CANVAS: How to create a Great Course Homepage

What is the Homepage?

- Entry point into course
    - Navigation to rest of course!
    - Instructor contact info
    - Course management details = Access to syllabus, critical forms, etc.
    - Other convenience items: recent announcements, "To Do" list
- Top level "start page" to return to at any time while using course

Select your Canvas Homepage

1. In Course Menu, click HOME
2. In right side menu, click Choose Home Page
3. Select desired homepage from 5 options- note that the Page option is not initially available.

The default homepage = Modules <– this is a poor choice!

- does not provide efficient navigation
- cluttered and unattractive
- provides very limited design options
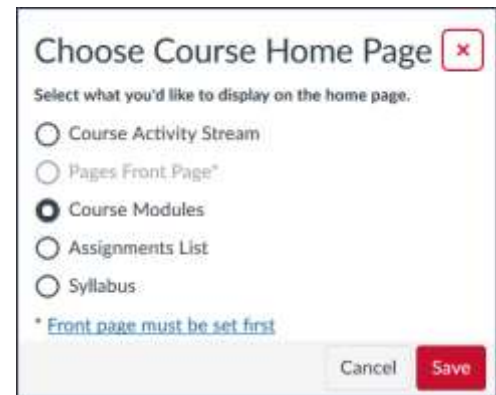
We recommend using either the PAGES FRONT PAGE or SYLLABUS options.

- The Syllabus option is a "Page" plus an auto-generated Course Summary.
- If you have old elements appearing in the Course Summary, i.e. you do not completely revise all dates at start of semester or have unused things lingering in your course, use a PAGE.
- Each Page is created and edited in Canvas with the Rich Content Editor. It is can include any normal web page element, such as images, links, and embedded video. To use a Page as the course Home Page:
    1. Click the PAGES storage area
    2. Add (create) a new page: insert title, text, content links, navigation link, graphics, etc.
    3. Save and Publish the Page
    4. On your list of Pages, expand the menu to the far right of the newly created page and select "Use as Front Page". A label is added after the page name and it is now available to selected as a Home Page option.
    5. Go to Home > Choose Home Page > Select "Pages Front Page" > Save
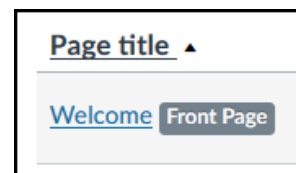
Design your Canvas Homepage:

DO:	AVOID:
Provide a syllabus file link & instructor contact information	Posting the entire syllabus text on the home page
Create an efficient navigation structure	Start student at top of module list and expect them to scroll down to relevant section each week
Incorporate color and small graphics for visual appeal and identity.	Post one large picture that must be scrolled past to reach navigation links each time page is displayed
Check for web accessibility	Assume every student will access the course the same way, every time, & learn the same way.
Group related items together & put them in chronological order	Expect students to hop between sections to discover/find what they need each week.

Is your course accessible to all learners?

- The ISU Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT, http://www.celt.iastate.edu/) provides training and information about ADA compliance for online course design

- Canvas provides an **Accessibility Checker** as part of the text editor. Guide: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-13345-4152808104

- **UDOIT** tool in Canvas – move to the "active" part of your Canvas Course Menu. Use it to scan your Canvas course and generate report of accessibility issues & suggestions on how to fix each. UDOIT Guide: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-6504 . Typical issues:
  - Images without text tags
  - Links that are not descriptive
  - Poor color contrast in text
  - Using color alone for emphasis
  - Tables missing header labels

- Test for colorblindness
  - "**Spectrum**" Colorblindess checker Chrome extension: https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/spectrum/ofclemegkcmilinpcimpjkfhjfgmhieb?hl=en
  - To use: Add extension to Chrome, restart browser, can now review page as seen by person with each listed color deficiency
    - Tip: Select "Normal" to reset palette between each choice.

- Information about contrast and color accessibility (overview with examples): https://webaim.org/articles/contrast/
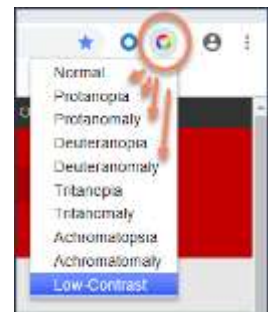
Home Page Examples:

Example 1:

- Created as a Page: clean and simple.
- Opens directly to navigation menu. Users can quickly see all content Modules and self-select which to visit.
- This site has no test or assignments so no need for 'Course Schedule' to appear.
- Audience = support staff, so low level of graphics works fine
- Contact information is provided at the bottom
- Text links are easily maintained.

Example 2 & 3:

- Colored "buttons":: In left course buttons = images; In right course buttons = colored table cells
- Navigation links are near top so user can get to them quickly.
- Subject-relevant banners and school color branding

EXAMPLE 4:

- Large, equally sized navigation bottons, each composed of text and relevant image.
- Consistency in font, font size, color usage, and image size.
- Visually appealing and balanced

Options for Creating Effective Navigation and Visual Appeal

- Provide site navigation on home page
  - Simple text links
  - Simple text link in a table, with colored cells
  - Buttons/images to give context, next to text links (list or table)
  - Buttons/images that are links (list or table)
  - Images used as links should all be same size

- Chunk content by week, case, project, etc. (whatever makes sense in your course).
  - Each "chunk" has links to all content and activities for that time period or study element
  - Chunk created as a Page, a Module, or a combination of the two
  - Smaller chunks allows for more direct navigation
  - Option: Module release can be based on each student's course performance or date
  - A link to some specific activity or content file can be presented in more than one chunk.

- Check image appearance on different devices, screen sizes
  - avoid left to right scrolling
  - don't bury navigation low down on a page such that learner must scroll down to get to first links
  - hard to see links are easily overlooked or never even seen
- All images require text tags for accessibility usage
- Use image editing software to resize images to desired end use size BEFORE storing in Canvas.

ISU Color palette: https://www.brandmarketing.iastate.edu/brand-elements/color-palette/ . Use the HEX number to define web color.

Written by Karla Embleton, College of Human Sciences, Iowa State University, April 2019.
Based on materials provided by Lisa Lund, Veterinary Medicine, Iowa State University.

Where to make/get icons, images and pictures?

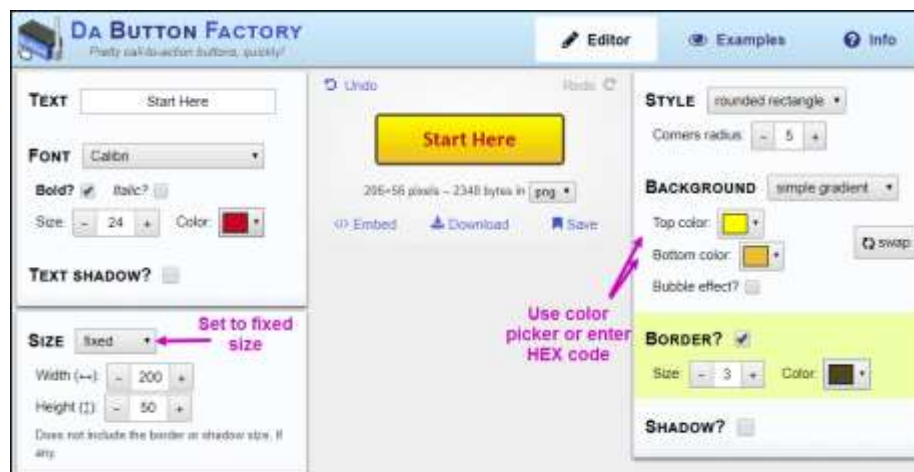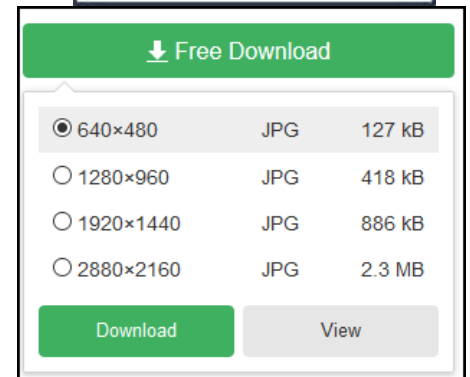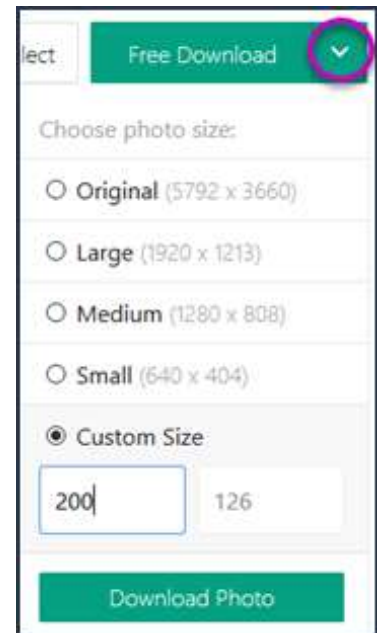**Pixabay - https://pixabay.com/**

- Free high definition photos and illustrations
- Search by keyword >
  click "Free download" >
  select desired image size *(if select **Custom Size**, enter one dimension and it calculates the second such that aspect ratio is preserved)* >
  click Download Photo >
  saves as a JPG formatted image file to your computer.
- When image is selected, may offer several more of related images *(e.g. same cat in different poses)*

Pexels - https://www.pexels.com/

- Free high definition photos and illustrations
- Search by keyword >
  click "Free download" >
  select desired image size >
  click Download Photo >
  saves as a JPG formatted image file to your computer.
- When image is selected, may offer several more of related images.

Da Button Factory - https://dabuttonfactory.com/

- Can quickly create sets of matched buttons (same size, font …)
- Define your desired button shape, size, text font, color. Tips:
  - Set size = fixed
  - Sans serif fonts are more legible but less formal
  - Smaller buttons are generally better for mobile screens
  - Make button with MOST text first (it will be largest).
- Download as PNG, JPG, or GIF file format.
- Embed option provides link to button stored in the Da Button server space
- If click "Save", receive a URL that can be used to re-open the image at future date for further editing.

Canva - https://www.canva.com

- Good for creating professional looking banners:: use the "Facebook cover" template
- Need to create a user account
- Includes tutorials/tips for using:: click the "**Design school**" link
- Saves your project as you work, saves your uploaded images
- Free editable templates:: can replace images and text in the template
    - Drag images from computer to left hand column to save. Saves in your Canva image folder
    - Click and drag images from your image folder to the selected template region
    - Can change banner image, text font, text size, text spacing, background color
    - Download and save as JPG (smaller, good for web), PNG (high quality images, web), PDF.
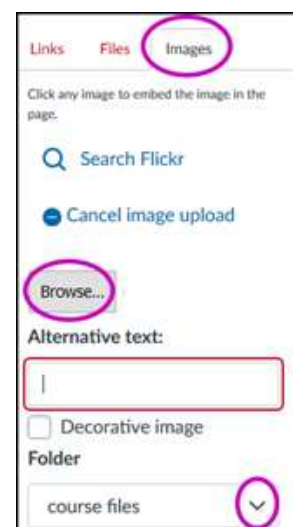

Putting it all together in a Canvas Page

Option 1: Copy all the images you wish to use for your homepage banner and navigation buttons to the FILES storage in your Canvas course. It is a good idea to create a Files subfolder for the homepage images so they are stored together and easy to find.

When you add the image to the page, you will need to open the **accessibility checker** then add alt text to the image – this is necessary for accessibility purposes.


Option 2: Upload each image individually to Canvas as you build your new page. The upload includes a box where you enter the image's alt text as part of the upload process.

Note: Regardless of whether you use Option 1 or 2, the alt text is stored as part of the Page code, not part of the image. Therefore, every time you use an image in Canvas, you will need to re-enter its alt text,

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1. Make sure buttons are visible and look clickable.
2. Do not use more than 3 font types/sizes on your page.
3. Consider color contrast, branding, emotions conveyed and cultural meaning of color (overview: https://learn.canva.com/color-theory/).
4. Pick a good location for buttons.
   - Group by type and place those needed most frequently closer to the top of the page.
   - A list layout is more accessible than a table but may be less visually appealing.
   - Navigation buttons should be easily visible when the course opens. Do not put them below an overly large image or have them hanging off the right side of the screen such that user must scroll to the right.
5. Create a link from each image to the thing that it should go to, e.g. a Module, File, Page, Assignment, URL, or other course component. When the link is made, it will flash yellow in the text editor.
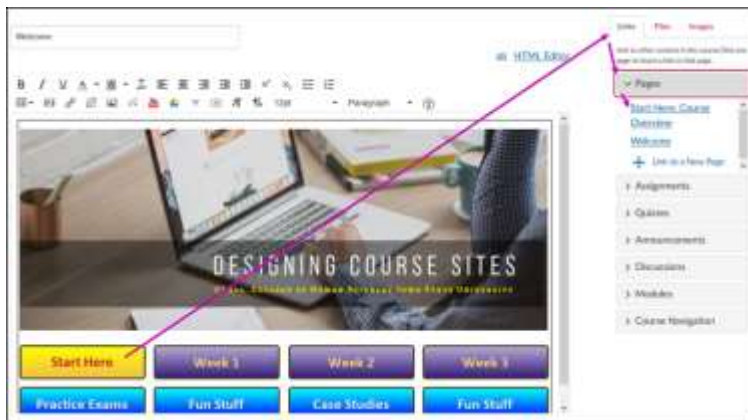
6. **Save** and **Publish** your Page.
7. Check that the homepage looks okay in multiple devices and screen sizes and works as expected.
   - You can switch to Student View or do as Instructor, but remember that the things the links are point to must also be published and not otherwise restricted by date or flow rules.
8. **Mark it as the Front Page** *(Pages> settings for the page >select Use as Front Page)*.
9. Specify that it should be used as the **Home Page** *(Home>Choose Home Page)*.