and makes key course information and expectations clear from the outset.
- ✓ **Have you [customized your notifications settings](#)?** Doing so will limit the number of emails that you receive. Also, unlike Blackboard, you will not have the power to override a student's notification choices, so we suggest you make it clear if there are essential notifications that they need to keep turned on (for example, many instructors use announcements for crucial reminders).

3. Adding Digital Resources

There is a wealth of digital resources that can be used alongside face-to-face teaching and learning methods. These could enhance your lectures, seminars or tutorials or simply act as stand-alone learning resources to support learning outcomes. Here are some ideas:

- ✓ **Record your lecture with Panopto:** So learners can watch it again later. ([Event Capture: Event Capture with Panopto](#) or [Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 5.8 Panopto and Video Recording](#))
- ✓ **Record and embed your own created media:** Such as bitesize summary videos. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 4.5 Adding files, links, video, and other content to pages using the rich content editor](#))
- ✓ **Source external content:** Such as videos, animations, audio, virtual labs. You may consider looking on YouTube, Box of Broadcasts, Vimeo, or other sources. Remember to check for copyright protection. ([Instruction Design @ UCC website Copyright FAQ](#))
- ✓ **Upload additional files:** Such as presentation slides, notes, handouts, podcasts or infographics. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 4.3 Upload and](#)

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[Manage Course Files](#))

- ✓ **Link to examples of external content:** Such as case studies, articles and videos, or point learners to social media and RSS feeds to help learners contextualise their learning in relation to real-world events.
- ✓ **Use interactive voting tools in class:** To check learner understanding, survey opinions, or encourage critical engagement. ([Canvas Guides: Polls for Canvas](#))
- ✓ **Use Canvas Conferencing:** To engage with learners remotely, you could hold a tutorial, arrange seminars, or even deliver taught content. Consider making use of the polling feature or virtual breakout rooms. ([Conferencing](#))

4. Assessment: Building and grading assignments

- ✓ **Provide an assessment outline.** Include a description of the module assessment, with a schedule, marking criteria/rubric and any other advice or important information. Make it clear when and how assignments should be submitted online. This will help learners to plan their workload and approach. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 06 Assignments, Quizzes and Grading](#))
- ✓ **Mark online.** Online marking is convenient and secure. Work can be submitted quickly by learners, then easily viewed and graded online. It also adds security, as work is far less likely to be lost. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 6.5 Using Speedgrader](#))
- ✓ **Check for Plagiarism.** Marking online makes it easy to check for evidence of plagiarism through Turnitin. In order to use this tool on learner submissions, you must enable it when creating the assignment. Learners should be given information on how to avoid plagiarism. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 6.3 Turnitin in Canvas](#))
- ✓ **Plan the release of feedback.** Ensure there is a clear message as to when

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feedback will be available and how that feedback will be delivered. Make use of the ability to [mute and unmute assignments](#) when releasing grades and consider [using video or audio feedback](#).

✓ **Consider the use of other tools in assessment.** Canvas enables the use of a number of other online tools to support a range of individual, paired and group-based assessment. You may wish to consider using:

- [Quizzes](#).
- [Numbas for maths quizzing](#).
- [Canvas conferencing](#) for face to face discussions or seminars.
- [Peer grading](#) and/or [Collaborative documents for group work](#)
- [Panopto quizzes embedded into recordings](#).
- [Discussions](#).

5. Ensuring your course is accessible

Accessibility is a central consideration for when you are building your module in Canvas and interacting with students through Canvas. There are over 1000 students registered with the Disability Support Service in UCC. Complying with good practice for accessibility and adhering to the minimum standards here will make life easier for all of your students. For example, a properly formatted Word document or Canvas page that works correctly with a screen reading software is also much easier to navigate for everyone in general.

✓ **For online materials, the following are minimum standards and you should check that:**

- Images have appropriate alternative text. Further advice on Alt text: <https://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/>.
- The font style is clear and size is large enough to read (minimum 12pt).

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- Text has high contrast against backgrounds.
- Links are descriptive (avoid saying 'click here', instead try 'download the syllabus').
- Headings are used consistently and are descriptive for all items.
- The navigation is consistent with related courses.
- The American National Center on Disability and Access to Education provides a useful one page guide <http://ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets/pdf/electronic-content.pdf> ([Opens in a new window](#))
- ✓ **Provide transcripts or notes.** Whenever possible provide transcripts or notes for video recordings or external video systems. [Panopto has auto-captioning and editing features.](#)
- ✓ **Provide slides in advance.** Presentation slides should be provided in advance of lectures. Learners may wish to modify the formatting of their copy to suit their needs.
- ✓ **Provide accessible texts by using the Library Resource List system.** You can discuss with your subject librarian how to acquire such texts as required.
- ✓ **Ensure links open in the same window.** This is so that the browser back button works. If a new window is essential warn the learners by labelling the link with 'opens in new window'.
- ✓ **Signpost specific requests.** The [Irish Disability Act of 2005](#) states that if a learner with a disability requests an accessible format of any resource this must be provided within reason.

Further guidance on accessibility and designing accessible content, is available at the following locations:

- [Webaim](#)
- [Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 4.6 Ensuring Content is Accessible](#)
- [Canvas Community: Making Canvas accessible.](#)

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6. Day to Day: Managing your students' learning

Here are six key areas to consider:

- ✓ **Check for broken links.** This is especially important if you are re-using previous course material imported from Blackboard or other external sources. Canvas has a handy tool, [the Course Link Validator](#) which will do this for you, you just need to press the button!
- ✓ **Check that the third party components are working** such as Panopto and Turnitin.
- ✓ **Post announcements.** The announcements tool provides a one-way channel for important news such as key dates and events. Use them throughout the module for updates and reminders. It can be particularly useful to post a welcome announcement at the outset so as to set student expectations and point them to key course areas. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 5.2 Announcements](#)). Remember you can also you can [set recent announcements to display at the top of the home page](#).
- ✓ **Use the discussions tool.** Ensure that the purpose of every discussion is clear. Include how learners are expected to engage with discussions and set expectations on staff responses. It can also be useful to use discussions to answer frequently asked questions. ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 5.4 Discussions](#))
- ✓ **Use the student view tool.** Check exactly what learners will see and what they will not see (such as published or unpublished content). ([Canvas Orientation for Teachers: 4.10 Publish a Course](#))
- ✓ **Notification Settings:** Learners can choose to unsubscribe from notifications. Learners may not, therefore, always be aware of announcements or other communications. It is worth [advising students to verify their notification settings](#) and to make it clear how you intend to communicate.

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Instructional Design @ UCC Recommends

This section of the document lists all of the recommendations made throughout the Canvas Orientation Course

01 Welcome to Canvas

1. The 24/7 chat or hotline should be your first port of call for questions on Canvas
2. Contacting the LTU for issues related to third-party tools such as Turnitin or Pebblepad
3. Contact the ID team, for any queries you might have on course design.
4. Using the Canvas Student or Teacher app to access Canvas on a mobile device.

02 Getting Started

5. Adding a profile photo to your Canvas account, this helps to personalise your course as well as interactions with students on Canvas.
6. Updating other settings so that they reflect your preferences, such as how you prefer to be contacted.
7. Updating your notification settings to suit your preferences.
8. Advising students to verify their notification settings.
9. Leaving the Dashboard on Card view as this should show all your courses.
10. Being aware that some Canvas terms are different from Blackboard, in particular, the word "modules" relates to a learning unit.

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03 Plan your Course

11. Make the [course navigation](#) as simple as possible by hiding every unused tool or tab from view and avoiding duplication
12. Taking the time to consider what your content consists of and how to present/structure it.
13. Using checklists from the Canvas Good Practice Guidelines to help verify your course
14. Making your homepage welcoming and ensuring that it highlights any key information.
15. Providing a mix of activities and assessments and considering what each will be worth, when it will be due and how it will be marked.
16. Letting each student know what is expected of them
17. Keeping a clear communication policy

04 Adding Content

18. Using modules to structure your course.
19. Putting every element that you create into modules (all discussions, assignments, pages).
20. Organising modules chronologically, by week, unit, or lesson.
21. Keeping modules unpublished until you are ready to release the full module.
22. Giving your files a logical name when you upload them
23. Keeping the files area unavailable to students
24. Use a maximum of three different font styles on any page.
25. Avoid very large images, as they are difficult to view on a phone.
26. Use short, concise page titles. Long titles tend to run off the page when viewing on a phone.
27. Using a variety of media can help to appeal to different learning styles.
28. Less is more, consider breaking up content into several smaller more manageable chunks.

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29. Using the accessibility checker to verify that your page is accessible to all.
30. Always providing alt-text for images. Alt-text describes an image and is used by screen readers.
31. As much as possible provide captioning or transcripts for media such as audio or video. (Both YouTube and Vimeo have automatic closed captioning functions)
32. Using high contrast colours (such as black on white) and don't rely on colour to convey information (i.e: explain in full) otherwise it could be missed by colour-blind students.
33. Providing appropriate headers and incorporate lists. Headers allow students using screen readers to quickly scan a page of text for relevant information. Similarly, lists facilitate keyboard navigation and provide meaning and structure.
34. Your home page should be welcoming and should highlight key information that students need
35. In the navigation menu, only keep links visible that are relevant to students. Hide any links that you are not using.
36. Using the Course Content Import tool to reuse content across courses.
37. Using Canvas Commons to share learning objects across your own department/school

05 Communicating with Canvas

38. If you plan to use Announcements to communicate regularly with students, tell your students. Remember, students may have set their notifications preferences to not receive email copies of Announcements, so you should advise them to turn them "on". Instructions on how students should turn on notifications are given above.
39. Archive emails instead of deleting them, so that you can retain a record of your conversation

40. Having clear communication policies, for example, a student should know how long you will take to get back.
41. There are a number of tips and tricks that can help to make discussion boards more effective, they are summarised in [this document](#)
42. Keeping due dates clearly marked and to communicate any changes to these via an announcement.
43. Not overloading a calendar with too much detail.
44. Using Panopto to make lectures recordings available in Canvas.
45. For online courses, recording a video announcement can add a personal touch.

06 Assignments, Quizzes and Grading

46. Use assignment groups to organise and weight your grades.
47. Use a Turnitin assignment if you wish to check for plagiarism.
48. Once an assignment has been graded, let your students know you have provided feedback and provide the links below to help them find the information.
49. Using rubrics, as it is a good way to clarify to students what the expectations are for the assignments. Many staff also find that using a rubric makes grading more efficient and can result in fewer questions from students since the expectations are more transparent.
50. Ensure your assignments are muted or unmuted as appropriate when you create it first, so as to ensure that students don't get alerted about grades before they should.
51. Once an assignment has been graded, let your students know you have provided feedback and provide the links below to help them find the information.

- [How do I view annotation feedback comments from my instructor? Links to an external site.](#)
- [How do I view rubric results for my assignment?Links to an external site.](#)

52. Using question groups and question banks to allow you to re-use questions in different assessments.

53. Marking all students as present and then just changing the handful of students who are missing. This will be faster than marking each student off one by one.

07 Group work

54. Making yourself familiar with the [UCC Academic Council Teaching and Learning Committee Group Work Policy](#)  which gives guidelines on implementing group work.

55. Using Collaborations to implement group work in your course.

56. Instructors create collaborations so that they maintain control.

57. Knowing that you have a choice to grade group assignments by group or individually.