Uploading files and providing instructions to students in a secure way ahead of an assessment

During assessments, lecturers often need to provide students with access to additional files, for example an exam paper that students will need to refer to. In Canvas it is easy to attach files to Assignments (or other forms of assessment such as quizzes). However, as these files may contain sensitive data for assessment then it may be important to share those files in a secure way so that they are inaccessible to students until the assessment date. This document sets out a workflow to prevent accidental early access.

In addition to the below, we also recommend that course leaders consider hiding the Files area of their Canvas courses by following the instructions here: How do I manage Course Navigation links. Seek advice from your department on established practice if needed.

Recommended Approach

This is our tested approach that we recommend you follow to ensure that your materials are released in a secure way (i.e. at the time intended, not before). Firstly, you will upload the sensitive files in a secure way. Then you will create your assignment with an assignment brief, with links to the sensitive files. If you have multiple assessments running at different times that include sensitive files, then you should repeat the steps below to create different folder for each assessment.

Part 1: Upload any sensitive files

1. Navigate to the **Files** area within the course menu of your Canvas course
2. Create a folder using the **+ Folder** button, and give the folder name, for example 'Final assessment files'.
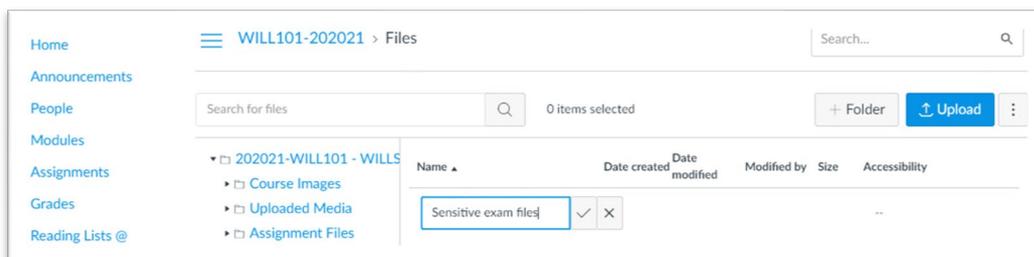
3. Edit the availability settings of the new folder by clicking on its green **Publish** checkmark.
4. From the dialogue box choose the option '**Schedule student availability**'. Set the **Available from** date to the assessment date and time.
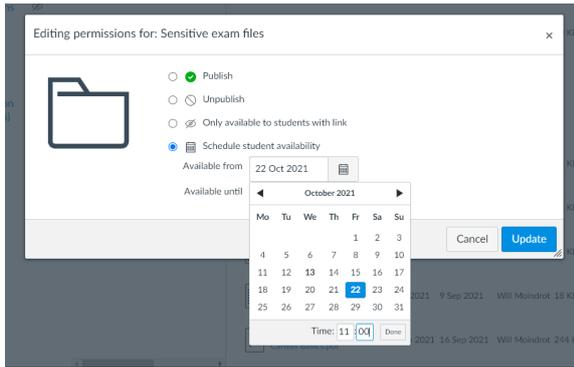
5. Now enter your new folder by clicking on its name, and upload your file from your computer by using the blue **Upload** button.

6. Verify that the file is not visible to students by using the **Test Student** view: Return to the **Home** area of your course and click on the **Student View** button at the top-right of the screen. If your students have access to the Files area in your course (because you did not choose to hide it as outlined here: Manage Course Navigation links), you should see that you are unable to enter your sensitive folder. We have also tested this fully with a real student account and can confirm this functionality.


Figure 1: Screenshot from when student tries to access locked folder, using view from actual student

(It is possible to apply the availability setting above to individual files within the folder, however to avoid potential for error we recommend applying it to the containing folder, with a different folder for each assessment)

Part 2: Create your assessment

1. Set up your new assignment, by going to the **Assignments** area and clicking on the blue **+ Assignment** button (or set up a quiz, other form of assessment, or any other text box in Canvas where you wish to link to a sensitive file).

2. Within the Assignment Brief, provide any text needed to instruct students on how to complete the assessment.

3. Now place a link within the assignment brief text to your previously uploaded file(s): From the text editor's formatting buttons click on the **drop-down button** next to the **Document** button, and choose **Course Documents**.
   (IMPORTANT: Do not upload the document again here! Doing so will create a new copy that students may have access to. Follow the instructions exactly as they are in this document)
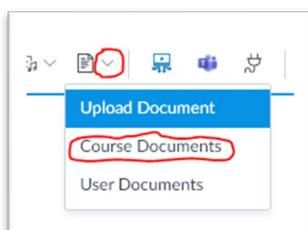
4. From the **Add** panel that appears on the right, click on the drop-down button next to the **Documents** field and choose **All**
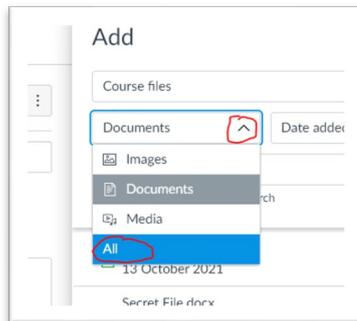
5. From the folder structure click **Course Files**, next select your 'sensitive' folder, and then click on the filename of your sensitive file. This will insert a link to your file within the text of your assessment brief.
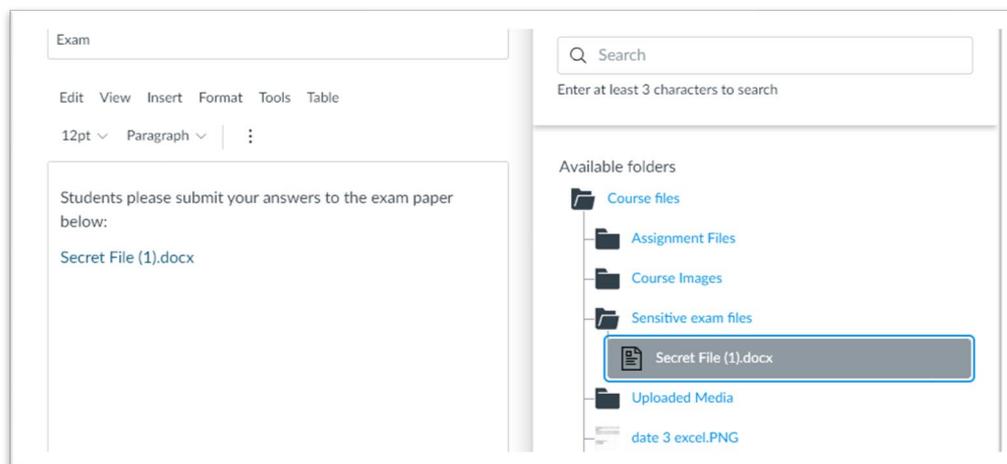
6. Continue to configure the rest of the options for your assignment as needed. Use the **Available From**, and **Until** dates to define the time-period in which students are expected to complete the assessment - seek advice from your department on established practice if needed.

7. When finished, click on the **Save & Publish** button. Or if you need to save as a draft to continue later, choose **Save**. The assignment must be **Published** for students to be able to access on the dates set by Availability Dates.

8. After creating the assessment, again test with **Student View** (from the **Home** area). You should see that the assignment appears within the student's Assignment area, but that (provided that Available From date has not yet arrived) they are unable to enter the assignment or see the assignment brief.

This approach has also been tested and verified with real student accounts, but teams can enrol each other as students onto courses via the **People** area to verify settings.
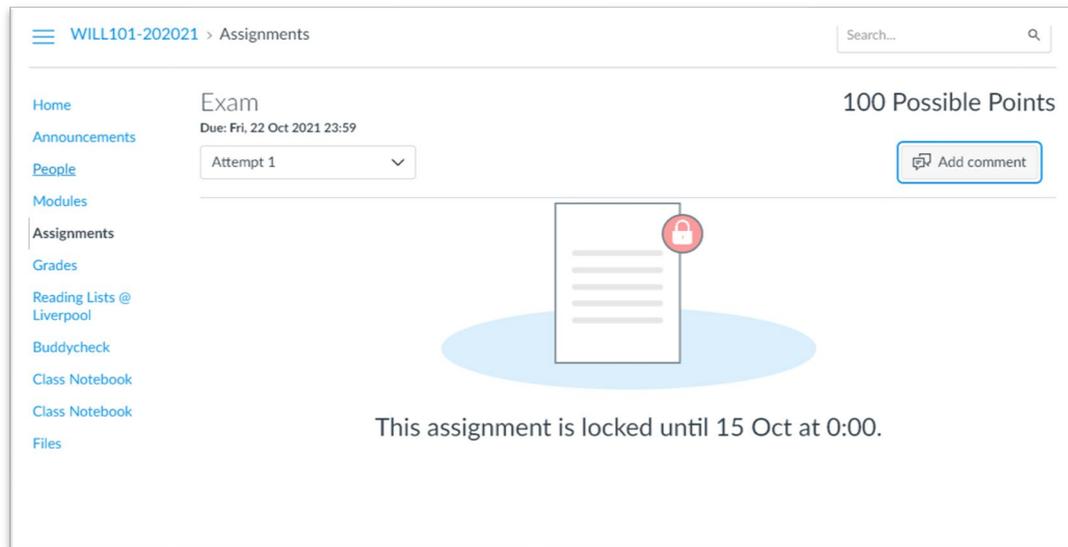

Figure 2: Screenshot of locked assignment from the view of an actual student

Giving students advanced access to Assignment briefs

Aside from sensitive materials, you may wish to purposefully release some elements of the brief to students ahead of time. Because the Assignment brief text is invisible to students until the **Available From** date has been reached, then any additional supporting materials needs to be provided in another location in Canvas.

- The approach taken by many lecturers is to devote a page within the Modules area to assessment information and make this available to students as needed. Instructions can be found here on how to do this: Create a page as a module item.
- Some staff have found that by adding the page to the student's 'to-do' list in Canvas can help to flag the materials to students, appearing on their Dashboard as a reminder and in their Canvas calendar: How do I add a page to the students To-Do list.
- Some departments have found an effective approach to be to create further non-grade bearing assignments to act as 'trial-runs' for students, providing instructions for students to follow so that students can familiarise themselves with the assignment interface ahead of time.