Canvas 101 in 30 minutes
hey there!
I’m Windi Turner.

Over the past decade, I've figured out how to **carefully map curriculum, create engaging lesson plans, and design intuitive online courses**. Along the way, I've coached hundreds of talented teachers and I'm here for you too.

My journey in education started as a Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) teacher throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. This prepared me well to become a Professor in the FCS Teacher Education program at Utah State University and my current roles as the Academic Unit Head over the Bachelor of Individualized Studies program at James Madison University and the lead instructor for the CTE New Teacher Institute for the Virginia Department of Education and the University of Virginia.

As an experienced educator and curriculum designer, I’ve served on multiple state curriculum revision teams in Virginia and Utah, led program development in higher education, and designed a new adult basic education program for the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail in Charlottesville. Throughout my career, I’ve built a reputation for having expertise in curricular updates, course transformations, and best practices in teaching and learning.

My bachelor’s degree in Family and Consumer Sciences is from Bridgewater College and both my master's and Ph.D. in Career and Technical Education are from Virginia Tech. I am also a Certified Personal and Family Finance Educator, a certification offered through AAFCS.

My goal is to give you practical solutions and simple tools to build your dream course.
Canvas 101 in 30 minutes

Guide

* Outside of the Box
* Scale the Shell
* Canvas Secrets
Outside of the Box

The Canvas learning management system (LMS) is a platform for hosting course content, delivering online quizzes, accepting online assignment submissions, disseminating grades and feedback, and much more. **Although the more common use of Canvas is online course delivery, Canvas can also be used for:**

**Workshops and Trainings**
**Advising Information**
**Program Introduction**
**Committees**
**FCCLA**
**Curriculum House**
The first step in designing your course in Canvas is what I refer to as *Scale the Shell*. This is where we work from the outside in. Most IT departments deliver your Canvas course in a "shell" with the basic functionalities you need to start designing. Unless your school division has purchased Design Tools or has pre-formatted templates, you have some lifting to do.

If you're not familiar with Design Tools from Cidi Labs, here's a quick overview of DesignPLUS. (click to view)

Disclaimer: I am not affiliated with Cidi Labs and this is not a promotion for them. I was privileged to have their tools and to be trained and certified on how to use them effectively while at Utah State University.
Before: the blank shell

After: the scaled shell
What follows are the very basics in adding your Profile Picture, configuring the User Settings, adjusting the course Navigation, and creating Modules.
First things first, let's add that **Profile Picture** and customize the **User Settings**. It's really important for students to know and identify *you* as the course instructor.

**Profile Picture**

1. Account/Profile
2. Click to Change Picture
3. Select Profile Picture/ Save

Although fun and interesting, examples like these should not replace you.
Course Details

1. Settings/Course Details
2. Click Choose Image & Upload Image
3. Enter Course Name
4. Enter Course Code
5. Select Time Zone
6. Select Start and End Dates
7. Students can only participate
8. Restrict students
9. Language
10. Large Course
11. Grading Scheme
12. License
13. File Copyright
14. Visibility
Use this resource from Canvas if you need additional visuals or explanations to customize your **Profile Picture** and **User Settings** for your course. (click to view)
One of the most important elements in good online course design is **Navigation**. You want students to easily access the content, announcements, and assignments with very few clicks and in multiple ways. This adds much value to the engagement piece of online learning we want to achieve.

Follow the simple steps below to drag/drop the menu choices. You can access this function from the Settings tab in the Course **Navigation** Menu.

Use this resource from Canvas if you need additional visuals or explanations to customize the Course **Navigation** Menu.

Link: [How to Manage Course Navigation Links](#)
Regularly click the **Student View** to monitor how your changes will appear for students. *Remember to click Save after your changes.*
The purpose of the **Modules** feature is to organize your course content in a linear flow. Think of **Modules** as folders for each unit of study in your course. After you create each **Module**, you can then add items, set prerequisites, and add requirements.

Here’s what you can expect to see the first time you add a **Module** to your course.

For clarity, I recommend including the name of each **Module or Unit** along with its respective number. If your course is chunked into units, naming the **Modules** with both the unit number and name allows students to easily locate and navigate within the menu of **Modules**. If your course is set up in a weekly format, naming the **Modules** as "Week 1, Week 2, Week 3" may make more sense - you do you.
If you lock a Module, students will be able to see that it is there, but they will not be able to access the Module until the unlock date.

If you add a prerequisite, students will not be able to advance to the next Module until the previous has been completed. *This includes grading so if an assignment or quiz is marked as a prerequisite, it will need to be graded before students can advance.*

If you are unsure if you want to lock a Module, add prerequisites or requirements, go back, and do this later. If you do use these functions, be sure to alert students so they are aware of this element in the course design.

Here’s the screens you will see to use these functions within the Modules tab.
Modules - 3

1. Click ☐ to edit
2. Click + to add
3. Click ☑ to publish

1. Click + to add
2. Scroll & select Page
3. Select Page
4. Select Indentation
5. Click Add Item
**Modules - 4**

1. click \(\text{↑} \) at page to Increase or Decrease Indent
2. click \(\text{●} \) at page to Duplicate
3. click \(\text{→} \) at page to Move
4. click \(\text{✓} \) to Publish Module

**Modules - 5**

1. click \(\text{●} \) to collapse Module contents
2. click \(\text{↓} \) to drag Module and Module contents
1. click Pages tab

2. click +Page

(inset page name here)

(inset content here)

select editing options

Users allowed to edit this page:

- Only teachers
- Only students
- Teachers and students
- Anyone

Notify users that this content has changed

Save
Home Page

The first page students see when they land on your Canvas course site is the **Home Page**. Here is your opportunity to immediately **capture their attention, create interest** in your course, and **set the tone**. Each time students open your course; they will land on the **Home Page**. You should design this page to be **visually appealing, welcoming, and intuitive** for both new and returning students.

Let’s look “above the fold” on this **Home Page** for a few good design practices:

- **Course Navigation Menu**: make this as clutter free as possible with only the necessities
- **Customized Banner**: use PicMonkey or Canva to create a course banner
- **Instructor Picture**: inserting a picture here should be larger than your profile picture
- **Course Content**: links to content are in the Course Navigation Menu and below the banner which allows for student choice
By default, the **Home Page** in your course is the Course Activity Stream which lists recent activities in the course such as announcements, discussions, and assignments. This may be helpful to students a few weeks into the course, but it’s not really helpful at the beginning of the course. You can replace this course activity page with more helpful information and directions by creating a custom **Home Page** with **Pages Front Page**. You can use Course Modules, Assignments List, or the Syllabus page too but I do not recommend these options.

Let’s look “below the fold” on the same **Home Page** taking note of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Design Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Paragraph</td>
<td>Highlighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Description</td>
<td>Bold Font</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Navigation</td>
<td>Different Font</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to Expect</td>
<td>Underlining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links (shown in blue)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Welcome to Canvas Designer Series: the Basics. This mini-course was designed and is taught by me, Windi Turner. I am so delighted to have you here and I welcome your feedback about how I can make your experience even better.

This mini-course is first in my Canvas Designer Series. The purpose of this series is to better understand how to use the Canvas learning management system (LMS) to plan engaged and intuitive online learning experiences.

This mini-course will provide a great starting point for building your online course in Canvas. We want students to have an easy-to-follow, consistent experience so they don’t have to spend a lot of time figuring out how to navigate and access content. Consider this your **very basic** design blueprint.

First, you will begin with the Canvas LMS module to be sure you are familiar with this LMS. The next module is Zoom. Even if you have some familiarity with these platforms, please scroll through each page noting how you could use the information in your course design. Both modules end with a practice quiz.

**Once you complete these modules, we’ll dive into the actual content.** This mini-course is truly THE BASICS with a lot of resources - it will be up to you to dive as deep as you need to. **There are no bells or whistles, that’s saved for the other mini-courses in my Canvas Designer Series.** But, you do have a special bonus: **Swag Bag.**

Let’s get started: [the Canvas LMS](#)

Windi turner
Adding People

Your IT department should automatically enroll students in your course in Canvas. However, there may be a time when a student is physically added to your course but IT has not enrolled them yet. ALTERNATIVELY, you may be using Canvas for another purpose outside of course delivery. From the Course Navigation Menu, click People then +People button.

Caution - you most likely will not be able to add anyone outside of your school division. This is where Canvas Free for Teacher is helpful.
Did you know you could use the **Inbox** feature from the Global Navigation Menu to send messages to an entire course section or group of students or even an individual student? Some teachers prefer to use this as the only method to communicate or as an additional method of communication.

However, you choose to communicate, be sure this is clear to students.
There you have it, CANVAS 101 in 30 minutes.

If we had 60 minutes, we would talk about Prepping the Presets for your Announcements, Discussion Boards, Introduction/Conclusion Pages, and Assignments/Quizzes.

Windi Turner