Organizing Your Canvas Course Site

Many considerations go into designing a Canvas course site. For example, what types of and how much course content you have, when and how students are expected to access and use the materials, whether they need to access them only once or reference them throughout the quarter. In general, the organization of your course site should reflect the course structure in your syllabus. This document describes a few common ways of organizing your Canvas course site such that students can easily find the relevant course content.

Organization Method I: Modules (Recommended)

Modules are similar to content folders in Chalk. They allow you to collect and organize course content into separate units that guide students through the material. There are three often used organizational possibilities:
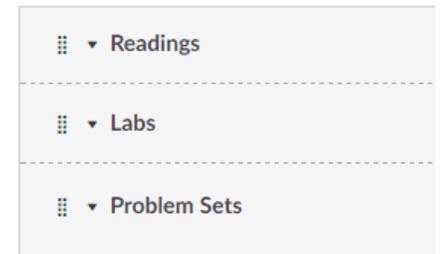
(A) – Chronological (or reverse-chronological)	(B) – Topic	(C) – Content Type
⠿ ▾ Week 1	⠿ ▾ Topic 1 - Global Warming	⠿ ▾ Readings
⠿ ▾ Week 2	⠿ ▾ Topic 2 - Renewable Energy	⠿ ▾ Labs
⠿ ▾ Week 3	⠿ ▾ Topic 3 - Resource Management	⠿ ▾ Problem Sets

Tips for organizing a course site using Modules:

1 Disable unnecessary navigation links

When the course navigation links such as *Files, Pages*, *Assignments*, and *Discussions* are turned off, it's clear to both the students and the instructor that all relevant course material is to be found in *Modules*.

2 Use consistent, descriptive names

Descriptive titles make it easier for students to find the relevant items in the module and to know what they are clicking on. For example, "Discussion for Week 1 – The role of dreams in *The Histories*" is clearer than "Discussion 1."

3 Add Text Headers for context

For example, if a number of readings or links are optional, add a *Text Header* that says "Optional Readings" and indent those items under that heading.

4 Use Content Pages to provide context

If the items in a module are not self-explanatory, you can add them to a *Content Page* in the Module, then provide context, instructions, or other information for your students on the *Content Page*.

5 Group Module Items under Headings

If you have more than 5 items in a module, organize them into groups using *Text Headers* and indenting so that they are easier to find. For examples, "For Tuesday, For Thursday;" or "Videos, Readings, Problem Sets."

6 Avoid run-on modules

Reduce the number of items in a module by putting them on a *Content Page* in your module. For example, instead of posting 6 separate small assignments for a given class meeting, put them on a Page (e.g. "Six Assignments for Week 2").

Organization Method II: Using multiple Index Pages

In Canvas, the course navigation links labeled *Assignments*, *Discussions*, and *Quizzes* take you to Index Pages that automatically collect and display all of the corresponding course items. For examples, the Assignments Index Page lists all of the Assignments in a course, the Discussions Index Page lists all Discussion Forums, etc. You can make use of this automatic indexing feature in organizing your course.

Tips for organizing a course site that uses multiple Index Pages:

1 Enable the navigation links you need

Organizing your course site based on Index Pages means that you enable the navigation links to those Index Pages that are relevant to your course.

This also means that it is important to **disable links you are not using**.

Example: if you are not using *Modules*, then disable the link.

Example: if your course has assignments and discussion boards, then you would want to make sure the *Discussions* and *Assignments* navigation links are enabled.

Example: if you have many course readings to deliver as PDF files, you can decide between creating a *Page* that contains links to the files, or creating a navigable file structure on the *Files Index Page*.

2 Be consistent & transparent

Being consistent in how you add course material to the course site makes it easier for students to find the material.

Example: if you are using the Assignments Index Page, make sure you have entered in all of the course assignments into the Canvas site as Assignments, and not, say, as text commentary on a Page.

Example: chose one method by which students can access course readings, be that on the Library Reserves page, *Files Index Page*, the *Modules Index Page*, or via links to the files on a Page of your own.

Let your students know how you organize your course site. It may not be immediately transparent to students, especially if instructors organize their sites differently.

Home

Syllabus

Announcements

Assignments

Discussions

Attendance

People

Grades

Library Reserves

Screenshot: The left-hand menu containing navigation links to various index pages.

General Tips

Check out the Showcase Courses page (*courses.uchicago.edu/showcase*) for examples of how to organize a course.

Course Home Page

- Consider using a *Content Page* that you yourself design as your *Course Home Page*. Pages are highly customizable, you can personalize a course by adding text, links to course material, images, etc. The Home Page provides you with a place to tell students where to find course materials.

- You can add *Announcements* to your Home Page by going to: *Settings* > *Course Details* > *more options* > *Show recent announcements on Course home page*. You can choose the number of announcements (up to 15) to display.

Syllabus Page

- We encourage instructors to put their course syllabi on the *Syllabus Page* of their course sites. By default, the *Syllabus Page* is enabled and accessible to users within the University of Chicago community to help students choose their courses. You can **choose not to share your syllabus** by going to *Settings* > *Course Details* > *Visibility* > uncheck the *Customize* box or, under *Customize*, change *Syllabus* from *Institution* to *Course*.