Upload files to your Canvas course

Introduction

Presenting your course materials to your students is one of the many functions of Canvas. When you start to build your Canvas course it is a good first step to upload these course materials (lecture slides, readers, assignment files, images, etc.) to Canvas in one action, and in a structured way. This saves time during the building process and makes maintaining your course easier. For this you use the Files section and this document shows the way how to use it. The idea is that you use the Files section in a course as a 'storage area' that is only visible for lecturers, and that you present the content to students in the Modules section. For the latter, see our best practice 'Organizing course content using Modules'.

Screenshots shown are made on a Window 11 computer and a Firefox browser. Canvas supports these browsers.

Important: When files are uploaded to Canvas they have a published state by default. If you upload files you want to share with your colleagues but should not be accessible by students, you should unpublish these files. You can unpublish files by file or by folder in the Canvas course Files.

The process outlined

1. Organize your course materials in a folder structure on your computer.
2. Create a zip file of all folders you want to upload.
3. Upload all files in one action to your Canvas course
4. Keep your file structure organized

Step by step instruction

1. Organize your course materials in a folder structure on your computer. This structure should be clear for you and your fellow lecturers that build/teach the course. If several lecturers are going to upload materials, decide about a structure together to streamline the course building process.

2. Create a zip file of the folder structure you want to upload by sending them to a compressed (zipped) folder. This preparation is necessary so you can upload all your course materials to Canvas with one action, since Canvas can only import files and not folders.

On Windows 11 you can create a zip file by selecting one or more folders and right click on the selection. In the context menu that appears choose **Compress to…** and then ZIP File. After some time the windows folder will show a .zip file that has the name of one of the selected folders.
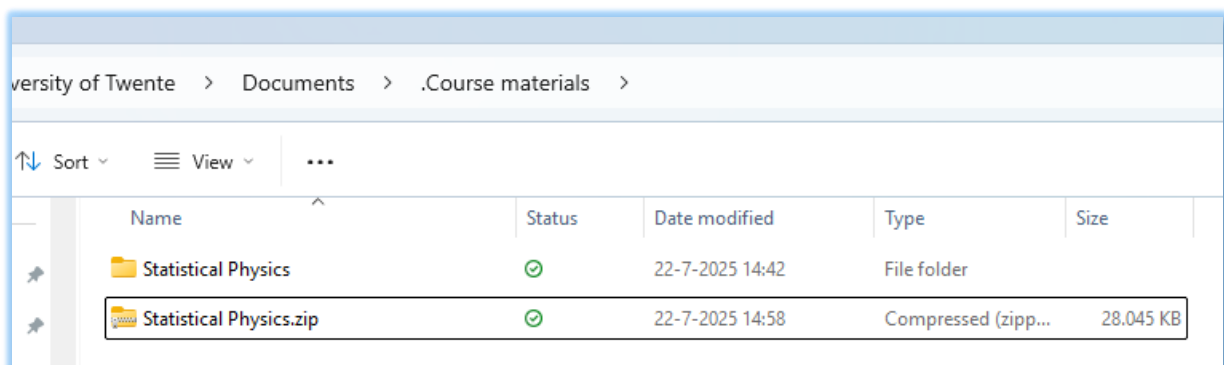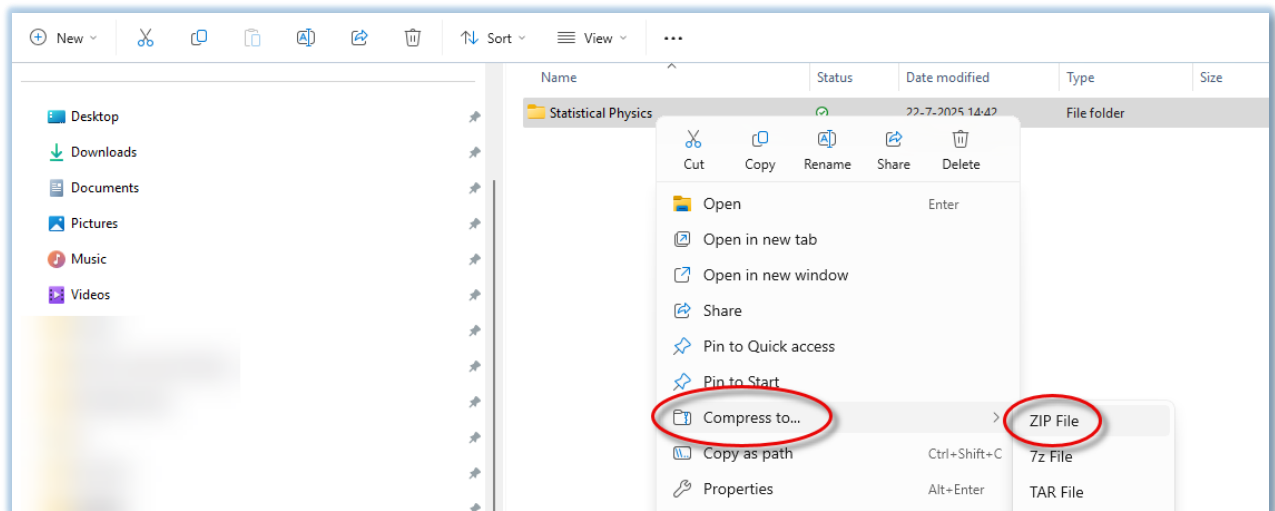
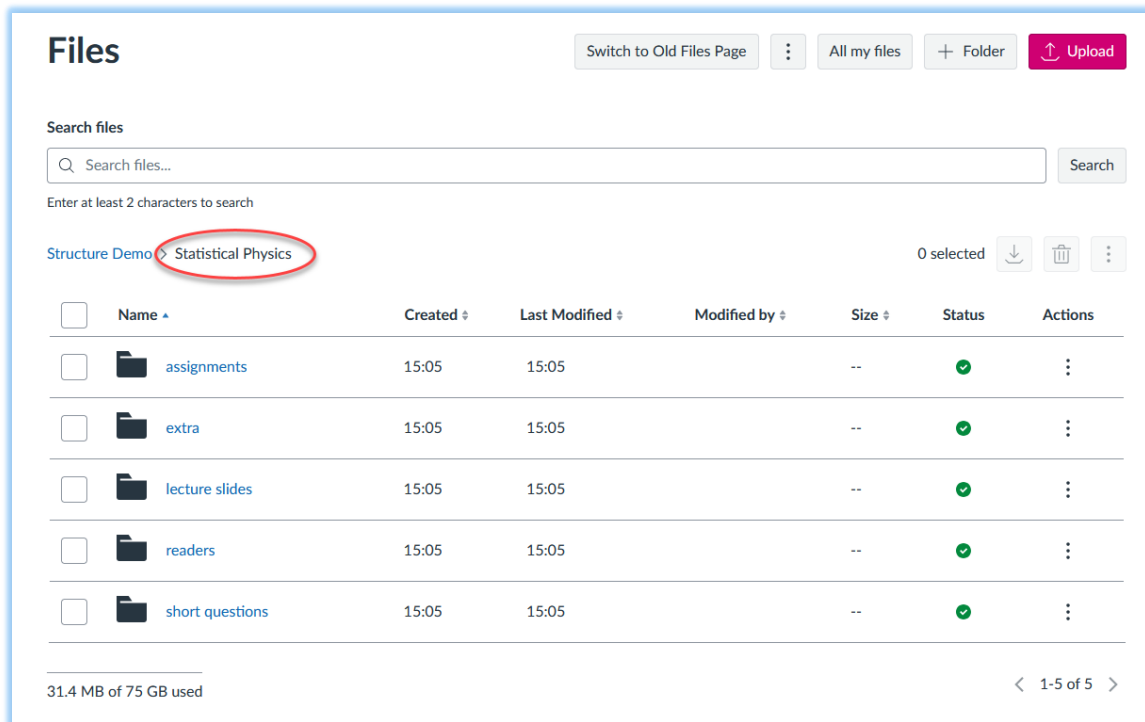**3.** Upload all files with one action to your Canvas course

Once you have prepared your course files in a zip file you can upload them to Canvas through the **Files** menu in your desired Canvas course. In the Files menu click the [Upload] button. A popup appears in which you can drag and drop the file from your Windows File explorer, or you can click [choose files]. In the example below, [choose files] is clicked.

Upload files to your Canvas course
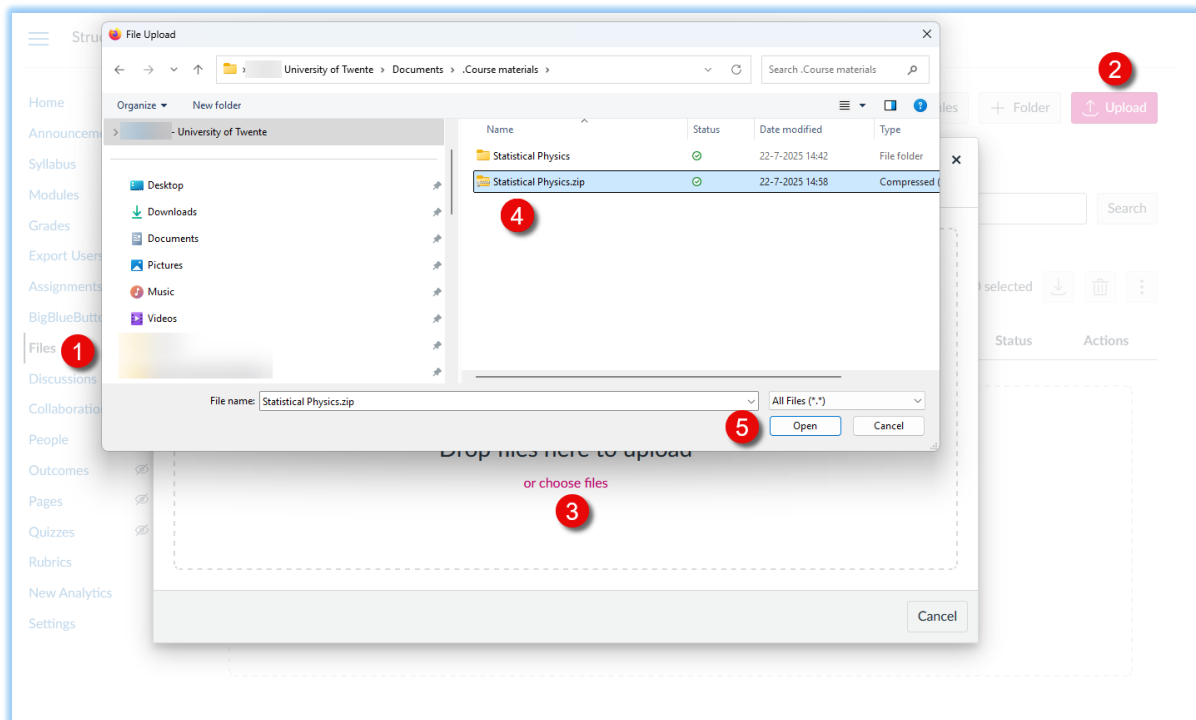
Navigate to your zip file in the file dialog that appears and click on [Open]. Canvas will present a dialog asking if you want to expand or upload the zip file.
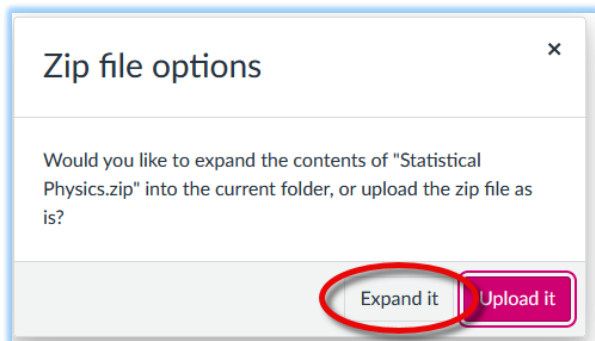
In this case you should click [Expand it] so Canvas will not only upload your zip file, but also expand it to the folder structure with all your course files. If you have a large zip file, this action might take some time to process.

Upload files to your Canvas course

In case you would want to import a simulation program for your students to download, you could choose [Upload it] so Canvas would upload the zip file as one file.

4. Keep your file structure organized

When uploading additional files into Canvas try to keep your file structure organized. You can upload files directly to a desired folder or create new folders in Canvas. You can also copy files between courses where you have a teacher role through the user files menu, by simply dragging files to a folder in another course.

Important: Don't forget to unpublish files that should not be accessible by students. Even when the Files menu is not visible for students and the file is not presented under a Module or on a page, a published file can still be downloaded if ePub exporting is enabled in the course. There are several options to publish/unpublish files in Canvas.

_____

Version: 22 July 2025

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

_____

Upload files to your Canvas course