

The art of the welcome announcement

If you are working through the [eCampus Online Course Evaluation Rubric](#), you are doing a lot of work to help your students feel welcomed and oriented in your class. You've created an [inclusive syllabus](#), you've designed a beautiful welcome page and your "Start Here" module is ready to go. Now what?

In an age when students [can't be 100% sure that their online instructor is still alive](#), sending a welcome announcement is a great way to immediately connect with your students and establish your presence as an instructor. If you are switching over to Canvas and want to change up your workflow, or if you are just looking to polish up your first impression, here are a few tips.

ENSURE YOUR STUDENTS CAN SEE YOUR MESSAGE

Unlike Blackboard, Canvas notifications are opt-in only, which means students may not receive copies of announcements in their email inboxes. If you are teaching on Canvas, consider sending a copy of your welcome announcement [via email](#). If you send announcements often ([which is a great practice](#)), you may even want to [direct students to adjust their notification settings](#) within your first announcement.

Don't forgo posting your welcome announcement on Canvas, though! The announcements are a great way to document your communication with students. Direct any students who enroll in your class late to the Announcements tab on Canvas to catch up. You can also make Announcements easily accessible on Canvas by setting them up to display on your homepage. Here is a [tutorial on how to set up your display preferences](#) for announcements.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF COLOR AND IMAGE FEATURES

In a recent article, "[Kindness at First Sight: The Role of Syllabi in Impression Formation](#)," researchers found that visual syllabus design increased student perception of instructors as "kinder, more creative, and more approachable." Consider transferring these findings to your first message to students. One advantage of Canvas' announcement feature is that it offers a full suite of editing functions, including headings, embedded media, and text color. While too many design

features may overwhelm your students (and their internet connections!), a thoughtfully selected color scheme or graphic can help convey welcome at a glance.

ADD INTERACTIVE FEATURES

A welcome message provides a great opportunity to prompt action. [Adding hyperlinks to course content](#) is streamlined in the Canvas announcement interface, which means you can easily direct students to important class pages. You can also [set up announcements to include a "like" feature and allow students to add comments](#). Nudge student interaction by asking them to "like" the announcement once they have viewed it on Canvas. Or ask students to comment on the announcement; this is a great opportunity to ask students fun "get to know you" questions that can range from irreverent community-builders to warm-ups for course content.

USE FRIENDLY AND ACCESSIBLE LANGUAGE

While all instructors have their own unique communication styles, [Chronicle of Higher Education contributor Flower Darby's recommendation](#) to "infuse your writing with warmth" is a great principle for anyone to adopt. Another way to think of this is to write with the assumption that students will be successful and make positive contributions to the course.

Here's an example from my own class:

Welcome!

Welcome to our summer session class! My name is Elle Fournier (feel free to call me Elle!) and I am the instructor for this course. I wanted to quickly reach out and welcome you. While we have limited time together this term, I am excited for this opportunity to build a community and learn from each other. I also wanted to share a few bits of information to help start the semester off smoothly.



Canvas

Your course is hosted on Canvas, not on Blackboard. To access the course, head to [alaska.instructure.com](#) and log in using your student ID (the same log in you use for UA Online).

Once you log into Canvas, you can view the [class tour video](#) to get oriented.

There is a lot of help available! Click [here](#) to access Canvas help.

Set Up Notifications

After this first message, the main way I will communicate with the whole class is through [Canvas announcements](#). You can view the announcement on Canvas, but you should also receive a copy in your UAF email. If you do not receive an announcement in your email, please check your Announcement settings on Canvas. You can change the setting by going to "Account," then "Notifications" and then hitting the checkmark by "Announcement." I will send out a lot of important information/reminders through Announcements this semester, so please make sure that you have set your Notification settings to get copies in your email.

We Are Here For You

I am available to answer any questions you have getting started. You can contact me via [email](#) or through Canvas. The university has many resources available for students as well. Please reach out if you need help connecting to our technology resources. You can learn more about other types of resources in the [syllabus](#).

Let's Get Started!

This week will be devoted to completing introductory reading assignments, including the syllabus and course information. There are also two activities this week: the [first due on Wednesday](#), the [other on Friday](#). Navigate to the [Modules page on Canvas](#) or click the links for more information. Feel free to [reach out](#) with any questions, or if you have any trouble with Canvas.

Weekly Challenge

[Read about weekly challenges in the syllabus](#), and then add your comment here.

Comment on this announcement with a picture of your favorite building. You don't have to have actually visited this building. Personal photos or online images are great.