

LEARNING MADE EASY



Canvas[®] LMS

for
dummies[®]
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Create an impactful
learning experience

Design a legendary
course that engages learners

Discover a community of
collaborators worldwide

Marcus Painter
Eddie Small

The Canvas nerds down the hall



Canvas[®] LMS

by Marcus Painter and Eddie Small

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Canvas® LMS For Dummies®

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Introduction

Canvas LMS — or *Learning Management System* — is a web-based course management platform that supports online learning and teaching. Used by educators, administrators, and students across the globe, it is an accessible and intuitive ecosystem that supports student learning and communication whether used in a fully remote-teaching model, a hybrid model, or alongside in-person teaching.

We've heard from many educators and school administrators begging for material that helps Canvas LMS users get “up and running” with the platform quickly, and although we always recommend checking out the Canvas Community website, or even investing in professional development and training from the Center for Leadership and Learning at Instructure, we still hear people say, “I wish there was a *Canvas LMS For Dummies*.” So to that end, we've written that book! And you are here because you already know and love Canvas, you are relatively new to Canvas and want to learn more, or you are brand new to Canvas and looking for an efficient way to get started quickly. This book bottles every ounce of what you hope to accomplish and gives it to you in a nice Panda package.

About This Book

We firmly and wholeheartedly believe that you, as an educator, are the most valuable part of the educational community. Educators influence society on a worldwide scope. You inspire thought, you encourage creativity, and you set your students on a road toward future successes.

You are reading this book because you value everything in the previous paragraph. You recognize that teaching is about being a lifelong learner. We believe this book can act as your guide on your Canvas LMS journey. It is a primer for all things Canvas LMS and a resource you can refer back to regularly. And it is our hope that you have a bit of fun while learning.

This book gives you the basics to get up and running with Canvas LMS. You take a spin through the major aspects of the platform, all while we provide you with best practices, thought leadership, and concrete use cases. We both have many years of experience using Canvas as students, as teachers, and as Canvas LMS administrators. We believe we can provide a learning experience in this book that is unmatched by any other platform. We also love that we have been able to write a book that — we feel — balances learning and “click-by-click” instruction with a bit of fun, while also being easy to read. We hope that *Canvas LMS For Dummies* becomes a regularly revisited resource for you in your ongoing Canvas journey.

Foolish Assumptions

Okay, elephant in the room time. In writing this book, clearly a new Canvas LMS user is the prime target audience. However, we speak to all levels of Canvas Pandas throughout these chapters.

You’re likely reading this book for one or two of the following reasons:

- » You are brand new to using Canvas LMS and are establishing your foundational knowledge. You’re in the right place!

- » You are relatively new to Canvas LMS. Maybe you used it during the pandemic in a sort of emergency, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants sort of way, and now you want to improve for your learners. You're in the right place!
- » You've recently switched from one of the *other guys* and you need to start off on the right foot with Canvas LMS. You're in the right place!
- » You are a Canvas LMS user who is a lifelong learner who is always looking for ways to improve at this beautiful craft we call teaching. Again, you're in the right place!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter.



TIP

The Tip icon marks tips and shortcuts that you can use to make Canvas LMS easier.



REMEMBER

Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, just skim through these icons.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a highly technical nature that you can normally skip

over, unless you happen to be an IT geek in your district or institution.



WARNING The Warning icon tells you to watch out! It marks important information that may save you headaches, frustrations, or unnecessary struggle within Canvas LMS.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to Canvas LMS that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "Canvas LMS For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

Where to Go from Here

Before we really get going, please take note that this book is not necessarily designed to be read in a conventional linear way. Though we hope you do that, this book can also be used in a desk reference manner. Maybe you are just curious about a certain element within Canvas LMS. Refer to the Table of Contents and go read about it. Our hearts will be full and our pride overflowing if this book gets beat up, marked up with highlighter and scribbled notes in the margins, and riddled with sticky notes.

So what's next? This may be a good time for you to take a moment and honestly assess your teacher toolbelt. What are you great at in teaching? What are you good at, but there's room for improvement? What can you own as

a weakness to improve upon? And here's the tough one that we don't like to consider: What have you blatantly avoided in your teaching that you know is important, but you're too scared to tackle?

These types of questions are important for all of us to consider as we learn more about Canvas LMS. We always say that Canvas is as deep as it is wide. That means that it can be intimidating to tackle without a plan, without some sort of focus, or without any guidance. Don't worry, you've come to the right place, Pandas. We are here to help. We invited a bunch of our Panda Pals to drop knowledge on you and guide you in your learning.

Whatever your reasons are for reading this book, positivity throughout your reading of these chapters is going to be essential in your journey through Canvas LMS. So, right up front, we ask you to give yourself some room to fail. And we don't say that in the wonderfully mystic, edu-celebrity, keynote sort of way. We say, give yourself room to fail because it will absolutely happen as part of actual growth and learning. None of us relish failure. Nobody says, "I just adore failing, it gives me such a rush of happiness." Nope! That is not real life. We are here to share the brutal honesty of learning as adults. Learning throughout this book may be tough, it may be humbling at times, and it may force you to look at your work differently moving forward. We hope all of these things happen. Whether you've been in education for 20 years or 20 days, it's go time!

Part 1

Getting Started with Canvas LMS

IN THIS PART ...

Get familiar with the Canvas Learning Management System and discover who uses Canvas from the K-12 setting through higher education.

See how Canvas is used in online and hybrid learning environments as well as in traditional in-person classrooms.

Discover how the COVID-19 pandemic reinvented the educational landscape, bringing the terms *asynchronous* and *synchronous* learning into the mainstream.

Figure out what it means to help learners in the digital space and how best to present your course material online.

See how Canvas can be leveraged for all learning styles, from visual and aural learners to verbal and physical learners, too.

Chapter 1

The Who, What, When, Where, and Why of Canvas

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what Canvas is and who uses it
 - » Deciding when you should use Canvas
 - » Looking at the importance of blended learning environments
-

Regardless of whether you are an aspiring Canvas Panda or you are a proper Panda Professional, we all share the same goal: to do what is best for the learners in our classrooms. You understand that *blended learning* — the mixture of traditional face-to-face instruction with digital media in any teaching modality — is here to stay; you may have struggled through teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most arduous times in history (let alone in your educational career); and you now are looking to use one of the most powerful educational technology (edtech) platforms in the world. You are in the right place.

With nearly 30 million paid users worldwide, 1.5 million active users within the Canvas community, 13 U.S. states adopting Canvas LMS and/or Instructure-powered products statewide, and tremendous growth in Europe, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific, you are among an enormous group of fellow Pandas all working toward the same universally important goal.

This chapter provides you with an overview of the Canvas LMS ecosystem and the reasons why it is such a powerful educational technology tool. You also get a preview of the topics you will explore in more detail throughout this book.

Who Uses Canvas?

The answer to this question is fairly simple: a world of educators, administrators, and learners who are focused on teaching and learning beyond the walls of a conventional classroom.

Educators

Next to students, educators are the biggest users of Canvas LMS in the educational sector. We hope that school administrators, social workers, instructional coaches, and office staff also gain helpful insights into how Canvas LMS can make learning and communication better for all by reading this book as well.

As educators ourselves, we have had very different Canvas experiences. In 2018, Eddie worked as the innovation coach at Central Nine Career Center, an adult and continuing education career center in Indiana. As most of the students who came to Central Nine were familiar with Canvas LMS already, having used it in school prior to coming to the center, Central Nine administration decided that it needed to consider adopting a learning management system (LMS), too. Eddie was well-versed in all things edtech and was extremely excited about the possibility of adopting and implementing Canvas LMS. Within a few months, Central Nine had made the decision to adopt Canvas LMS, and Eddie took on the task of facilitating a year-long implementation plan with a pilot teacher team that he

named the “Panda Pilots.” It was a great success! While Eddie was in those early stages of adopting and implementing Canvas LMS, he was constantly collaborating with Marcus. Marcus is what we refer to as an “OG” or “original gangsta” of Canvas LMS.

Marcus’s background with Canvas started back in 2013. He was teaching high school English at a small rural school district in Indiana. As he recalls, the original reason for adopting Canvas LMS was because in the flatlands of Indiana, two inches of snow could shut down school for the day. Some of you know exactly what we are talking about, but for those who don’t, the situation was this: Even a minimal amount of snow could close school due to the hazardous road conditions caused by the blowing and drifting of snow. So, in any given school year, Marcus would see roughly six to ten school days canceled by inclement weather. Those lost instructional days would be added to the end of the school year and every time that happened, end of the year events such as graduation ceremonies, open houses, awards nights, athletic events, and on and on, had to be rescheduled. This rescheduling of events over and over became quite a strain on relations between the school district and the community members.

Believe it or not, the primary reason his district adopted Canvas LMS back then was to attempt to avoid this calendar nightmare. The philosophy was simple. Having Canvas would enable teachers to provide work, mostly busy work in those days, to students even when they were not in school, thereby avoiding a full cancellation of the day. So, Marcus has been using Canvas for a long time. Though the journeys are clearly different, that is precisely what we felt made our collaboration work so well. To this day, we still often see Canvas LMS from completely different viewpoints and are constantly

learning from each other's experiences in working with teachers.

The point right now is that many teachers worldwide from all types of teaching backgrounds — K-12, higher education, career and technical education, and beyond — find their way to Canvas LMS. (In [Chapter 3](#) you take a look around the Canvas interface, and in [Chapter 4](#) you discover the steps to setting up your very first Canvas course.)

Administrators

Administrators use Canvas LMS, too. Canvas is one of the few edtech platforms that can and should be used as regularly by administrators as it is by teachers in classrooms. Think about that. How many digital platforms do you use each day? How many of those can be effectively leveraged by an administrator? The answer is that there are very few, but Canvas LMS is one of the most effective platforms for administrators to utilize on a day-to-day basis.

Our primary experience is in the K-12 setting, but when you think about the myriad of ways administrators can use Canvas to lead within their buildings, you can see that an administrator not using Canvas LMS is an administrator who is working hard, but maybe not working intelligently. Whether you are a principal, an assistant principal, a curriculum director, or the superintendent of your district, leveraging Canvas LMS is absolutely critical, worthwhile, and effective.

We have all said this before: *This meeting could've been an email!* Well, as administrators continue to learn Canvas LMS, they can leverage the platform to save everyone time and struggle within the day-to-day grind of teaching. In [Chapter 8](#), we go into the ins and outs of

using the Canvas communication tools to not only make learning personal for your learners, but also help you streamline communication between departments and clearly communicate with stakeholders.



TIP Did you know that there is an entire department at Instructure that solely focuses on educational thought leadership and provides professional development to school and district administrators? The Center for Leadership and Learning (www.instructure.com/product/canvas/leadership-development) works with hundreds of administrators every year to assist them in their implementation of the Canvas LMS, Canvas for Elementary, and MasteryConnect platforms, in order to better lead by example.

School staff

The phrase, *it takes a village* is likely one of the most appropriate phrases to apply to teaching and learning. In the K-12 setting, there are instructional coaches, technology coaches, technology integrationists, innovation coaches, paraprofessionals, councilors, teacher aides, and about a dozen other titles that all fall under this umbrella of “other folks who support learning who need to be fluent in their use of Canvas LMS.” In Marcus’s experience in some small- to medium-sized school districts, he would often leverage some of the classroom aides and paraprofessionals on campus to ensure that everyone could assist a student with learning via Canvas LMS. In short, adults in the building should be functional, if not fluent, in using Canvas LMS because it is one of the few digital platforms that truly impacts

nearly every stakeholder associated with a school district or university.

Students

Last, but certainly not least, millions of student learners use Canvas LMS every single day. Whether the student is a kindergartener in Kansas, a preteen in Oregon, a teenager in England, a college student at the University of Notre Dame, or a student of dental hygiene in Australia, Canvas LMS students are as diverse and as powerful as ever. As with so many other technology platforms, often the adults struggle more with new technology than the kids do. Canvas LMS is quite intuitive, and with some basic knowledge of the platform and a little bit of time to become acclimated, students always find a way to see learning success within Canvas.



TIP

One of the best things you can do as an educator or administrator is to find a way to also be a student within the Canvas LMS platform. This is a point that is paramount when learning Canvas LMS. As an educator, you need to create, design, and build content for your students, but you should also experience that content as a student. (You discover how to use the Student View in Canvas to check out how your courses appear on students' screens in [Chapter 4](#).)



REMEMBER

In much the same way you design a lesson backward, starting with the desired outcome, as an educator you always want to consider how your lesson design in Canvas LMS looks, feels, and works