

## Teaching Online through Canvas

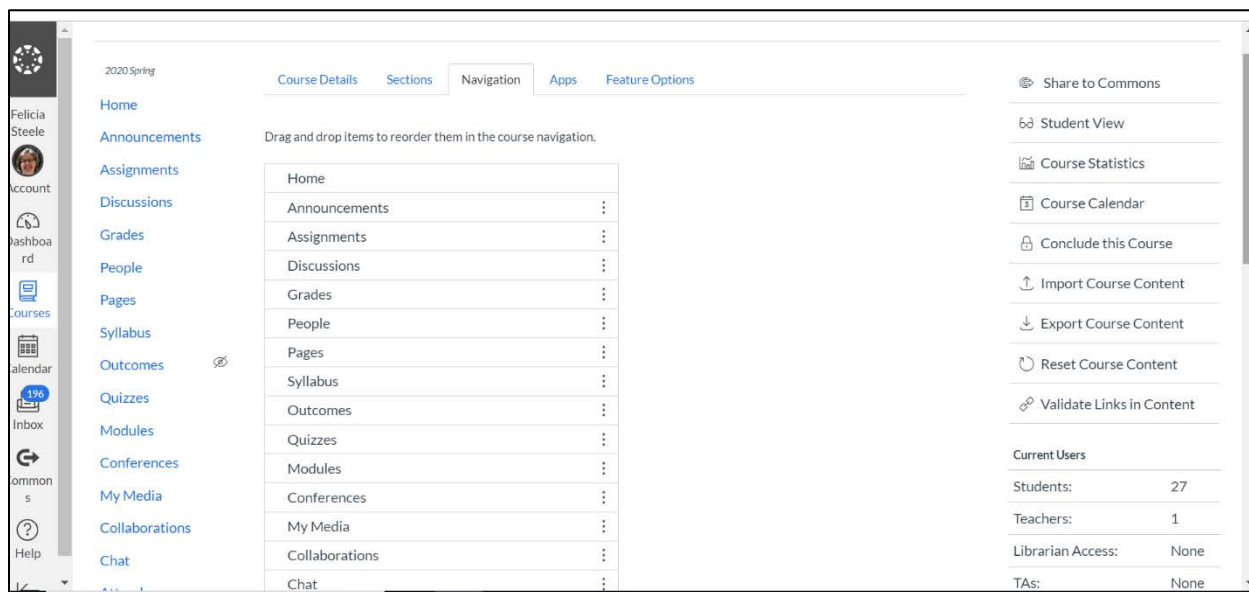
Felicia Jean Steele, Department of English, The College of New Jersey

March 1, 2020

Whenever I get a respiratory infection, my voice fails. Rather than cancel class or design group tasks that students can do while I supervise through "interpretive dance," I've been teaching through Canvas's "Conferences" module. Typically, it only has to happen once a term, but it helps us to stay on track; if we have a snow day and everyone still has power, I do the same thing. The course is not, in any way "blended" in the way that some TCNJ classes are, but teaching through "Conferences" is a useful stop-gap measure.

Since we're reaching a moment of uncertainty in terms of what we might be expected to do to self-quarantine if we're exposed to COVID-19, or if the campus wants us to minimize interaction in order to prevent spread, I thought it might be helpful to others for me to write up how I do this. I'm certain that I'm not the only person who has used this technology, so perhaps this might help to start a conversation about what people have found that works or doesn't work.

"Conferences" is one of the tools that is automatically activated in Canvas, but if you need to activate it, go to the "Settings" page in your Canvas course and select "Navigation."

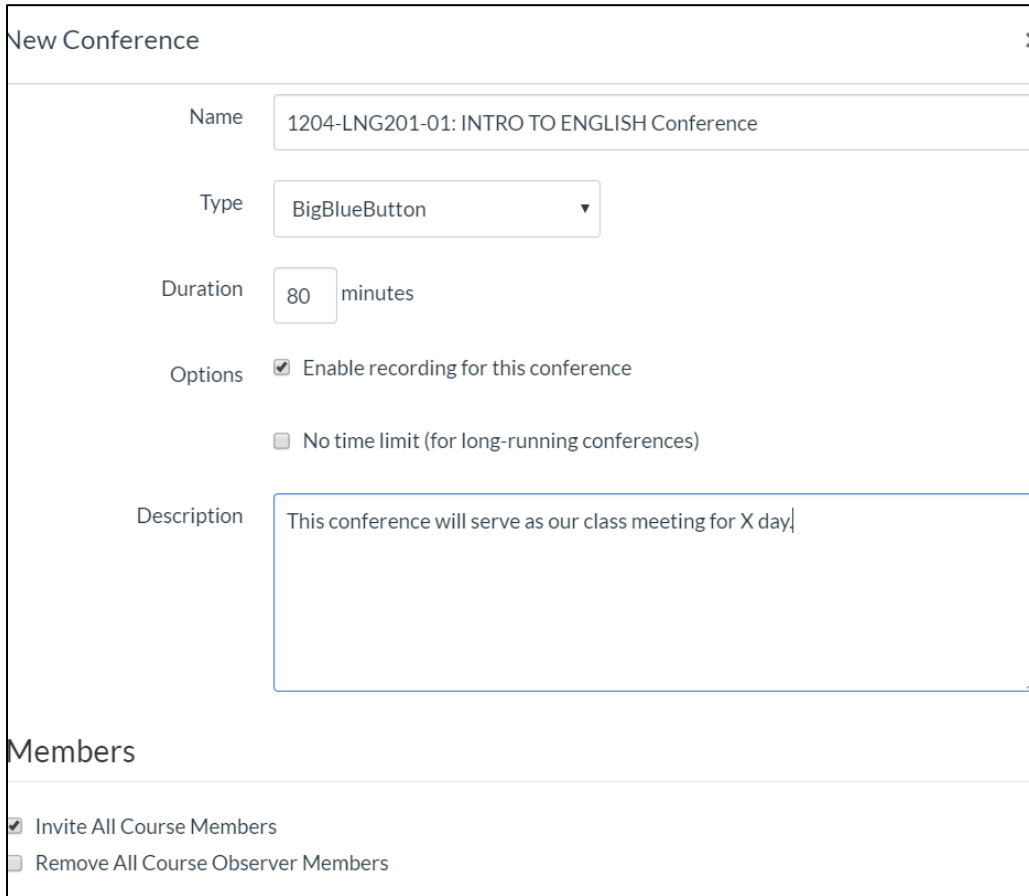


I tend to use a lot of the tools in Canvas, but I think those that are used to communicate with students most frequently are "Conferences" and "Chat."

Part of the reason that I like to use the "Conferences" module is that you can share a document with students as a presentation within the tool and that you can share your screen with students so that if you want to share something like a poem, you can.

"Conferences" works much like videoconferencing software such as "Go To Meeting", but it is scaled back and defaults to a textbox. When you activate "Conferences," you'll be asked to make some choices: how long the conference will run, who will be invited to participate, and whether or not you want the

conference to be recorded. I always choose to have the conference recorded so that students can see the documents that I used if they aren't able to make the technology work on their end. Keep in mind, however, that the recording of the conference only records audio and what appears in the presentation screen—not the textbox where the classroom discussion unfolds. In addition to the recording, I always select and copy all of the text within the textbox so that I can save a transcript of the class. I then share that transcript with students through an announcement immediately after the class.



New Conference

Name 1204-LNG201-01: INTRO TO ENGLISH Conference

Type BigBlueButton

Duration 80 minutes

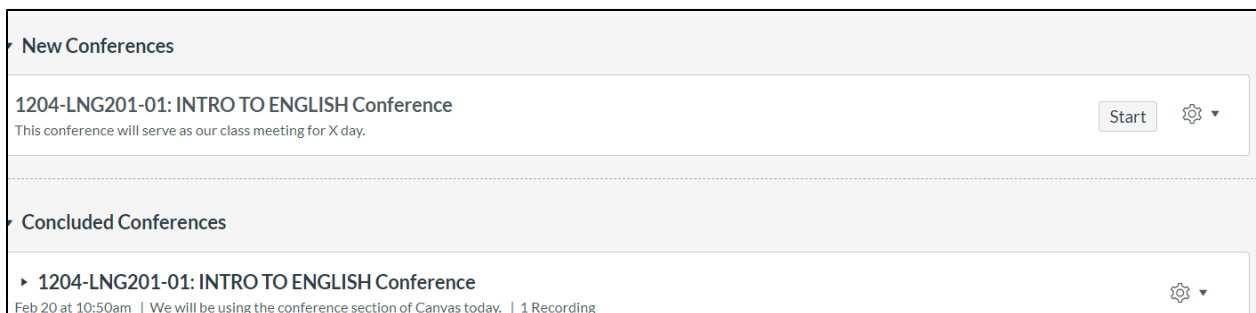
Options  Enable recording for this conference  
 No time limit (for long-running conferences)

Description This conference will serve as our class meeting for X day

Members

Invite All Course Members  
 Remove All Course Observer Members

Once you've set up the conference, you'll return to a screen where it will appear as a "New Conference" that must be started.



New Conferences

1204-LNG201-01: INTRO TO ENGLISH Conference  
This conference will serve as our class meeting for X day. Start ⚙️

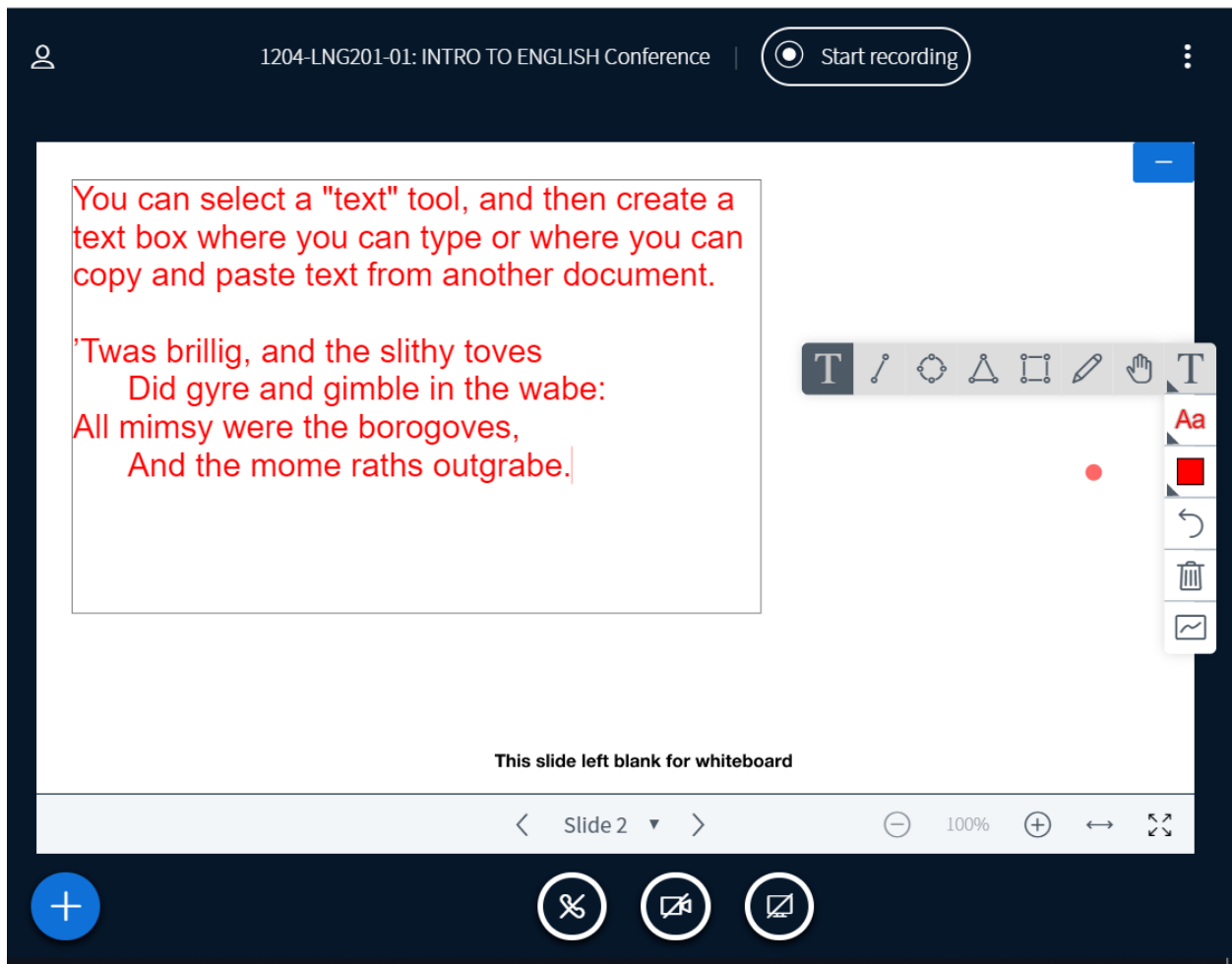
Concluded Conferences

▸ 1204-LNG201-01: INTRO TO ENGLISH Conference ⚙️  
Feb 20 at 10:50am | We will be using the conference section of Canvas today. | 1 Recording

Once you begin the conference, you'll be asked whether you want to activate your web camera and your microphone, or if you want to join through your telephone. Students have these same options when they join the conference. I don't use sound or camera in most of my conferences because my classes are

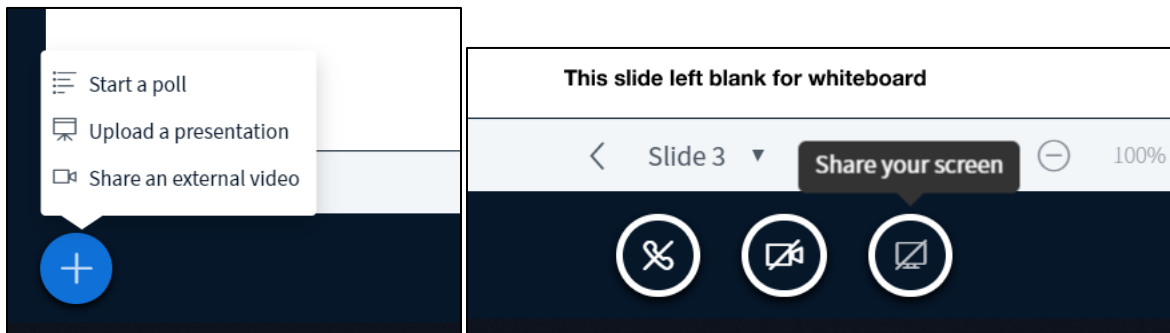
big and the program has always been buggy. In addition, when I've tried it, I've wasted a lot of time dealing with students' interactions with the system—with sound feedback and other annoying things. If you have a small class (such as a LIT 499), audio and video may work, but make sure that everyone (including you) uses headphones so that there is no possibility for feedback.

The default screen has a description of all the things that the system can do. If you select the right arrow at the bottom of the screen, you'll go to a white board that all the participants in the group can use if you wish.



I've placed an arrow next to the icon that you would select if you wanted students to have the opportunity to use this white board as well.

Typically, I share a presentation with students that I can flip through. I either generate a PDF of a powerpoint or another document. You can also direct a student to an external video or share your screen. Screensharing is particularly helpful if you want to show students how to use a computer system, such as one of the library's resources. Basically, you can do anything with screensharing that you would do in a smart classroom.



I've never used a poll, although it would probably be best to have the questions drafted ahead of time so that you can cut and paste them quickly into the appropriate fields.

< Polling
×

Select an option below to start your poll.

Yes / No	True / False
A / B	A / B / C
A / B / C / D	A / B / C / D / E

To create a custom poll, select the button below and input your options.

Custom poll

**How does the class unfold and how do you prepare for it?**

Whenever I teach this way, I write out all the comments that I plan to make in class in a document ahead of time so that I can cut and paste them into the textbox field. You do have to be patient as students type their comments and as you type your replies, but you can make class unfold relatively efficiently if you prepare your remarks carefully ahead of time and have a sense of the rhetorical and pedagogical transitions you know you will have to make ahead of time. I don't find this more onerous than any other type of preparation, although I do have to write out my notes in prose rather than in outline form. You can see how quickly cutting and pasting allows me to populate the textbox.

**Felicia Steele**

9:30 AM

We aren't going to be using any sound (the system isn't quite as robust as it should be) so don't worry about having to activate your microphones or speakers

**Felicia Steele**

9:30 AM

Thank you all for doing this. I really appreciate it. I'd prefer not to be seen for a few days. :)

Let's talk about how this class is going to go, because it is going to show a slightly unconventional pattern. To keep a measure of consistency, let's go over the agenda first: We'll be talking about the following terms: open/closed lexical categories, morphological description, syntactic description, syntactic frames. Then we will be talking about terms specific to individual parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, determiners, auxiliary verbs. We will likely not get to all of the material, but as you can see from the rest of the syllabus up until the midterm examination on Monday, March 9, we have lots and lots of space for repetition and practice with these concepts. You'll notice days that say things like "more syntax" and "even more syntax." Finally, you can ask questions through the chat box at the left at any point, but if you are replying to something that a specific person has said, make sure you include the tag @Person'sName.

**Felicia Steele**

9:31 AM

There is a lot of material in this chapter, and it may seem somewhat overwhelming, but this chapter is the juncture of two important systems in linguistics: morphology and syntax. First and foremost, I want to reassure you that this is material that will be re-emphasized over and over again as we talk about syntax.

I always begin my classes in the same way that I would begin an in-person class with an agenda of what we'll be doing and with instructions about how to share comments. Since the students' comments, once they begin, come fast and furiously, I also ask students to tag anyone they might be replying to directly. Tagging also allows me to indicate when I'm replying to a specific student question, even if it becomes disconnected from the conversation as a whole, or if I've moved on to a new topic prematurely. Not all the students will be equally good typists, but they generally report that they are comfortable interacting and asking questions in this way..

**Morgan** [REDACTED]

9:42 AM

question- what is the definition of morphological description again

**Felicia Steele**

9:42 AM

Good--so I hope that we've have illustrated the difference between lexical category, morphological description, and syntactic description.

**Felicia Steele**

9:43 AM

@morgan Morphological description means that we can define a lexical category according to what morphemes attach to a given word

Course chats work in a similar way, and also include support for emojis, but they are lasting (so anything a student posts remains up for the duration of the course). You can't share a screen, but you can provide links to material that they could use on their own computers.

I know many of us also use the discussion board to facilitate work when we are away at conferences, but if we are required to do some kind of instruction synchronously, then the "Conferences" within Canvas will be helpful.