

This document outlines the differences and similarities between three options for distributing content from one course to several other courses: blueprint courses, Canvas Commons, and course templates. It also provides some suggestions and examples of how each tool might be used within Canvas.

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Feature Summary

Feature	Blueprint Courses	Canvas Commons	Course Templates
Content types allowed (e.g., files, assignments, quizzes)	All	All	All
Content distribution type	Top-down sync, exact copy	Collaborative sharing	Top-down sync, exact copy
Feature enabled by	Canvas Admin	CSM	Canvas Admin
Affected user roles	Account/course roles with appropriate permissions	Account/course roles with appropriate permissions	Account/course roles with appropriate permissions
Update method	Users with blueprint permissions can update blueprint course	Original author updates, uploads to Commons	Account roles with course template permissions
Sync method	Synced to all courses simultaneously	End-user manually downloads updates for individual courses	Template applied to course shells as part of new course creation process (manual or SIS)
Content overwritten when synced	Yes (some content) ¹	Yes ²	N/A
Searchable	No	Yes	No
Supports locked content	Yes	No	No
File size limitations	Varies by institution	500mb per file	Same as course copy
Student enrollments in main course	No	Yes ³	No
Affected by sub-accounts	Yes ⁴	No	No
Content editable by end user	Yes - Unlocked content No - Locked content	Yes ⁵	Yes
Shareable with other instructors/users	Yes ⁶	Yes ⁷	Yes ⁸
Shareable outside of institution	Yes ⁶	Yes ⁷	Yes ⁹
Available in Free for Teachers accounts	No	Yes	No

(see notes on following page)

Notes:

1. Locked content is overwritten; unlocked items and items edited/added by teachers are not overwritten.
2. Updates effectively replace old content, so any changes are overwritten
3. Student enrollments and data are removed when content is uploaded to Commons.
4. Associated courses must reside in the same or a lower subaccount than where the blueprint course resides.
5. Imported updates through Commons will overwrite any changes made by the user.
6. Sharing a blueprint course requires a course export.
7. Sharing depends on institution settings. Sharing options for Commons: privately, group, consortiums, entire account, public.
8. When set for an account, course template content is populated as a course copy to all new course shells automatically; content can be managed as a course export.
9. Sharing a course template outside the institution requires a course export.

Blueprint Courses

Blueprint courses allow institutions to set up a master course (the blueprint course) customized with locked and unlocked content and synced to one or more associated courses. The blueprint course is generally created and maintained by an account admin or an instructional designer, or an instructor with appropriate permissions.

Content can be locked (or left unlocked) by any user with permission to manage the blueprint course and is not allowed to be modified by instructors in the blueprint's associated courses. Lockable course objects include content, points, due dates, and availability dates. Users can set objects to be locked generally or by type. Lockable content types include Assignments, Discussions, Pages, Files, and Quizzes.

Blueprint courses function like a regular course in Canvas with three major exceptions: Blueprint courses sync to associated courses, manage content editing with a content locking feature, and contain no student enrollments.

A user who manages a blueprint course adds content to the blueprint course like with any other course in Canvas. By adding course content to the blueprint course, the user builds the blueprint for all associated courses. Upon syncing, all content from the blueprint course is copied into the associated courses. Instructors can then customize associated courses by adding new content, editing unlocked content, and adding LTI tools.

A blueprint course can exist at the account or subaccount level, but associated courses must reside in the same or a lower subaccount than where the blueprint course resides.

Institutions interested in promoting consistent, best practices in course design while providing autonomy to instructors may want to consider using Course Templates.

Canvas Commons

Canvas Commons is a learning object repository that enables educators to find, import, and share resources. Using Commons, instructors can share content with other teachers and departments, among other schools, and with worldwide Canvas instructors. Instructors can also import course content from a variety of sources for course creation. An instructor can modify imported content to best fit the needs of their students.

Once Canvas Commons is enabled for an institution, account admins manage the sharing and availability settings for Commons. They may choose to allow content only from other users within an institution as well as public content available from Canvas users around the world.

Canvas Commons content can be downloaded and used in Canvas courses. When a user updates content in Commons, these updates do not automatically sync to courses that have previously downloaded the content. Updates must be imported by the user who downloaded the original content. Additionally, only the user who originally uploaded the content can update the information in Commons.

Course Templates

A course template in Canvas is a course shell that can be configured to provide structure to support each institution's style for optimal course design. Configuration for a course template can include course navigation, widely applicable content pages promoting school or departmental ethos, as well as module layout to help with pacing through a term.

Course templates function like a regular course in Canvas except they do not contain user enrollments or a People page.

The course template is created and maintained by an account admin with appropriate permissions. The Courses - Course Templates permissions are not available for course roles. An admin can add content to the course template like any other course in Canvas and build a template for all new course shells in the account or associated sub-accounts. When a course template is applied to an account or sub-account and a new course is created, the content from the course template is copied into the new course shell. Instructors added to the new course will have all content from the template but can still customize the course by adding new content, editing unlocked content, and adding LTI tools.

A course template can exist at the account or sub-account level. Any course template at any level can be set as a course template for an account or sub-account.

Institutions interested in associating courses via a master template with content lock restrictions should use blueprint courses.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages		
Blueprint courses	Canvas Commons	Course Templates
One click sync to all associated courses	More control over content updates	More control for admins to set a foundation for course design
More control for admins, instructional designers	More control for instructors	The same content template can be used for all new courses
Use the same content for many courses	Use a variety of content to build a custom course	Less initial work for teachers in course design
Teachers don't need to check for updates	Vast library of resources, can push updates to selected resources as needed	Easy to transition course content into new terms/semesters
Can lock course content to prevent editing	Instructors have flexibility to download and share resources	Consistent starting point for course content
Less initial work for teachers in course design	Searchable by title, tags, grade level, and outcomes	Course templates can be set from any account
Easy to transition course content into new terms/semesters	Shareable publicly (must be enabled by Admin)	
Consistent starting point for course content		

Disadvantages		
Blueprint courses	Canvas Commons	Course Templates
Blueprint course creation and management requires large time investment	Can be difficult to track updates needed	Course template creation and management requires large time investment
Updates may overwrite changes made in associated courses	Updates are uploaded and downloaded manually	Updates to course template only apply to new courses
Changes made to locked items after initial sync may not sync or may overwrite changes made in associated courses	Admin must contact CSM to set up Commons	Can only be managed by users with permission in an account-level role
Not all aspects of a course can be locked	Free for Teacher accounts are limited to finding, importing and sharing	Course content cannot be locked in courses where the content is copied

	public resources only	
Associated courses must reside in the same account or a lower sub-account where the blueprint course resides	Content may be overwritten when an update is downloaded	Courses created from a template are not associated with the template
Not supported across trust accounts	No control over content once it's been downloaded by another instructor	Not supported across trust accounts
Can't share publicly or to other institutions	No content vetting for Admins	Not searchable
Not searchable (only available to associated courses)		

General Usage

This overview details how blueprint courses, Canvas Commons, and course templates are generally used. These tools can be utilized to meet the unique needs of an institution, its faculty, and students. This section should not be considered an exhaustive list of all use cases.

Blueprint Courses

A blueprint course may be used to fulfill many course design needs. The following cases would benefit from blueprint courses:

- Courses that include the same core content, such as multiple sections of the same course.
- A general education course (such as an introductory or freshman course) with several sections taught by different instructors but utilizing the same content.
- Courses that use the same content every term/semester.
- K-12 courses that need to maintain uniform structure and content, such as consistent course navigation or a standard course home page.
- A variety of courses in a department that requires some of the same basic content.
- School administrators need to distribute official school documents (such as a plagiarism policy) to associated courses.
- A course created collaboratively by department members that can be synced to and customized by all department members.

Canvas Commons

Commons may be used to share and collaboratively create course content. The following cases may use Canvas Commons:

- A group of teachers share course content to use between their courses.
- An instructor would like to share their high quality course content with other Canvas users.
- A team of instructional designers collaboratively create content for instructors to use in their courses.

- Several instructors would like to collaboratively create a final test to use among their different courses.
- A new instructor searches for and downloads applicable course content from Commons in order to focus on developing other aspects of their course.
- School administrators encourage instructors to share course content with each other to increase collaboration and efficiency in course creation.
- A school decides to share a portion of their content with other Canvas users, so they make it available to download through Commons.

Course Templates

A course template may be used to fulfill many course design needs. The following cases would benefit from course templates:

- A Canvas admin works with a course designer to create a templated course design for instructors that does not need to be locked down
- A Canvas admin wants to provide consistency between all courses within a specific account or sub-account

Sharing and Syncing

Content	Blueprint courses	Canvas Commons	Course Templates
Assignments	✓	✓	✓
Quizzes	✓	✓	✓
Modules	✓	✓	✓
Pages	✓	✓	✓
Discussions	✓	✓	✓
Apps/LTIs	✓*	✗	✓*
Files	✓	✓	✓
Calendar Events	✓	✓	✓
Assignment Details (points, due dates, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
Full Course	✓	✓	✓

*Some apps and LTIs will not function correctly after a course copy or blueprint course sync. Be sure to check all LTI configurations in associated courses.

Blueprint Courses

When any change to content is made in the blueprint course, the Sync button becomes available. When a sync is initiated, all locked and unlocked content in the blueprint course syncs automatically to all associated courses. All content will sync exactly as created in the blueprint course, including settings, points, and availability dates. Locked content overwrites any content already in the associated courses. Unlocked content syncs to the course unless an instructor has edited the content in an associated course. In this case, the content will not be synced and will display an exception in the Blueprint course sync history.

New content added to an associated course by an instructor is not affected by a sync and will not be overwritten when a sync takes place.

Associated courses that have been concluded continue to sync with the blueprint course. Course status does not affect blueprint course syncing, so any changes made in the blueprint course will affect both published and unpublished courses. Changing details for locked assignments, discussions, or quizzes may affect student grades in associated courses.

Blueprint Sync notifications can be turned on to alert instructors of associated courses when a sync occurs.

Commons

After a user uploads a resource to Commons, content creators can update the content using one of two options: Update the current resource, or upload the updated content as a new resource. Each person who downloaded the content receives a notification in Commons about an update. They can choose to manually download the update from Commons, or ignore the update and keep the existing content. An update downloaded from Commons could overwrite any changes made to the content.

Course Templates

All assignments, settings, files, and other artifacts in the course template will be copied when a new course is created for the account. New content added to a course template does not apply to existing courses and only applies to new courses.

New courses using the template are created through the following methods:

- Account-level Courses page
- SIS imports
- Dashboard
- API endpoint

Note: Course copies via the Course Import process do not use the course template; they retain a copy of the selected course.

User Roles

Blueprint Courses			
User Role	Admin	Instructional Designer*	Instructor (in associated course)
Create a blueprint course	✓	✗	✗
Change blueprint course settings	✓	✗	✗
Manage content in blueprint course	✓	✓	✗
Sync blueprint course	✓	✓	✗
Lock and unlock content	✓	✓	✗
Associate courses with blueprint course	✓	✗	✗
Edit unlocked content in associated course	✓	✗	✓
View sync details/Receive sync notifications	✓	✓	✓

*Or any other non-admin course-level role added to the blueprint course

Canvas Commons		
User Role	Admin	Instructor
Manage settings for Commons	✓	✗
Create Groups in Commons	✓	✗
Manage shared resources for account	✓	✗
Update resource content (content can only be updated if user is original content creator)	✓	✓
Upload a new resource	✓	✓
Edit/delete resources in Commons	✓	✓*

* Instructors can only edit or delete their own resources shared to Commons

Course Templates			
User Role	Admin	Instructional Designer	Instructor (added to new new course)
Create content for course template	✓	✗ ^	✗ ^
Set course template for account/sub-account	✓	✗	✗
Manage content in course template	✓	✗	✗
Create new course using course template	✓	✓ *	✓ *

* If user role is allowed to create new courses and if the course is set as the template for an account or sub-account

^ Content can be designed in a course shell—however, to enable the course as a template, an admin must remove the user from the course, as course templates cannot have any user enrollments.

Resources

Canvas Admin Blueprint Course Guides

- [How do I enable a course as a blueprint course as an admin?](#)
- [How do I associate a course with a blueprint course as an admin?](#)
- [How do I lock course objects in a blueprint course as an admin?](#)
- [How do I sync course content in a blueprint course as an admin?](#)
- [How do I view the sync history for a blueprint course as an admin?](#)

Canvas Instructor Blueprint Course Guides

- [How do I manage content for a course associated with a blueprint course?](#)

Canvas Commons Guides

- [Canvas Commons Guides](#)
- [What is Canvas Commons?](#)

Canvas Admin Course Template Guides

- [How do I enable a course as a course template?](#)
- [How do I select a course template in an account?](#)