

# Canvas LMS Essentials

## The Beginner's Guide to Creating a Simple Yet Effective Online Course

by Matt Stollenwerk

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

If you've purchased this book, I have two things to say right off. "Congratulations!" and "You have my sympathies."

Since the book title raised your interest, I assume that you're among the thousands of teachers and professors this year who are using Canvas for the first time. You're either creating a new online course in Canvas or migrating an existing course from face-to-face or another online platform to Canvas. Either that, or you're a returning Canvas user looking for a simpler solution to creating an effective course. If you belong to any of these groups, this is the book for you.

## The Good News

I say congratulations because Canvas is arguably the best LMS out there. Instructure developed Canvas from the ground up as an educational platform. It includes a constantly growing list of tools specifically designed for effective teaching and learning. These tools provide you with a great deal of freedom in how you structure a course, deliver content, and both interact with and assess your learners.

The screenshot displays the Canvas LMS interface for a course named 'ED170'. The top navigation bar includes the Canvas logo, user name 'Yolanda Baldwin', and links for 'Inbox', 'Settings', 'Logout', and 'Help'. Below this, a secondary navigation bar shows 'Courses & Groups', 'Grades', and 'Calendar'. The left sidebar contains a list of course tools: Home, Announcements, Assignments (highlighted with a blue circle and the number 17), Discussions, Grades, People, Pages, Files, Syllabus, Quizzes, Modules, Conferences, and Collaborations. The main content area is titled 'Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy' and shows assignment details: 'Due Yesterday by 6:21pm', 'Points 20', 'Submitting a text entry box or a file upload', 'File Types pdf, doc, docx, rtf, and txt', and 'Available until Sep 7 at 2:59am'. The assignment description states: 'Using this week's video and reading as guides, create a draft of your own teaching philosophy. The draft will provide a foundation for your personal teaching goals and methods as we explore transformative learning. Since developing a carefully thought out statement may take weeks, be assured that I don't expect this to be a complete and polished document. As we cover different theories of transformative learning during the term, we'll compare their themes to your own teaching philosophy ideas that you list here. Our discussions and reflections on the theories may help you clarify and better express your answers to these questions. At the end of the term, we'll revisit your teaching philosophy to see how our journey has influenced how you see your role as a teacher.' Below the description is a 'Reflection Rubric' table.

Reflection Rubric					Pts
Criteria	Ratings				
Spelling and Grammar	Reflection has no spelling and/or grammar errors. 3 pts	Reflection has 1 or 2 spelling and/or grammar errors. 2 pts	Reflection has 3 or 4 spelling and/or grammar errors. 1 pts	Reflections has 5 or more spelling and/or grammar errors. 0 pts	3 pts

On the right side of the interface, a 'Submission' box indicates the assignment is 'Turned In!' on 'May 3 at 5:56pm'. It includes links for 'Submission Details Download' and 'Week 1 Reflection Yolanda Baldwin.docx'. The grade is listed as 'A- (20 pts possible)'. A 'Comments' section shows a message from 'Matt Stoltenwerk, May 2 at 9:23pm' praising the reflection. At the bottom of this box is a 'Re-submit Assignment' button.

*Assignment page example.*

The power of Canvas continues to expand through its integration with popular third-party external web tools from Twitter to YouTube to Dropbox. Canvas' developers at Instructure take great pride in creating a thoroughly modern platform, and they're continually building on and refining it with the input of Canvas' tens of thousands of users.

Although it's already relatively easy to learn how to use Canvas' tools, it also has a robust support system with clear tutorials on just about every tool and feature, support staff to help answer questions and solve

problems, and an active user community. If you're going to teach online, Canvas is an outstanding platform for doing it.

## The Bad News

I say you have my sympathies because all this power and flexibility can make completing a first Canvas course an overwhelming experience. Starting something new often brings excitement for new opportunities, but also anxiety over the uncertainty of how to proceed.

Perhaps you've already received some initial Canvas training from your school. You participated in workshops or webinars introducing Canvas' many tools, but it was just too much information to absorb. You just don't know where to start.

Maybe your school developed its own web-based training resources with links to Canvas' many tutorials. The tutorials provide instructions on specific tasks, but you can't see how all these tools might fit together to create the learning experience you want to deliver to your students.

Perhaps you're short on time and you need to get your first course up and running quickly. You just don't have the time or the energy to invest in a full-length Canvas training program. You just want to implement what works now, and invest in more advanced course development when you have time later.

Or maybe you're already using Canvas in your courses, but it's just not working. Your students can't find things in the course or they're confused about what's due when. You get a lot of emails from students asking for clarification about your expectations on assignments. Students say they didn't turn in work because they didn't know it was due.

If any of these situations apply to you, I know I can help.

## The Solution

Whether you're completely new to Canvas or are a returning user that needs some guidance, what you need is a simple structure for your first Canvas course. The course should use minimal tools and a simple navigation structure that make it quick and easy for you develop and conduct the course. Once you get more comfortable with Canvas, you can then explore more advanced tools for your future courses.

I want to be clear that, if created the right way, building a course with simple tools and a simple structure can be just as effective as a more complex course. In fact, I argue that a simple course can be even more effective than a complex one; it focuses your energy and the students' energy on the content of the course and your interactions with one another, not on trying to figure out all of the features' bells and whistles. What's important is that you use these simple tools to effectively create the learning experience you want for the course.

## How this Book Will Help

By the end of the book, you'll have created a high-quality, basic first Canvas course that has all of the essential functions of more complex courses. You'll also have the necessary knowledge to conduct the course, including interacting with and assessing your students.

Rest assured that this book will lead you step-by step through the necessary tasks to build a course and run it with as gentle a learning curve as possible. Once you've completed your first course, you'll have the foundation for incorporating more advanced activities into future courses.

## **The Types of Courses this Book Addresses**

I wrote this book for teachers who will be directly engaging students in online courses that are conducted during specific academic terms, such as a semester. It is not designed to address self-paced courses which involve little or no interaction from the teacher. Self-paced courses can be engaging and effective, but a good self-paced course takes a *lot* of design work to be successful. You can certainly create self-paced courses in Canvas, but that is the subject of another book.

### **If You're New to Online Teaching**

If you're completely new to LMSs, be assured that this book covers all the basics of how to create and interact in Canvas, but won't overwhelm you with everything Canvas has under the hood. I do provide, however, leads to these more advanced features and tools that you may want to incorporate into future courses as you become more comfortable.

Be mindful that as you create an online course, you're not just putting a face-to-face course online. Your presentation of content will be different. Your interactions with your students will be different. Without the visual and verbal cues of interacting in the classroom, you need to be much more thorough and intentional about procedures and expectations. On the other hand, the online environment provides many great opportunities for you to interact with your students in ways not possible within the constraints of the classroom.

### **If You're Coming from Another LMS**

If you're coming from another LMS, you have a head start because you already have a good idea of the online content of your course. I encourage you, however, to look with fresh eyes how your students will interact with that content, with you, and with each other. Like I said, Canvas provides a lot of flexibility in how you build your course.

Canvas does have a tool for importing course content from other LMSs to a Canvas course. But Canvas offers you so many unique opportunities to create an engaging course that other LMSs cannot, so I highly recommend that you build your Canvas course from the ground up. That way, you're not tempted to mimic the structure of your old course.

## **What this Book Doesn't Cover**

This is not a complete reference on how to use Canvas. It's designed to show you how to use the tools needed to create a solid, basic course. Once you're done with this book, however, you'll have enough of a foundation to use Instructure's own Canvas tutorials to create even more robust future courses.

Since I'm assuming that you're using a school-based Canvas account, I'm going to focus only on the tools that a school would provide permissions for you to use. This book will not cover features handled by your school, such as creating course shells or enrolling students.

Although this guide adheres to online course design principles, it's not a comprehensive guide to effective online course design. That book would take much more space and I've decided to focus my efforts on making a guide just to the essentials of an effective Canvas course. My Canvas LMS Tips website at [canvaslms tips.com](http://canvaslms tips.com) includes strategies for effectively incorporating Canvas into your curriculum. I encourage you to browse the site for ideas on making your courses even more engaging and meaningful for students.

I'm also creating new books and courses that cover more advanced Canvas skills. You can join my mailing list on the Canvas LMS Tips website to receive updates and special discounts on new releases.

## What Is an LMS?

Canvas is an example of a learning management system, or LMS. LMSs are single-package solutions for managing learner access to courses. Features include tools for hosting online course content, facilitating communication among teachers and learners, and managing grades.

## How Is Canvas Different?

Canvas *does* allow you to deliver the same content that you may already have in other LMSs, but Canvas includes a lot of powerful tools *not* included in these LMSs. These tools provide you with a lot of great opportunities to expand the way you deliver content and interact with your students. Canvas is also well known for being easy to use, with an intuitive interface that allows you to build and conduct courses with minimal guided instruction.

Canvas is specifically designed to allow you build courses that let your students engage more fully with the content *and* with each other. You can deliver your course content using a combination of text, document files, images, PowerPoints, and even uploaded or recorded audio and video.

## Week 2: Transformative Learning Theory (8/31-9/6)

This week, we'll explore the development of transformative learning theory and its contribution to adult learning. As the earliest theory in the field, it's the foundation upon which all other transformative learning approaches are based or contrasted against. We'll use the theory to compare with later theories of transformative learning by other educators in the coming weeks.

1. Watch "Mezirow's Legacy: The Evolution and Impact of Transformative Learning." It's a rich panel presentation of the evolution of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory from its origins to the present. Note the main points of each of the speakers. Please complete this viewing by Wednesday.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=409Gu8M2Jsk>



2. Read "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice" @

### Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice


Jack Mezirow

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal

*Content page example with video thumbnail and embedded document.*


Your students can view all these formats directly in Canvas. They can also use *all* these same media to express themselves in course activities and assignment submissions.

You and your students can interact with each other using tools like discussion forums, collaborative documents, messaging, chat, and even video conferencing.

**Yolanda Baldwin**  
1:37pm


Looking back through all my years in grade school and college, I remember a lot of teachers that had a positive impact on me. I think the one teacher that has had the most influence on my own teaching style was my high school senior English teacher, Mrs. Bryant. She was the first teacher I recall who truly challenged us to...

👤 Reply

**Steve Hart**  
3:00pm

Wow, Yolanda! Mrs. Bryant sounds like a great teacher. I'm sure that she was a huge influence. Your description of her ways of getting you to see the world from other people's perspectives sounds like something all teachers should strive for, no matter what subject they're teaching. You wouldn't think that there's room for that in a math class, but I've found that...

👤 Reply

**Johnny Nunez**  
3:13pm

Good point, Steve. Is there any chance you can you share those resources you found on collaborative math groups? I'd love to try them in my own classes.

👤 Reply

*Discussion topic example.*

You can also create assignments in Canvas to track student progress and allow students to submit their work online. You can then give your students feedback on the assignments in *multiple* ways, including



video comments and online marked-up versions of student submissions.

The screenshot displays the SpeedGrader interface for a student submission. At the top, the header shows the user 'Yolanda Baldwin', 'Student 1 of 5', and the assignment title 'Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy (ED170)' with a due date of 'May 3 at 3:21pm'. The main content area shows a document titled 'Reflection: My Teaching Philosophy' with the following text: 'I strongly believe that we are all put on the earth for a reason. We need to live consciously in order to find out what it is each one of us is here to do. Our parents are the primary people who help us find our way, but teachers need to play a major role, too. As a teacher, my goal is to find the gifts and talents that lie within each learner in my class, and to allow those gifts to shine through as best as possible within my classroom. As much as I believe that the curriculum my school has charged me to teach is important, I feel it is at least as important for my students to know that they have something to offer to the conversation, no matter their previous experience in the subject. Some of the best insights I have gained about my teaching have come from students who share the course content from a refreshingly unique perspective.' The text is marked with yellow highlights. On the right side of the document, there are two yellow comment boxes from 'Matt Stollenwerk': 'Yes! The methods you describe in this reflection clearly convey this goal.' and 'It's'. The right-hand sidebar contains a 'Submitted' section with the date 'May 3 at 2:56pm' and a link to 'Submitted Files'. Below that is an 'Assessment' section showing a grade of 'A-' (18 / 20). At the bottom of the sidebar is an 'Assignment Comments' section with an 'Add a Comment' button and a text area containing a comment from 'Yolanda, I thoroughly enjoyed reading your reflection. You convey a passion for teaching that is so needed in today's world! Your students are fortunate to have you. I'd love to hear more about...'. There are also 'Attach' and 'Submit Comment' buttons at the bottom of the sidebar.

*SpeedGrader with teacher-annotated student submission.*

As you go through this guide, I'd like you to avoid thinking about how you can get your course content to fit into Canvas. Instead, I invite you to imagine what kind of online learning experience *you* want for your students, then explore the Canvas features that can help you bring *that* vision to life.

## My Approach

The truth I've discovered about online learning is that, no matter what wonderful activities or advanced technologies an LMS can provide for your course, the course cannot be successful without meeting three basic criteria:

- make it easy for students to figure out where they are in the course,
- make clear what students are to do next, and
- let students know where they can go for help.

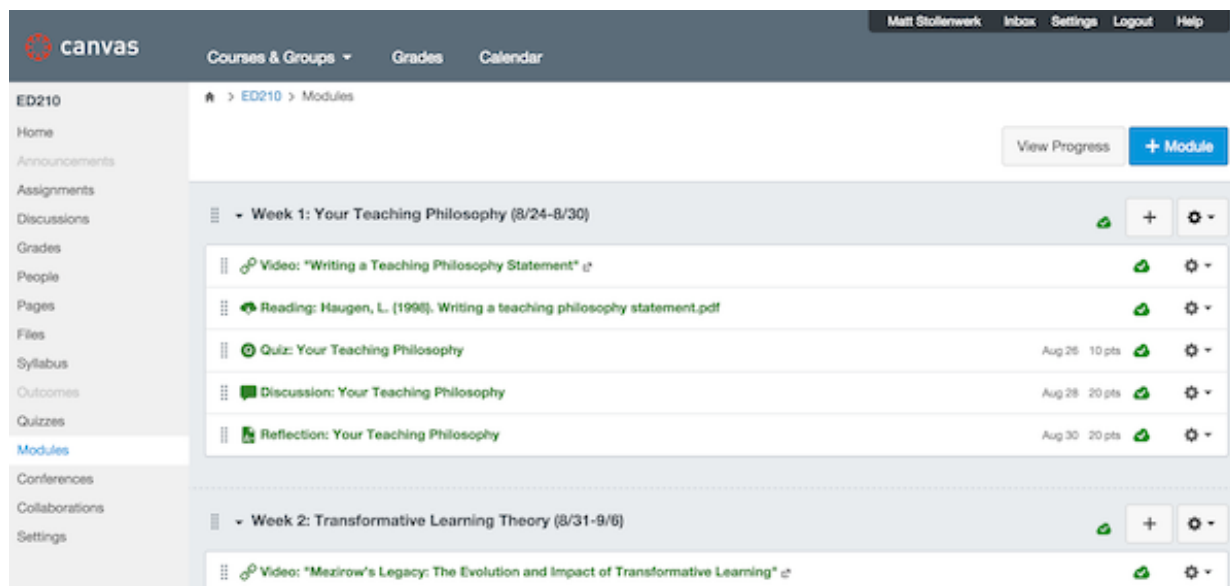
Often, when we add too many tools and toys to our course and ways to navigate the course, students can easily get lost among all the stuff.

Courses that are not designed with a plan for student navigation can be frustrating for both the students and the teacher. Students will inundate the teacher with lots of questions. There will be misunderstandings about how to proceed and what is due when. Students' confidence in being successful in the course will falter.

The more complicated the course design, the more challenging it is to have clarity about sequence. So, my solution is to make the course navigation as simple as possible. How? Fit the course on a single page—the syllabus, to be exact.

# Using the Syllabus as the Hub of Your Course

If you've already seen other Canvas courses, you'll notice that they often organize content into *modules*. Modules are a relatively quick way to build a course, but they're more complex than the single-page solution and, in my opinion, they're not any more effective.



*Modules page.*

Modules mimic the folder system of a computer desktop, a hierarchical structure that many teachers and students are already familiar with. Unfortunately, this metaphor implies that students have to make decisions about the sequence of their learning, creating an unnecessary possibility of confusion. If you lead a course with a cohort of students through an academic term, the learning experience is actually linear. You want a visual metaphor that reinforces this.

Modules also provide no context for the content within them. There's no place to insert more information about the module or the items contained within it. Like a computer folder, all you see is the name of the item. Students need to actually open items within modules to understand what they are and how they fit within the learning.

Canvas gives you freedom in how to build your course, including how it's structured. The navigation structure I propose is to make your syllabus document the hub of your course, with links directly to each activity. That way, the syllabus puts students only one click away from any activity they need to access in the course. You need to create a syllabus for the course anyway. Why not make two tasks into one and build your Canvas course directly from the syllabus?

## Course Syllabus

### ED210: Teaching for Transformation

Fall 2015  
Matt Stollenwerk  
[email address]

#### Course Schedule

##### Week 1: Your Teaching Philosophy (8/24-8/30)

This week, we'll take some time to get to know each other through our personal experiences with teaching and learning, then we'll each draft our own personal teaching philosophy. As we explore different theories of transformative learning during the term, we'll assess how their themes may help us to clarify and express our own teaching philosophies in our work.

1. Watch "Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement" from Iowa State University. The video describes the purpose of writing a teaching philosophy and how to approach writing your own. Note the main points of the video. Please complete this viewing by Wednesday.

*Syllabus excerpt with detailed course schedule.*

There are several advantages to using the syllabus as your primary course navigation tool.

- Having all the course content accessible directly from one document makes it much easier for students to locate what they need. They won't have to figure out which page contains the link to the next activity.
- If you link all your course content directly from the syllabus, students will be more likely to read the syllabus because that's the only place where they can access all the information they need.
- The syllabus lets you include an overview with each unit and activity that describes how the activities fit in the context of the larger course. The full description of the procedure and expectations of each individual activity can then live on each individual activity page.
- Students can print or download the syllabus page for offline use, confident that they have all the course information captured.

One challenge with making the syllabus the sole location for course content is that it can get pretty long. It's therefore important to format the document so that it's well-organized, readable, and consistent, with clear headings for each section. I'll cover formatting in [Chapter 7](#).

## When Not to Use the Syllabus as the Hub

Although the syllabus-based navigation method is an excellent strategy for organizing course elements, there are times that a module-based navigation system is more appropriate for your course. You might need to lock an entire unit of content from student access until a certain date, force students to proceed in a sequence, or prevent students from opening an item until they complete a prerequisite item. In these cases, structuring content in modules is the way to go. Chapter 7 includes more information and resources for creating modules.

## How We'll Get There

I've designed this book to lead you through the process of creating your first course. Here's a general sequence of events.

**Get an overview of Canvas.** I'd like to provide you first with an idea of what's possible with Canvas, and what type of experience your students can have. [Chapter 2](#) provides you with a summary of how Canvas works, its features, and its tools. Hopefully, this will provide you with some vision of what you want your learners to get out of their experience with you.

**Identify your course goals, outcomes, and activities.** We'll start your course design process in [Chapter 3](#) by identifying your course learning goals and outcomes, then list all the assigned activities you plan to have in your course that help meet those outcomes. You'll then arrange these activities in the order in which you want your learners to begin them and group them by learning unit.

**Develop the activities for your course.** In [Chapter 4](#), you'll proceed to create each of the course activities in Canvas itself. I'll walk you through how to upload content, create assignments, start discussion topics, and develop quizzes and surveys. I'll also cover the many useful options Canvas provides for each activity that you may find useful.

**Adjust your user and course settings.** In [Chapter 5](#), you'll personalize your user account by adding a profile picture and setting how you want to be notified of new course activity. [Chapter 6](#) shows you how to set course options that apply to the entire course such as the course start and end dates and course grading scheme.

**Create the course syllabus.** [Chapter 7](#) leads you through the process of developing your syllabus as the navigation hub of your course. It also details content to include in the syllabus to ensure that students are informed of your expectations of them as well as what they should expect from you. There's a complete sample course syllabus included in the Appendix.

**Copy your course content.** In [Chapter 8](#), we'll go over how you can copy your course content to another course, share content with colleagues, and back up content as an archive.

**Run your course.** [Chapter 9](#) covers the activities you'll perform during the course term, including communicating with your learners as a group or individually, and participating in group discussions. You'll also learn how to use Canvas' SpeedGrader and Gradebook tools to grade your learners' work, provide comments, and track their progress.

In [Chapter 10](#), I provide a list of online resources for furthering your Canvas education.

## About Me

I've been a teacher my entire professional career of over 20 years. I've taught at many different levels, including middle school, high school, graduate school, and community education. My background in media and educational technology have provided me with an invaluable foundation for understanding and applying effective teaching and learning practices in any context, both online and face to face.

I've developed and taught curricula in such diverse areas as instructional media, biological and physical science, computer applications and programming, search and rescue, adolescent development, and religious studies.

As a university-level instructional designer, I worked extensively with both students and teachers in the Canvas environment. I've consulted in the development of countless Canvas courses. I've also created

and implemented many of my own online courses using Canvas and other platforms.

I deeply understand the opportunities and challenges that online teaching and learning present, as well as the strategies for creating effective and meaningful online educational experiences. This book is an opportunity for me to share with you what I've learned from my experience as an educator.

my own site at [canvaslms tips.com](https://canvaslms tips.com) is an additional resource that can be especially valuable for learning Canvas. In it, I continue to create a growing list of tips, techniques, and strategies for creating an effective learning experience in Canvas. I encourage you to check it out. While you're there, be sure to subscribe to the mailing list so you can stay up to date on how you can make your online courses shine using Canvas.

My site also includes the companion online course for this book—also called “Canvas LMS Essentials”—that provides video tutorials of the activities described in this book. I think you'll find it an excellent instructional complement to the information provided here.

My hope is that the resources I offer will provide you with the skills and confidence you need to create the online learning experience you've always wanted for your learners.

So, if you're ready, here we go!

## **Advanced Features**

During the course of this book, I'll touch on nearly every feature and tool in Canvas, but I'll cover only the essential elements in depth. That way, you can get your course up to speed with a minimum of superfluous training.

Along the way, however, I've added sidebars like this one that provide a summary of the more advanced Canvas tools you may want to consider using in your course. I'll describe their role in Canvas and possible uses, then provide links to the appropriate tutorials for the tools in the Canvas Guides.

Once you're comfortable with the basics, feel free to add the tools that you feel may be helpful in your teaching and your students' learning.

# Chapter 2: An Overview of Canvas

Although we won't be using Canvas to build your course until after you've completed planning the course activities in Chapter 3, let's explore Canvas now so that you can get an idea of what it's capable of and what your students will experience. As we go through this chapter, don't worry about trying to figure out which tools to use in your course yet. We'll get to that later.

So, let's get started. The first thing you need to do, of course, is to log into Canvas.

## Technical Recommendations

Instructure does its best to make Canvas compatible with as wide a range of computer systems and hardware as possible, even older ones. But they do need to balance this compatibility with modern web technologies that make Canvas such a flexible and easy-to-use LMS. Canvas, therefore, requires a minimum level of technology for you to ensure the best experience.

### Computer

Generally, any computer manufactured in the past five years will have the necessary hardware to handle Canvas. The computer should have at least a 2GHz processor and 1GB RAM. It should be running on Windows XP with Service Package 3 or newer, or Mac OS 10.6 or newer. If you're using Linux, such as on a Chromebook, make sure you're running on the current version of ChromeOS. You can also use an iPad, iPhone, or Android device to access Canvas.

### Internet Connection

Your Internet connection should have a bandwidth of at least 512kbs. The lowest level of DSL or cable Internet service is at least this good. Check with your Internet provider to confirm your speed. You can test your actual Internet upload and download speeds by going to [speedtest.net](http://speedtest.net) and selecting the "Begin Test" button. A faster connection is always better, especially if you plan to upload a lot of materials to your course.

### Web Browser

Canvas runs on all of the more recent versions of most modern web browsers including Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Internet Explorer, and Respondus Lockdown Browser. Instructure recommends you use the most recent version. Also make sure that you have the newest versions of the browser's Flash and Java plug-ins. By default, most web browsers automatically update to the most recent version, but your browser may have its preferences set not to do so for some reason.

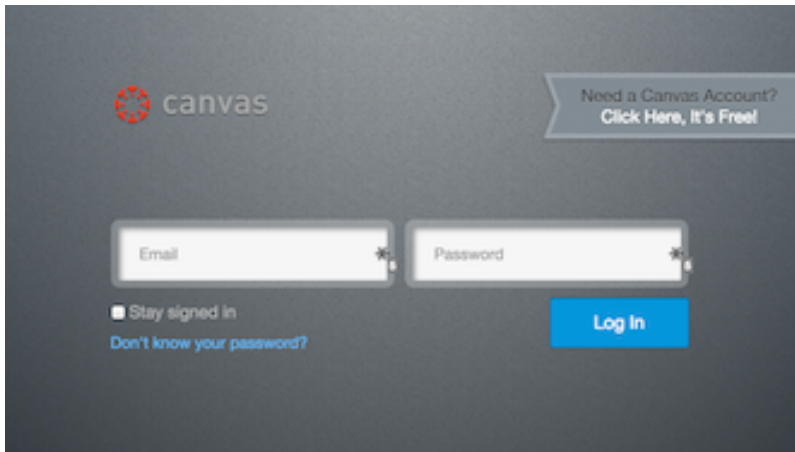
The web browser version of Canvas is designed for a computer screen size as small as an average netbook. If you want to use your mobile device to access Canvas, you *can* use the device's web browser, but Instructure recommends you use the Canvas mobile app for best results. We'll cover mobile devices later in this chapter.

You can also check the Canvas Guides to see if there are any new minimum recommendations.

[Canvas Guides: What are the basic computer Specifications for Canvas?](#)

## Logging In

To log in, go to your school's Canvas login page. It will probably have the URL "[yourschool].instructure.com." That's instruct-u-r-e dot com. Your school's homepage probably has a link to the login page as well. If you're not sure of the URL, contact your school's technology help desk.

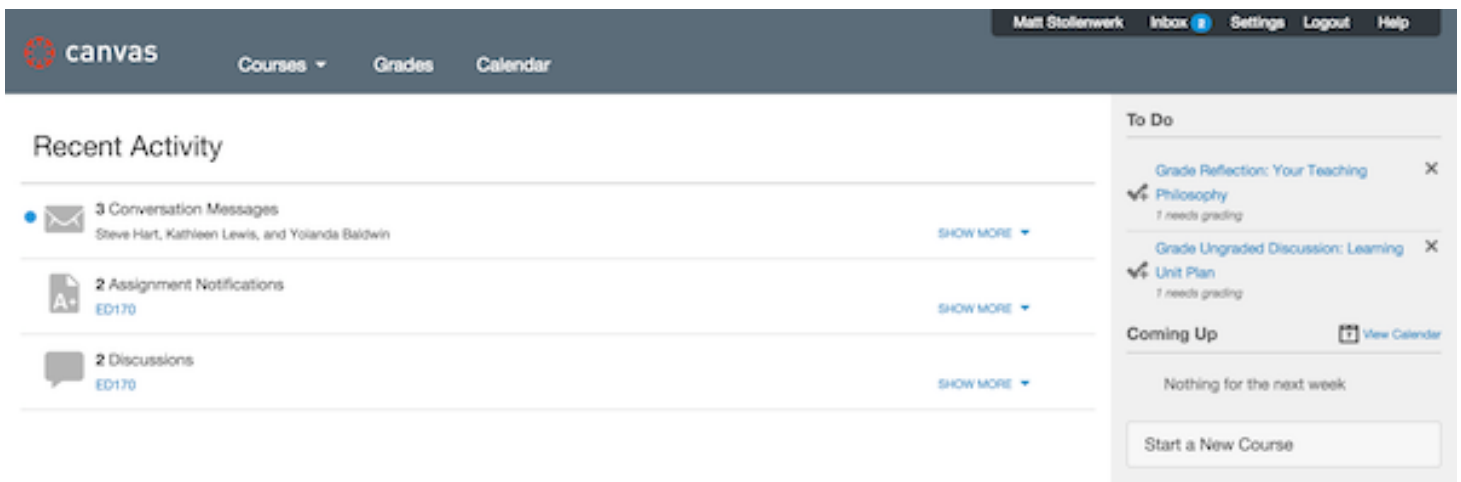


*Login page. Your school's login page will include the school's branding.*

Once you see your school's Canvas login page, enter the email address for your Canvas account and password. The email address is usually your school email address. The password is usually your school email password.

You can choose to stay signed in on your current computer if you're using a computer that only you have access to. Just select the "Stay signed in" option.

When you've successfully logged in, the first thing you'll see is the Dashboard for your user account. You'll also see your school logo and links in a bar at the top of the page.

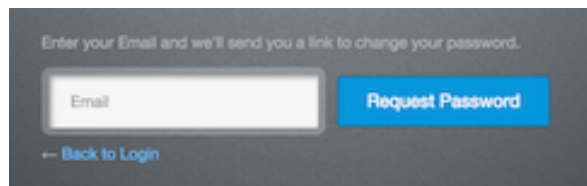


*The Dashboard.*



If you receive an error message when trying to log in, check that you're using the right login URL, email address, and password, then try again. If you're still unable to get in, contact your school's help desk.

If you don't recall your Canvas password, a "Don't know your password" link may be visible on the login screen that allows you to request a new password. It may or may not work, depending on your school's arrangement with Instructure.



*If you select the "Don't know your password" link, the forgot password prompt appears.*

If, after submitting a password request, you don't receive an email from Instructure within an hour, check your email client's Spam folder. If the message wasn't sent there, contact your school's help desk for help.

## **Activity: Logging Into Canvas**

If you haven't already, go ahead and log into your Canvas account so you can follow along as I describe different features. I'll even ask you to do some important stuff along the way.

### **Advanced: Access Canvas Using Your Mobile Device**

Although you *can* log into the Canvas website using your mobile device's web browser, the site is not optimized for use on a mobile device. It can be a very cumbersome experience.

As an alternative, Canvas has an app for both Android and iOS devices that is especially designed for you to perform Canvas tasks on your iPhone, iPad, or Android device. The app's features focus primarily on Canvas' communication tools, including Announcements, Conversations, Discussions, and Assignments. Instructure continues to add features to the app—especially for tablets—that approach the functionality of the desktop version.

Although you probably don't want to be in touch with your class all day, accessing Canvas on your mobile device conveniently allows you to follow up on student communications wherever and whenever you want.

As of this writing, your device needs to be running at least iOS 7 or Android 2.3 to use the app. You can check the Canvas Guides to see if the requirement has since changed.

[Canvas Guides: What are the basic computer Specifications for Canvas?](#)

The Canvas Guides have several tutorials for installing the Canvas app and performing tasks on a mobile device. See the *Mobile - Canvas by Instructure* category to search the tutorials.

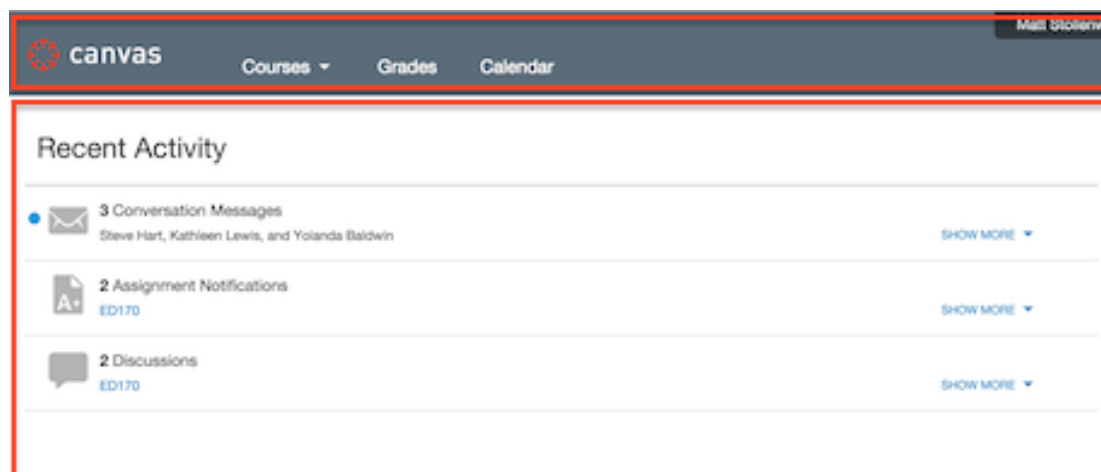
[Canvas Guides: Mobile - Canvas by Instructure](#)



# Global Tools

When you first log into your school's Canvas account, you'll be greeted by the Canvas Dashboard.

Actually, the Canvas page is split into two parts. The bar at the top of the page with the school's Canvas logo on the left is *Global Navigation*. The content area below Global Navigation displays the *Dashboard*.



*Global Navigation (above) and the Dashboard (below) highlighted.*

**Note:** All of the screenshots in this book were created using a Free for Teachers Canvas account. My Global Navigation and some of the tools available to me will be different from yours, depending on how your school has configured Canvas. I'll let you know throughout this book when a tool or activity I describe may be different in your account.

## Global Navigation

Let's look at Global Navigation first. As the name suggests, the links in this bar are available to you no matter where you are in your Canvas account. They also behave the same way no matter where you are in your account.



*Global Navigation links.*

The Global Navigation links let you access information in any of the courses you're teaching. For example, the **Courses** menu allows you to see what courses you have access to and lets you open any one of them. The **Grades** link accesses student grades for all of your courses so you can view and update them. The **Calendar** link opens a Calendar that shows events and assignments for all of your courses. Your school may have additional links here as well. Students will see the same links in Global Navigation that you see, though some of the behaviors will be different.

The *Help Corner* in the upper-right corner of the page contains links to resources that are independent of any courses. The link with your name opens your user profile page, where you can add personal information about yourself to share with others. The **Inbox** link sends you to your messaging inbox, where you can have conversations with your students like email. The **Settings** link sends you to your personal account settings. The **Help** link sends you to Instructure’s support tools.



*The Help Corner in the upper right corner of the page.*

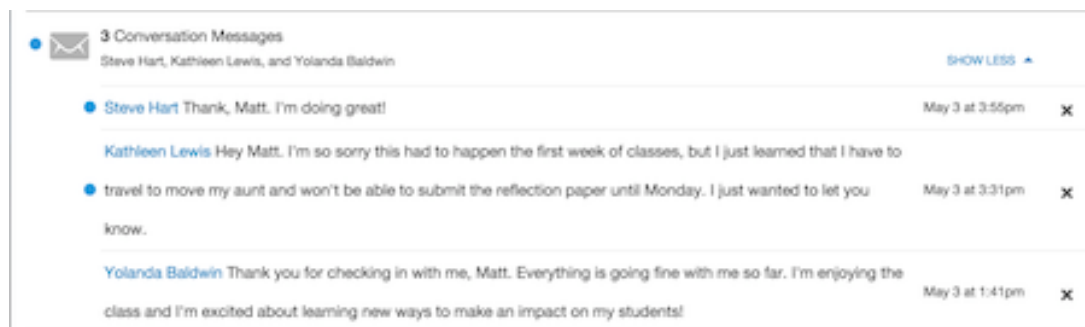
I’ll cover all of the tools in Global Navigation in more detail throughout this book.

## The Dashboard

Now, let’s look at the Dashboard, which appears in the content area below Global Navigation when you log in. The Dashboard provides a summary of what’s going on in all of your courses, so you don’t have to dig through all of your courses to find out what you need to attend to.

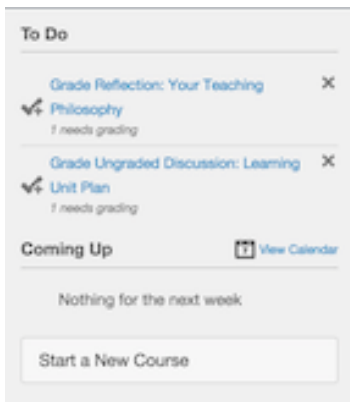
The left side of the Dashboard displays notifications of activities that have occurred in your courses over the past four weeks such as announcements, conversation messages, assignment submissions, and discussion posts. A blue dot indicates an activity type that contains an item that you have not yet read.

The *SHOW MORE* link on the right side of each row lets you expand any of the recent activity sections to view the notifications. Select the name of the activity to go directly to that activity. You can remove a notification by clicking the “x” icon. The *SHOW LESS* link collapses the list.



*Recent Conversation Messages expanded using SHOW MORE link.*

The sidebar on the right side of the Dashboard lists what needs to be done next in all of your courses. The **To Do** section contains notifications of assignments that need to be graded. Clicking the “x” icon removes a notification. **Coming Up** shows Calendar events coming in the next seven days. Clicking on the event opens your Calendar to the date of the event.



*The Dashboard's right sidebar.*

Like Global Navigation, students will see the same Dashboard that you do when they log into Canvas. They will *also* see notifications of assignments coming due or past due in their *To Do* lists, as well as a *Recent Feedback* section that notifies them of any of their assignments you have graded.

You can return to the Dashboard from wherever you are in Canvas by selecting the logo in Global Navigation, at the top-left corner of the page. Like Global Navigation, I'll cover all of the Dashboard tools more in-depth throughout this book.

## Activity: Navigating the Dashboard

Before moving on, go to your Canvas account and take some time to explore the links in the Global Navigation menu. Select the logo in the top-left corner to get back to the Dashboard.

If you have any recent activity, go ahead and open the recent items. You can then return to the Dashboard by selecting the logo.

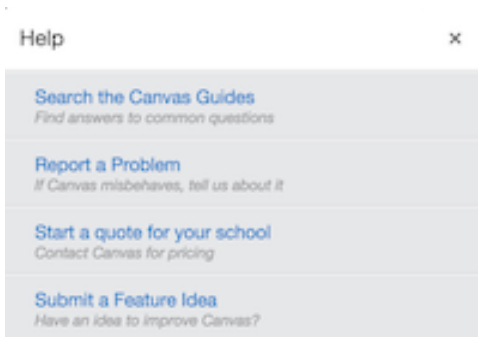
**Note:** Some of the tools and features described in this book may not be enabled for teachers by your school. If a tool or feature you want to explore isn't working, ask your school's Canvas administrator if they can activate it for you.

## Canvas Help

I cannot understate the usefulness of Canvas' support tools. They provide a rich variety of ways for you to get a Canvas-related question answered or a problem solved. When in need, I strongly encourage you to go to Canvas Help first.

You can access Canvas support using the **Help** link in the Help Corner. If Help is not visible in the Help Corner, your school may have a custom Canvas support system. Ask your school's Canvas administrator.

The Help link brings up a window with several choices.

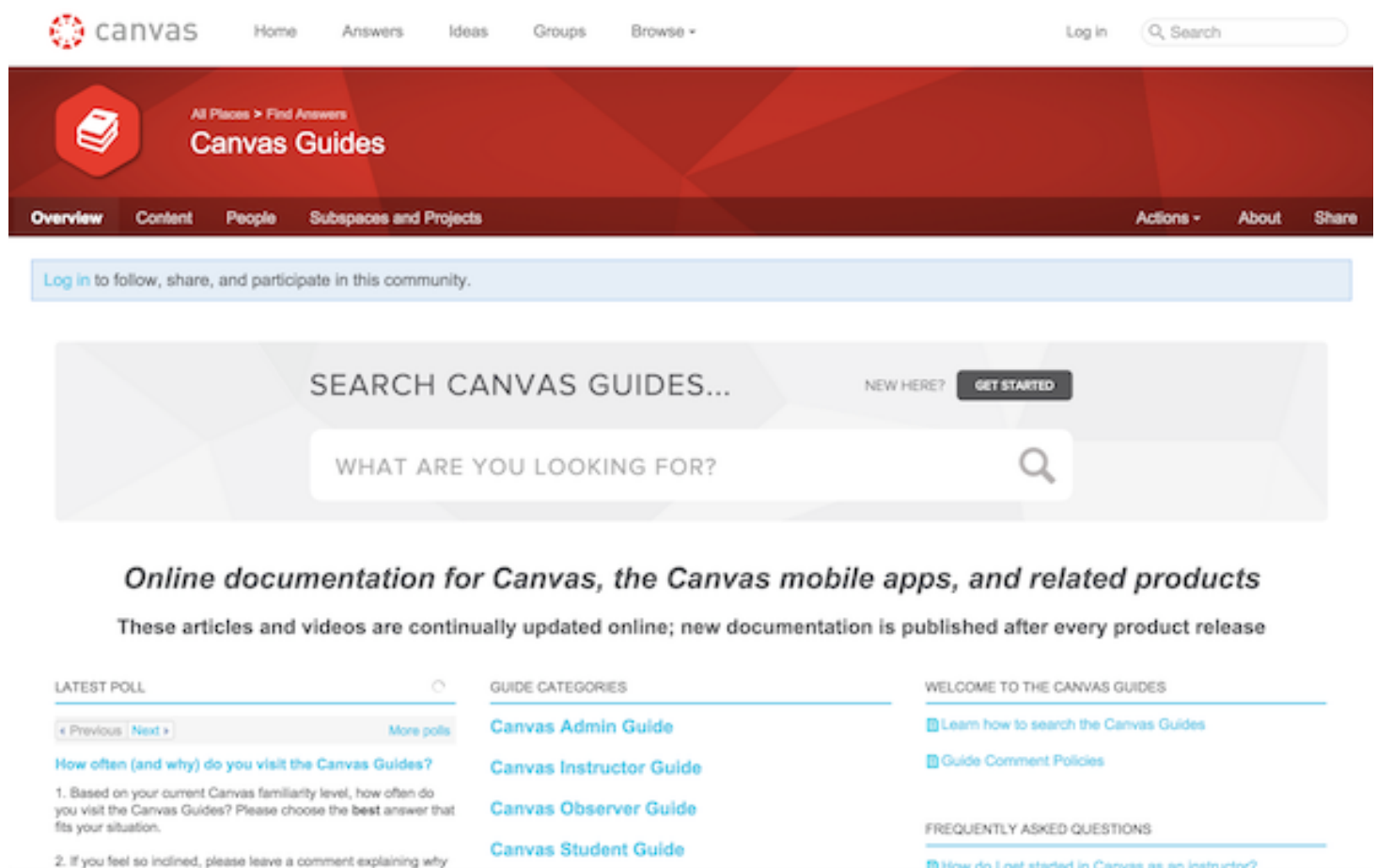


*The Help window.*

## The Canvas Guides

The **Search the Canvas Guides** link takes you to the *Canvas Guides*. These guides are a great resource for learning how to use Canvas' tools. The tutorials are easy to follow, with lots of pictures to help you locate items on the screen. You can access the guides directly at <https://community.canvaslms.com/community/answers/guides>.

The easiest way to locate a tutorial is to do a search using keywords. Just type the words into the large **What are you looking for?** field.



*The Canvas Guides main page.*

As an example, if I want to remember how to add a picture to my personal profile, I could enter the key words “add profile picture” into the filter box. It’s helpful to know the Canvas term for what you’re looking to do.

You can also use the Canvas Guides tutorials to learn more about what you can do with a specific Canvas tool or feature. As of this writing, the Canvas Guides no longer has an index of tutorials listed by tool, so I’ve recreated and updated the index of tutorials for instructors on the Canvas LMS Tips website.

## Canvas Instructor Guide Tutorials

Introduction	Course Navigation	Outcomes
Analytics	Course Setup Checklist	Pages
Announcements	Course Statistics	People
Assignments	Course Status	Profile & User Settings
Attendance (Roll Call)	Discussions	Quizzes
Calendar	ePortfolios	Rich Content Editor
Chat	External Apps (LTI)	Rubrics
Collaborations	Files	Settings
Commons	Global Navigation	Speedgrader
Computer Specifications	Grades	Syllabus
Conferences	Groups	User Dashboard
Conversations	Help Corner	Web Services
Course Home Page	Modules	
Course Import Tool	Notification Preferences	

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*The Canvas Instructor Guide Tutorials page on the Canvas LMS Tips website.*

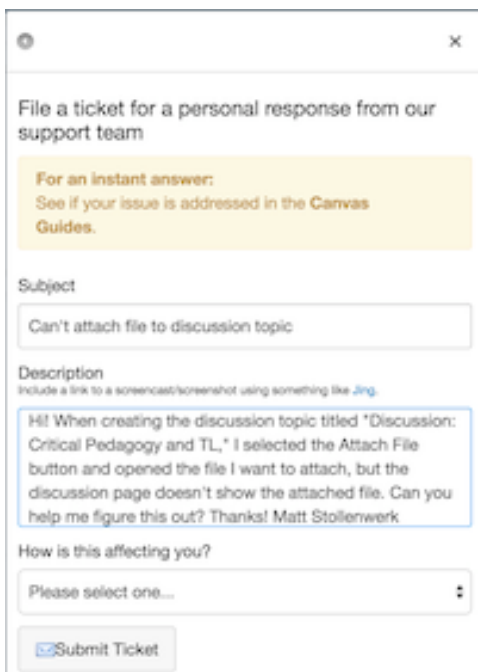
To learn more about a tool, just select the tool from the list at the top of the page, then select the tutorials you want to view from the list of tutorials that appears.

You’ll notice that I have a liberal number of links to Canvas Guides tutorials throughout this book. The Canvas Guides are an excellent resource that I’d like you to get a lot of exposure to as you create your first courses using this book. As you begin stretching your skills in the future, you’ll be referring to the Canvas Guides a lot, so the more first-hand experience you have knowing how it works and what it has to offer, the more confident you’ll be at creating your own courses.

Another reason for the Canvas Guides links is that Instructure updates Canvas’ tools often. This is a good thing, but it makes every third-party tutorial obsolete almost as soon as it’s published. Linking to the constantly-updated Canvas Guides tutorials ensures that you’re getting the most current instructions for Canvas’ many wonderful tools.

## Reporting a Problem

The **Report a Problem** link in the Help window lets you send a problem you’re having with Canvas directly to Instructure’s Canvas Support Team. It includes fields for a subject and description, and a dropdown menu to specify the priority of the problem.

A screenshot of a web form titled "File a ticket for a personal response from our support team". The form includes a yellow tip box with the text "For an instant answer: See if your issue is addressed in the Canvas Guides." Below this is a "Subject" field containing the text "Can't attach file to discussion topic". The "Description" field contains a message from Matt Stollenwerk about a file attachment issue. At the bottom, there is a dropdown menu for "How is this affecting you?" and a "Submit Ticket" button.

File a ticket for a personal response from our support team

For an instant answer:  
See if your issue is addressed in the Canvas Guides.

Subject

Can't attach file to discussion topic

Description

Include a link to a screencast/screenshot using something like Jimg.

Hi! When creating the discussion topic titled "Discussion: Critical Pedagogy and TL," I selected the Attach File button and opened the file I want to attach, but the discussion page doesn't show the attached file. Can you help me figure this out? Thanks! Matt Stollenwerk

How is this affecting you?

Please select one...

Submit Ticket

*Report a Problem window.*

When reporting a problem, be sure to be as specific as possible about what you're trying to do, the events that led to the problem, and a description of the problem (including any error text). It's also helpful to include the URL of the page where you're encountering the problem. Keep the subject brief, yet specific.

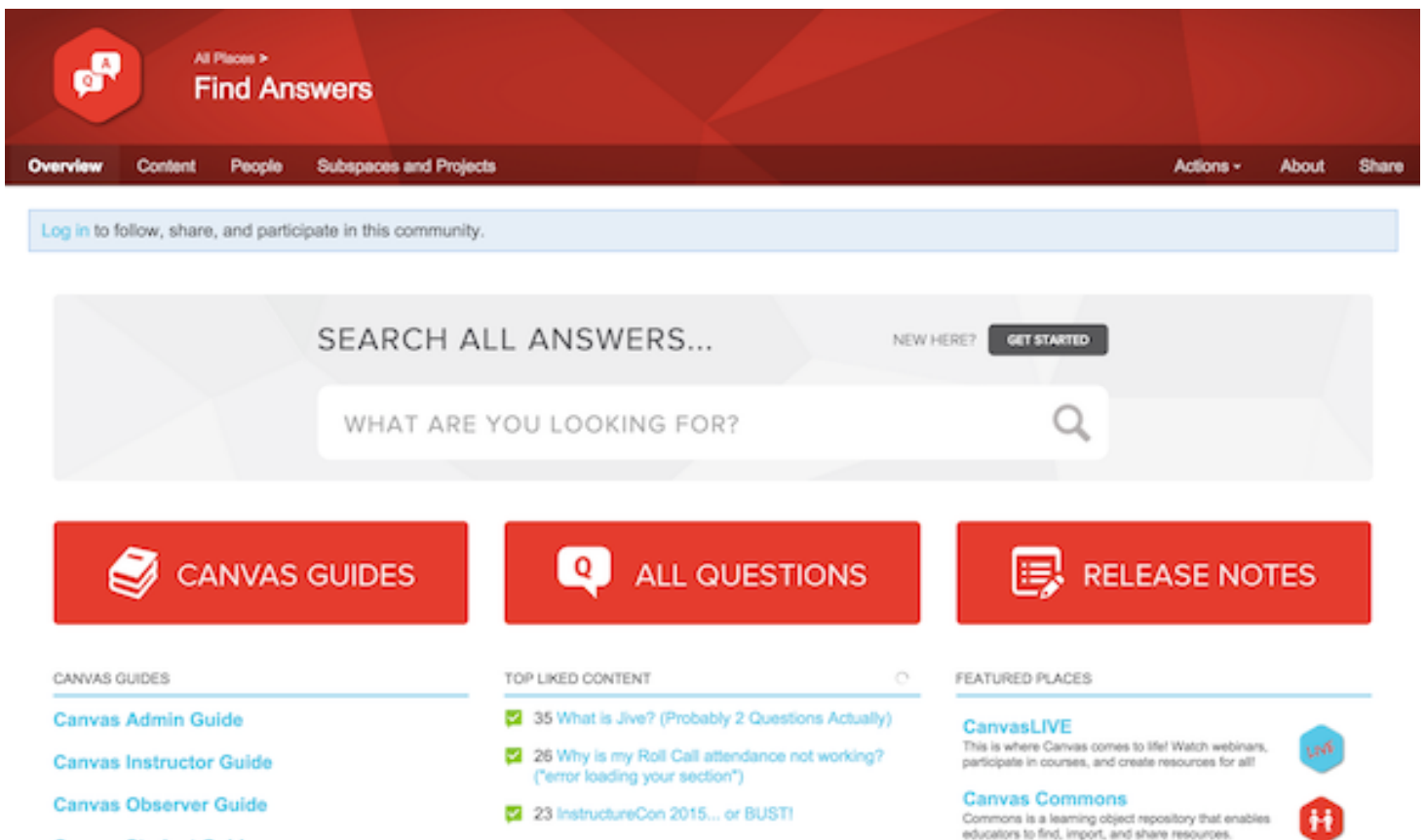
Your school may also have access to the **Chat with Canvas Support** and **Call Canvas** links that let you talk live with a Canvas Support Representative.

Canvas does a great job of responding to your requests for help. Depending on your question or problem, however, it might not be resolved right away, so be patient. Canvas may have further questions for you or they may need to do some research, or you may be referred to a specialist.

For any technology questions not related to Canvas, contact your school's help desk instead, if possible. If you send a request related to things like logins, email, your school's website, or computer support to Canvas, they'll just refer you back to your school's IT staff.

## Getting Help from the Canvas Community

The **Ask the Community** link lets you submit questions or problems to a forum that includes expert Canvas users as well as Instructure employees. You can also search the community posts to see if your question has already been asked and answered by other community members.



*The Canvas Community Find Answers page.*

You can access the Canvas Community Answers page directly at <https://community.canvaslms.com>.

If you have a problem or question regarding Canvas, I recommend you look for support in the following order to best ensure the fastest resolution. Search the Canvas Guides first, then look in the Canvas Community, then Report the Problem to Canvas Support.

## Requesting New Features

Finally, the *Request a Feature* link lets you submit ideas to Instructure for new tools and features, as well as tweaks on existing tools.

It's a good idea to search the Canvas community first to find out whether the feature already exists or has already been requested. You can always go to *that* request and add that you're also interested in the feature. Keep in mind that Canvas' feature request is only one factor Instructure uses to prioritize new and updated tools. Don't be disappointed if your request goes unanswered.

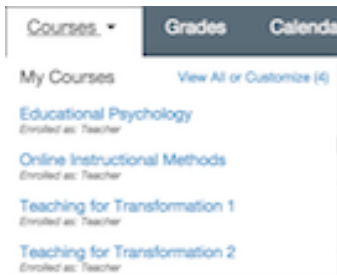
### Activity: Exploring the Canvas Guides

Take some time to browse the Canvas Guides. Select one of the chapters in the Instructor Guide that interests you and read one or more of the tutorials.

## Course Elements

The features we've covered in the previous sections are available wherever you are in your Canvas account. They're all accessible in Global Navigation. In this section, we'll explore how to access tools for adding content and communicating with others for a specific course.

You can access the Canvas courses you're enrolled in by hovering your pointer over the **Courses** menu in Global Navigation.



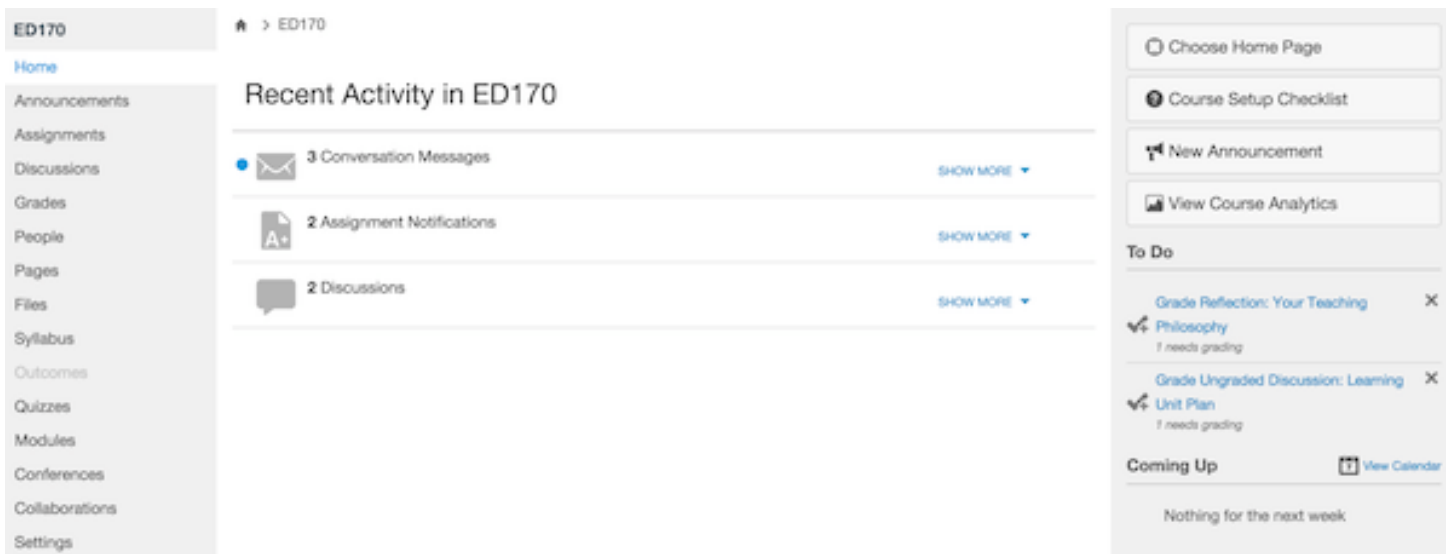
*Courses menu in global navigation.*

If you're also enrolled in one or more Canvas groups, your menu will say **Courses & Groups**. For more information on working in groups, see the list of groups tutorials on the Canvas LMS Tips site.

### [Canvas LMS Tips: Canvas Instructor Guide Groups Tutorials](#)

To open a course, just select the name of the course from the menu. If you have a lot of courses in your list, you may need to select the **View All or Customize** link to see them all.

The course's home page appears.



*Course home page example.*

## The Course Home Page

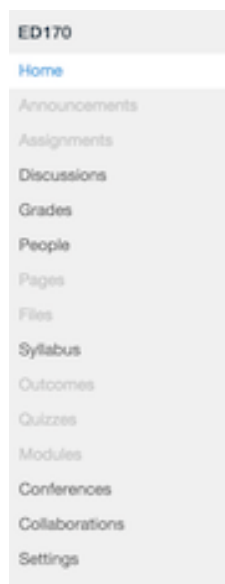
The course home page includes the large *content area* in the middle, a list of *course navigation links* on the left, and a sidebar of page-specific tools on the right.



By default, the home page’s content area displays the *Course Stream*. It’s a lot like the Recent Activity section of the Dashboard we covered earlier, only it contains notifications of activities just for this course. This is currently what students will see when they open the course. You’ll learn how to change the course’s home page to something that better meets your class’ needs later in this book.

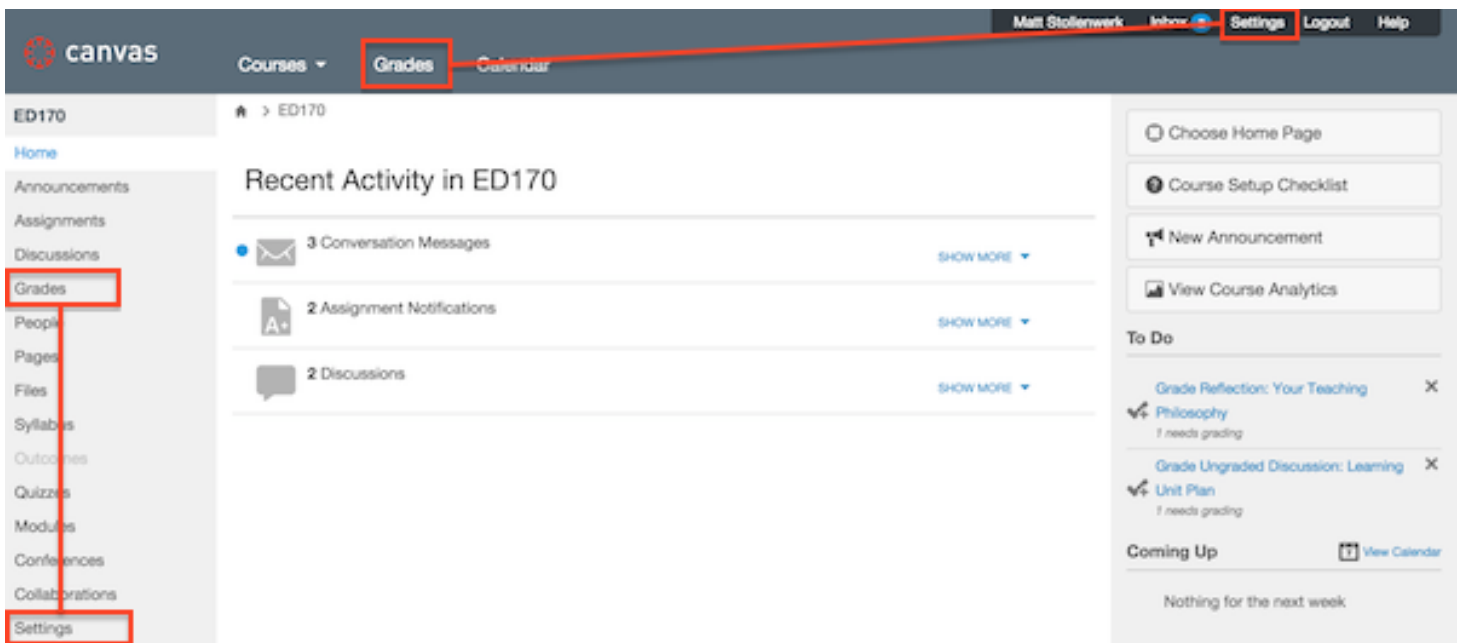
## Course Navigation Links

A list of *course navigation links* appears on the left side of the course page. These links only appear when you’re in a course. The active link is highlighted, indicating the contents of the content area. Your course navigation may include additional links to tools provided by your school not shown here, such as *Chat*.



*Course navigation links.*

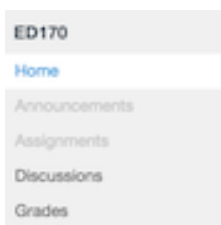
Global Navigation and course navigation have similar links, but their location indicates whether they apply to a specific course or your whole account. For example, the *Grades* link in course navigation only shows grades for the assignments in this course. If you were to choose the *Grades* link in Global Navigation, it would show grade averages for all of your current courses. If you choose the *Settings* link in course navigation, you would see the settings for this course. If you choose *Settings* in global navigation, it brings up the settings for your whole account.



*Global and course links for Grades and Settings.*

The course navigation links only apply to the course you're currently viewing. If you were to go to a different course, many of the same links would be there, but they would go to the relevant content for that course instead. The *Discussions* link for this course, for example, only shows the discussions for this course. For each course, you can customize which links are visible to students and in which order they appear in the list. We'll cover how to do it later in the book.

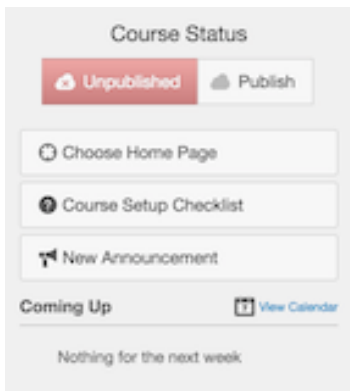
It's important to know that course navigation links in gray are active links, just like the black links. This is contrary to the Internet convention that a gray link is inactive. A gray link just indicates that the link is hidden from students, either because you set it that way or the link doesn't contain any content yet. You can still use the link to add a new content item of the indicated type. Once there's content in there, it will turn black unless you decide to hide the link from students.



*Gray links are hidden from students.*

## Course Sidebar and Breadcrumb Navigation

When you select a course link, a sidebar often appears on the right side of the content area. This sidebar contains tools relevant to the link you selected.



*The course home page sidebar.*

The top of the content area contains another way to navigate your course. It's called *breadcrumb navigation*. It's a convenient way to see where you are in the hierarchy of content in your course. It also allows you to quickly return to any parent page in the hierarchy, such as the main page for the content type you're working on, the course home page, or the Dashboard. Just select the name of the parent page you want to visit.

★ > ED170 > Assignments > Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy

*Breadcrumb navigation.*

## Activity: Exploring Your Courses

Take some time to explore one of your courses. Try the links to see where they go. Use the Course Navigation links or breadcrumb navigation to reorient yourself if you lose your bearings.

## Types of Course Activities

Now, let's look at the types of student activities you can add to your course. There are four categories of basic Canvas activities we'll cover in this book—content, assignments, discussions, and quizzes. This isn't all that Canvas has to offer, but with just these four types of activities, you can create an effective online course. As you'll see, there's a lot of flexibility within these activities to create the experience you want with your students.

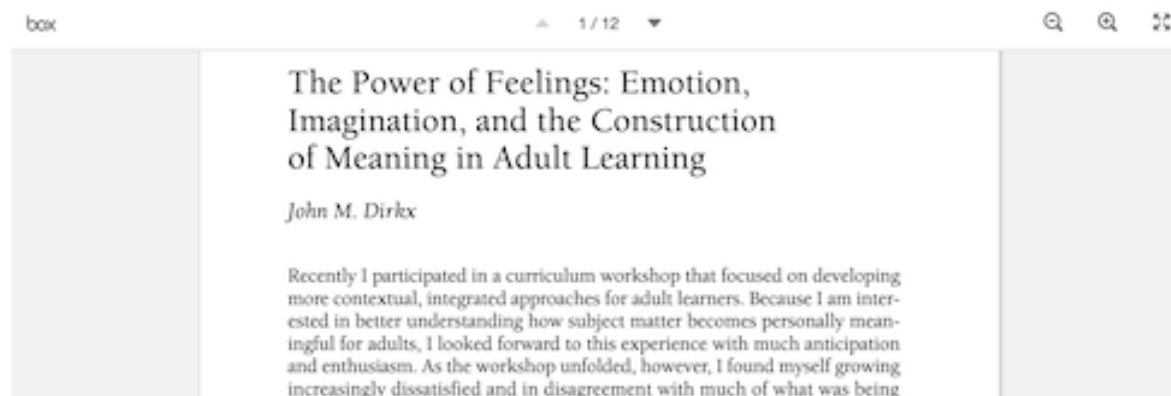
### Content

Content is all of the “stuff” you assign students to read, view, or listen to during the course—documents, links to external web pages, images, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and more.

You can upload any type of file to include as content for your Canvas course. Not only can students download content files, Canvas can allow users to actually view many types of files directly within Canvas, including PDF, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and many audio and video formats.

## Week 3: Depth Psychology and Transformative Learning (9/7-9/13)

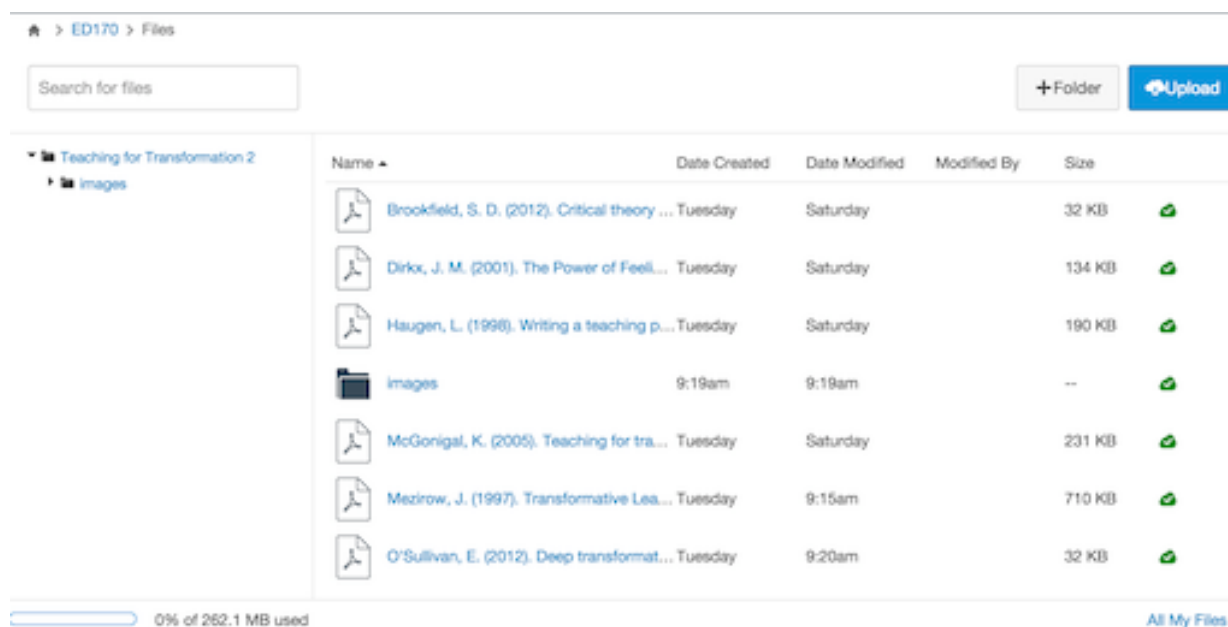
Dirkx, J. M. (2001). The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning.pdf [g](#)



*Document embedded in a Canvas page.*

Content files that aren't compatible for use within Canvas can still be downloaded by your students to be opened on their local computers. Students will need the appropriate software installed on their computers, however, in order for them to access these files. External web pages, of course, aren't actually stored in your course; instead, you create URL links that connect users with content on the web.

Although there are different places to upload and place individual files within your course, they can all be seen together in the *Files index page*, which you can see by selecting the **Files** link in course navigation.



*The Files index page.*

Bringing external web pages into your course content adds a broad variety of learning opportunities to your course—online articles, blog posts, images, videos, animations, surveys, and more. All you need is the URL of the web page to make it accessible to students in the course.

## Assignments

Assignments are activities that students are accountable for completing during the course. Assignments are usually graded to assess and provide feedback on each student's progress towards the desired learning outcomes. Grades are also used as an incentive for completing the activity. In Canvas, you can include both a grade and comments for each student in each assignment.

🏠 > ED170 > Assignments > Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy

## Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy

Published Edit

Using this week's video and reading as guides, create a draft of your own teaching philosophy. The draft will provide a foundation for your personal teaching goals and methods as we explore transformative learning.

Since developing a carefully thought out statement may take weeks, be assured that I don't expect this to be a complete and polished document. As we cover different theories of transformative learning during the term, we'll compare their themes to your own teaching philosophy ideas that you list here. Our discussions and reflections on the theories may help you clarify and better express your answers to these questions. At the end of the term, we'll revisit your teaching philosophy to see how our journey has influenced how you see your role as a teacher.

Please include answers to each of the following questions from the reading in your draft:

1. To what end?

Points 20

Submitting a text entry box or a file upload

File Types pdf, doc, docx, rtf, and txt

Due	For	Available from	Until
May 3 at 3:21pm	Everyone	-	Sep 6 at 11:59pm

+ Add Rubric

*An assignment page example.*

I recommend that you make *any* course activity that involves feedback to students a Canvas assignment. Even if you won't be assigning grades, you can use the grading part of assignments to let students know whether they've turned in required work, as well as whether it is completed to your expectations.

Assignments can be graded whether they're submitted on paper or online. Students can submit work online in a number of ways, including text composed directly in Canvas, an uploaded file like a Word document, an external web page link, or even audio or video comments recorded in Canvas. You can even grade activities for which there is no submission, such as a presentation or for class participation.

Once you've submitted a grade and comments for a student's assignment, the student has the chance to respond to your feedback in Canvas, allowing you to hold a discussion with each of your students on each of their assignments.

Although there are different places to create and place individual assignments within your course, you can view them all in the *Assignments index page*, which you can see by selecting the **Assignments** link in course navigation.

🏠 > ED170 > Assignments

Search for Assignment

+ Group + Assignment ⚙️

☰ ▾ Assignments + ⚙️ -

☰	📝 Quiz: Your Teaching Philosophy	Week 1: Your Teaching P...	Available until Sep 2	Due Aug 26 at 11:59pm	10 pts	✅	⚙️ ▾
☰	💬 Discussion: Your Teaching Philosophy	Week 1: Your Teaching P...	Available until Sep 4	Due Aug 28 at 11:59pm	20 pts	✅	⚙️ ▾
☰	📝 Reflection: Your Teaching Philosophy	Week 1: Your Teaching P...	Available until Sep 6	Due May 3 at 3:21pm	20 pts	✅	⚙️ ▾
☰	📝 Quiz: Transformative Learning Theory	Week 2: Transformative ...	Not available until Aug 24	Due Sep 2 at 11:59pm	10 pts	✅	⚙️ ▾
☰	💬 Discussion: Transformative Learning Theory	Week 2: Transformative ...	Not available until Aug 24	Due Sep 2 at 11:59pm	20 pts	✅	⚙️ ▾

*The Assignments index page.*

## Discussions

*Discussions* are an online version of group discussions. You assign a discussion topic, and students post responses to the topic that are visible to all members of the course. You and other students can then post comments on any existing post in the topic. You can designate any discussion to be a graded assignment.

Ungraded Discussion: Learning Unit Plan Apr 25 at 1:47pm


4 5

As you work on your project, you may find times that you aren't sure how to proceed or are concerned about the direction of the project. Please use this space to share your questions or concerns. Other members may have the same question that needs to be answered. I'll be monitoring the discussion during the last two weeks of the course to address any needs brought up. Before posting a question, be sure that the question hasn't already been answered here. Of course, if you have answers or ideas regarding another student's questions, I heartily encourage you to share them with us.

Search entries or author Unread ⋮ ⋮


📧 Subscribed

↩ Reply



**Kathleen Lewis**  
Yesterday

Hey everybody! Does anyone know of any resources for developing creative reflection assignments? I'd like to add some reflections to my unit, but I'd like to try a different approach for each assignment to keep it interesting. Thanks all!



**Johnny Nunez**  
Yesterday

I've used an awesome resource from the University of Vermont on facilitating reflection. Most of the activities are for the classroom, but there's a whole chapter on additional forms of reflection that I think you'll like. I

*Discussion topic sample.*

Although there are different places to create and place individual discussion topics within your course, they're all visible in the *Discussions index page*, which you can see by selecting the **Discussions** link in course navigation.

Unread

Assignments

+ Discussion

⚙

▼ Pinned Discussions

You currently have no pinned discussions

To pin a discussion to the top of the page, drag a discussion here, or select Pin from the discussion settings menu.

▼ Discussions

Ordered by Recent Activity

<b>Ungraded Discussion: Learning Unit Plan</b> <small>Last post May 3, 2015</small>	No Due Date	
<b>Discussion: Your Teaching Philosophy</b> <small>Last post May 3, 2015</small>	Available until Sep 4 Due Aug 28 at 11:59pm	
<b>Discussion: Transformative Learning Theory</b>	Not available until Aug 24 Due Sep 4 at 11:59pm	
<b>Discussion: Depth Psychology and TL</b>	Not available until Aug 31 Due Sep 11 at 11:59pm	

The Discussions index page.

## Quizzes

*Quizzes*, of course, can be used to conduct tests and quizzes online, but they're a great way to gain information from students in so many other ways. You can use a quiz to check for student learning, conduct surveys and questionnaires, receive student evaluations, or provide a prompted response assignment. Quizzes and surveys can be graded or ungraded. If you choose, surveys can be submitted anonymously to encourage honest responses.

### Quiz: Your Teaching Philosophy

Started: May 4 at 9:32am

#### Quiz Instructions

This 5-item multiple-choice quiz is designed to check your understanding of the main points of the "Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement" video and reading from Iowa State University. There are 10 points possible for the quiz.

You'll have 10 minutes to complete the quiz. Once you begin the quiz, you cannot pause it and you can only take the quiz once. If you do not complete the quiz in 10 minutes, the quiz will be automatically submitted. After submitting the quiz, you'll be able to compare your responses to the correct responses.

Question 1

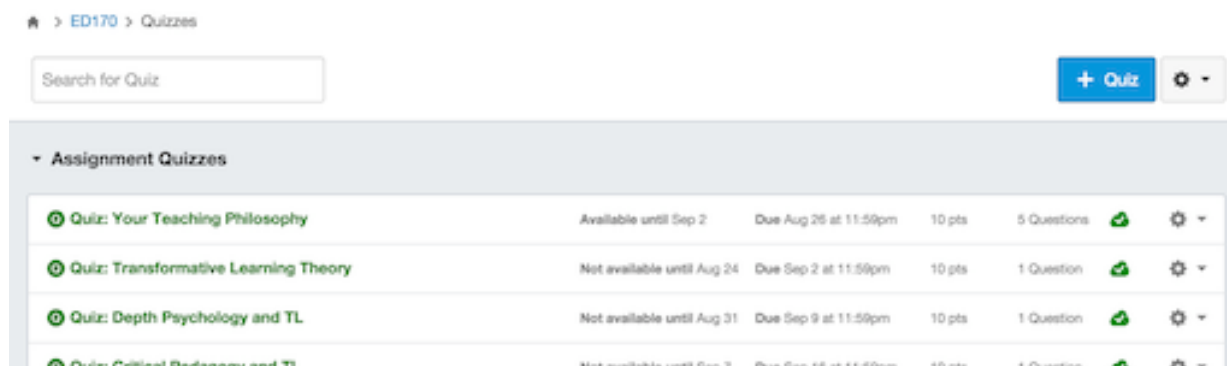
2 pts

According to the reading, which of the following is **not** a primary element to include in a teaching philosophy statement?

- ☐ Your background
- ☐ Your objectives as a teacher
- ☐ How you intend to measure your effectiveness
- ☐ Your teaching methods
- ☐ Why you teach

Quiz sample.

Although there are different places to create and place individual quizzes and surveys within your course, they'll all be visible in the *Quizzes index page*, which you can see by selecting the **Quizzes** link in course navigation.



The *Quizzes index page*.

## Advanced: Wikis and Collaborations

*Wikis* and *collaborations* are two types of Canvas activities that allow your students to collaborate on their learning. Although they're not gradable assignments on their own, you can set up an assignment that assesses student participation in these activities.

### Wikis

You can choose to make a content page into a wiki, allowing you and your learners to make changes to the page for everyone to see. Maybe you can use a wiki to create a sign-up sheet or start a research links repository.

The following Canvas Guides tutorial shows how to create a wiki by allowing students to edit a content page you create.

[Canvas Guides: How do I create a new Page?](#)

### Collaborations

The Collaborations tool allows groups of students to work together on a word processing document at the same time through Canvas, either in Google Docs or EtherPad. Changes made by one user are immediately visible to all participants in the collaboration. Students can submit a collaboration as an assignment, either individually or as a group.

To learn about creating and managing collaborations, see the list of collaborations tutorials on the Canvas LMS Tips site.

[Canvas LMS Tips: Canvas Instructor Guide Collaborations Tutorials](#)

## Communicating with Your Students

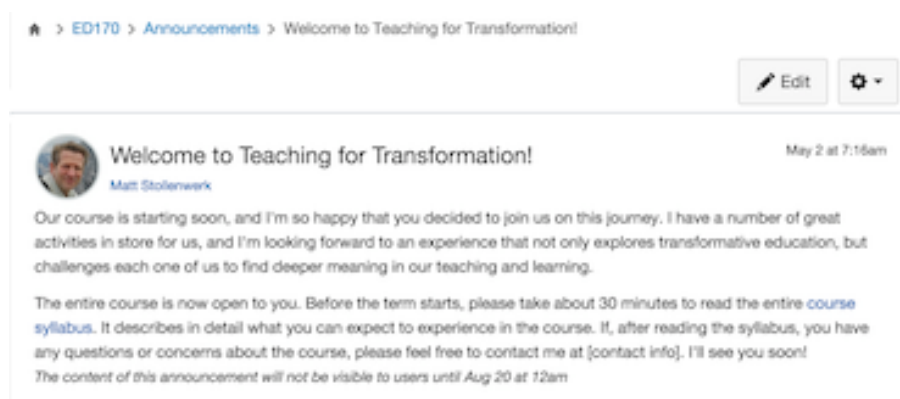


Communication is fundamental to the success of your course. The appearance of your online course doesn't necessarily have to be flashy to get and keep learner interest. If you provide a personal presence in your course, show learners that you care about them, and actively encourage them to connect with each other both in formal activities and informally, it fosters an environment in which your students are motivated to stay engaged through their developing relationship with you and each other.

One of the strengths of Canvas is the many ways that you and your learners can communicate among each other. I highly recommend you consider taking advantage of these tools to engage your learners—with you and with one other.

## Announcements

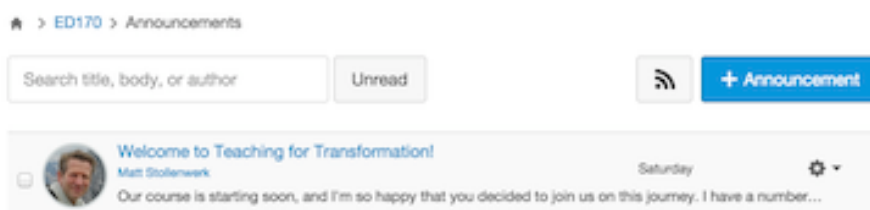
An *announcement* is a message that is sent to all members of your course, including students, other teachers, TAs, and observers. What's great about using announcements is that students will be notified of your message based on the contact methods they choose for their account. You don't have to create mailing lists and your messages stay within the course for students to refer to. Another nice feature of announcements is that students who enroll in your course after you send an announcement will still have access to the announcement.



*Announcement example.*

You can choose to delay the posting of an announcement to a specific date and time. That way, you can create all of your standard announcements for the term at once, instead of having to remember to post them when they need to go out. This option can be useful for reminding students of important events like an assignment due.

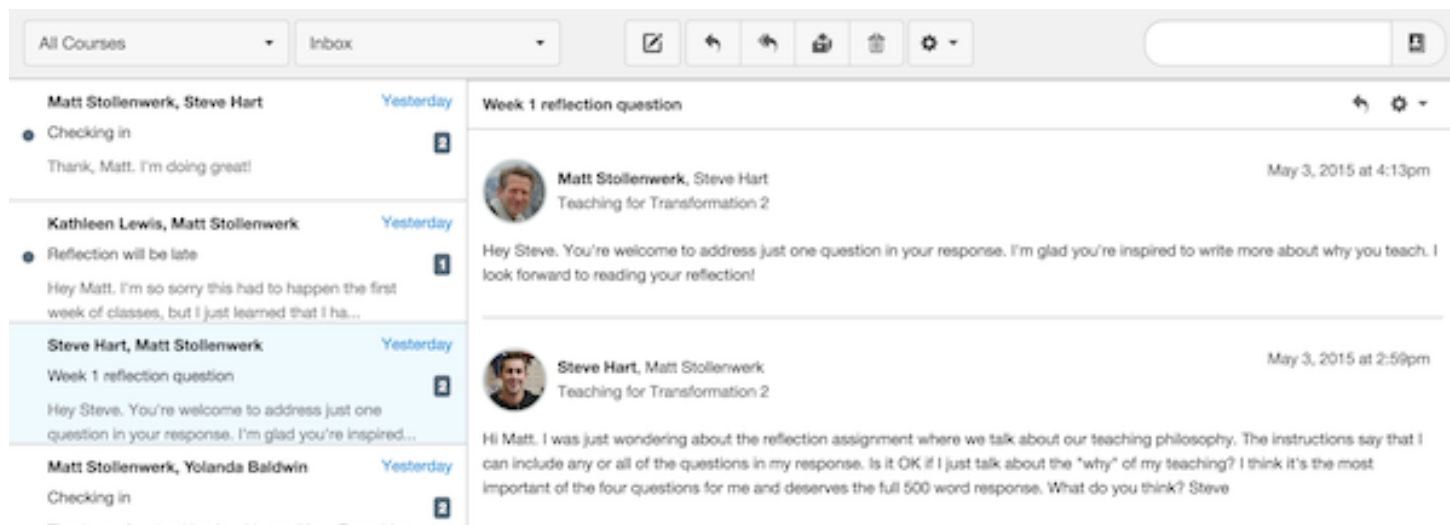
You can access all announcements for the current course by selecting the **Announcements** course navigation link.



*The Announcements index page.*

## Conversations

Like announcements, Canvas' *Conversations* feature allows you to send messages to other members of your courses including students, other teachers, and TAs. The difference with Conversations, though, is that you can choose the recipients of your messages. You can select a single individual, a group within a course, or even everyone in a single course. Your feedback to student assignment submissions also appears in Conversations.



*The Conversations page.*

Conversations works a lot like email. The advantages of Conversations over email include not needing to keep track of student email addresses, your messages go to the preferred notification methods set by your students, and your conversations with your students stay within the course so it's easy to track course-related conversations.

You can access all conversations for all courses by selecting the **Inbox** global navigation link.

### Advanced: Conferences and Chat

Announcements and Conversations are examples of asynchronous communication modes, in which there is a lag time between messages back and forth. Canvas also has two synchronous communication tools, Conferences and Chat, that allow you and your learners to have a real-time conversation within Canvas. Both of these tools can be used for informal communications among you and your students or as part of formal course activities.

#### Conferences

The *Conferences* tool allows you and your students to hold synchronous conferences with one another. Conferences includes real-time audio, webcam video, and screen sharing. Uses for Conferences include presentations, group discussions, and office hours. All participants in a Conferences session will need a webcam and microphone. I'd recommend a USB headset with built-in microphone.

No more than 25 users at a time are recommended for Conferences. Fewer users will result in better performance. Before starting a Conferences session, I'd suggest an activity in which students test their audio and video performance in pairs before the session.

You can create, start, or join a Conferences session by selecting the **Conferences** course navigation link.

## **Chat**

*Chat* is a course chat room that allows you and your students to communicate together in real time by text. Uses for Chat include informal conversations, group discussions, and office hours. Chat conveniently includes a History that allows you to view messages from previous sessions.

The **Chat** course navigation link allows you to join a chat session. If the Chat tool is not visible, ask your school's Canvas administrator to contact Instructure to activate it.

The Canvas LMS Tips site has the lists of tutorials for using both Conferences and Chat.

[Canvas LMS Tips: Canvas Instructor Guide Conferences Tutorials](#)

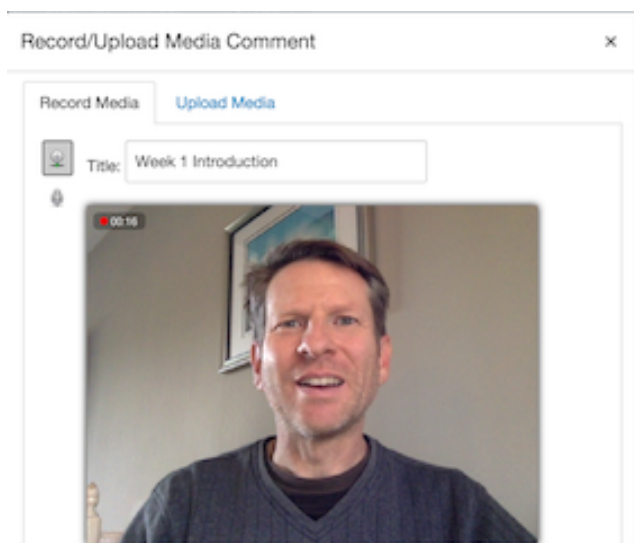
[Canvas LMS Tips: Canvas Instructor Guide Chat Tutorials](#)

## **Advanced: Recording Audio and Video in Canvas**

Recording yourself on audio and video is an excellent way to add a more personal feel to your course, because it allows learners to see your face and hear your voice. You can either record audio or video comments directly within Canvas or upload your own audio or video file to play in Canvas.

### **Audio and Video Comments**

Canvas has audio and video recording tools built in, so you can quickly and easily produce your own segments right within Canvas. All you need is a working webcam and microphone installed on your computer. I recommend a USB microphone for best results.



*Video comments recording window.*

Canvas' recording tools are best used for brief personalized comments that are no more than 3 minutes long. You can record a personal introduction at the beginning of the course, introductions to lessons, or debriefs of assignments. You can also add audio or video comments to assignments, discussion posts, and messages. Of course, students also have the opportunity to record their own audio and video as part of an assignment, discussion post, or message.

The Canvas Instructor Guide has tutorials for creating audio and video within Canvas.

[Canvas Guides: How do I record a video using the Rich Content Editor?](#)

[Canvas Guides: What should I do if I can't record video comments with my webcam?](#)

[Canvas Guides: How do I record audio using the Rich Content Editor?](#)

### **Uploading Audio and Video**

If you want to add longer videos that will be reused in different course sections or terms—lectures, for example—I recommend that you use separate recording and editing software to create the audio or video, then upload the file to your Canvas course.

Once you've created the files, the Canvas Instructor Guide has tutorials uploading them for use in your courses.

[Canvas Guides: How do I upload a video using the Rich Content Editor?](#)

[Canvas Guides: How do I upload an audio file using the Rich Content Editor?](#)

## **Advanced: Creating Your Own Free Canvas Account**

To build a course on your school's Canvas site, a course shell must already be created for you. You cannot create your own new course from scratch. But, what if you wanted to do some early development on a Canvas course for a future term that isn't in Canvas yet? And what if you want to use Canvas to create one of your own independent courses?

Instructure allows you to create your own *Free for Teachers* account in Canvas that you can use to create your own courses and import into courses in your school's Canvas site, if desired. The courses you create in your free account have almost all of the same features as the courses created directly in your school's Canvas site, so they will import seamlessly.

There *are* some things you can do in your free account that you *can't* do on your school's site. For one thing, you can add students and co-teachers to your courses. Not only does this allow you to hold your own courses, it also allows you to share your course with other teachers during development, and test user experiences before moving the course to your school's site.

To create your own Free for Teachers account, go to Instructure's [Try Canvas web page](#) and select "Build It."