SpeedGrader in the Canvas Teacher app: Stylus digital ink and other tools to help with feedback and assignment handling

Introduction

The Canvas Teacher app can be a useful tool for providing assignment grading and feedback through SpeedGrader. Members of staff at the University who are using this method, report back that its touch and stylus friendly interface makes for an easy to use and streamlined grading platform, potentially raising the quality of feedback, whilst ensuring that assignment handling procedures are robust and secure.

It is recognised that not every department will have access to Apple/Android equipment capable of running the Canvas app. Some of the benefits around stylus use can still be realised through a standard computer through the addition of a cheap graphics tablet (please see **Using the desktop browser version of Canvas for digital inking section** below).

However, if you are using SpeedGrader to handle your assignments or exams, you may find that the approach of using the Canvas Teacher app has much to offer to you too. We set out here some of the benefits as well as a getting started guide.

Benefits of using SpeedGrader through the Canvas Teacher app

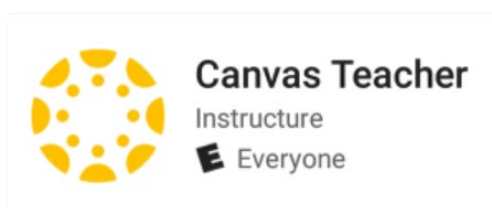These are some of the benefits as reported by current users.

- Quick viewing and navigation between assignment submissions
- Stylus input allowing natural free-form annotations on top of submitted scripts for rich, highly personalised and contextual feedback for students. Digital stylus capture, especially on iPads, is generally very good leading to increased legibility. However as will all approach it's worth talking with your students and your school's disability support office in case a different format of feedback is needed.
- Grading by rubric is a breeze through touch sensitive interface
- Leaving textual and general comments can capitalise upon device's high quality voice to text systems
- Eased assignment handling especially where tracked changes would otherwise be used (e.g. digitised exam scripts), avoiding need for downloading/annotating/re-uploading.
- Submissions and feedback remain within Canvas for increased security
- Submission overview screen with links to papers, useful within moderation processes
- Interface seems well designed and intelligent. Things like remembering your favoured colour of digital ink between papers
- Works with all of the varied submission formats accepted by Canvas SpeedGrader: office documents, pdf, scanned images, websites, videos and non-submission types (see **FAQ** at end of document)

** The quality of annotation via stylus, particularly on devices such as the iPad has been found to be very good, but consideration is recommended around the legibility of annotations and as always approaches should be considered in.
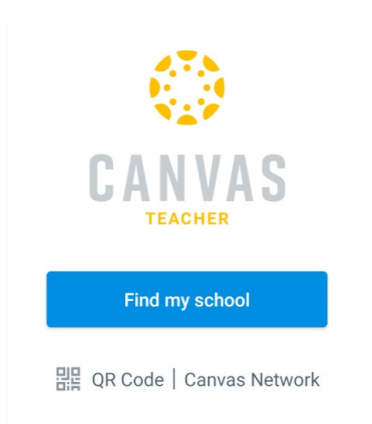
Getting Started with the Canvas Teacher App

The Apple version of Canvas Teacher was used for this guide.

1. You will need to download the Canvas Teacher app for your chosen device from either the App Store or Play Store. Whether you use an Apple or Android based device, once you have the app installed, operation is very similar.

2. Once the app is installed you will need to log into Canvas, but you should only have to do this once. Click **Find My School.**

3. Type '**Liverpool**' then select '**University of Liverpool**' from the search results.
4. You will then be taken to a University of Liverpool login page where you will need to enter your MWS credentials. Make sure to use the 'username@liverpool.ac.uk' format.

Once you have logged in you will be brought to the app landing page which will display all of your courses. If you are unfamiliar with navigating the Canvas Teacher app you can find extensive how to guides here:

- Canvas Teacher Android Guide
- Canvas Teacher iOS Guide

Important - Check your course 'Grade Posting Policy'

The default setting in Canvas is for grades and feedback to be released automatically to students as soon as they are left by the tutor. In most cases, grades and feedback need to

be hidden until a certain date for all students, so it is vital that all module leaders change this setting to Manual in their Canvas course, ideally at the outset of teaching.

Please see this guide for instructions: [Turn on Manual Post Grades](#)

Getting Started with Digital Annotations and SpeedGrader in the Canvas Teacher App

1. To begin marking, enter you course via the mobile app, then click **Assignments** from the left hand menu. You will then be given an overview of all of your assignments.
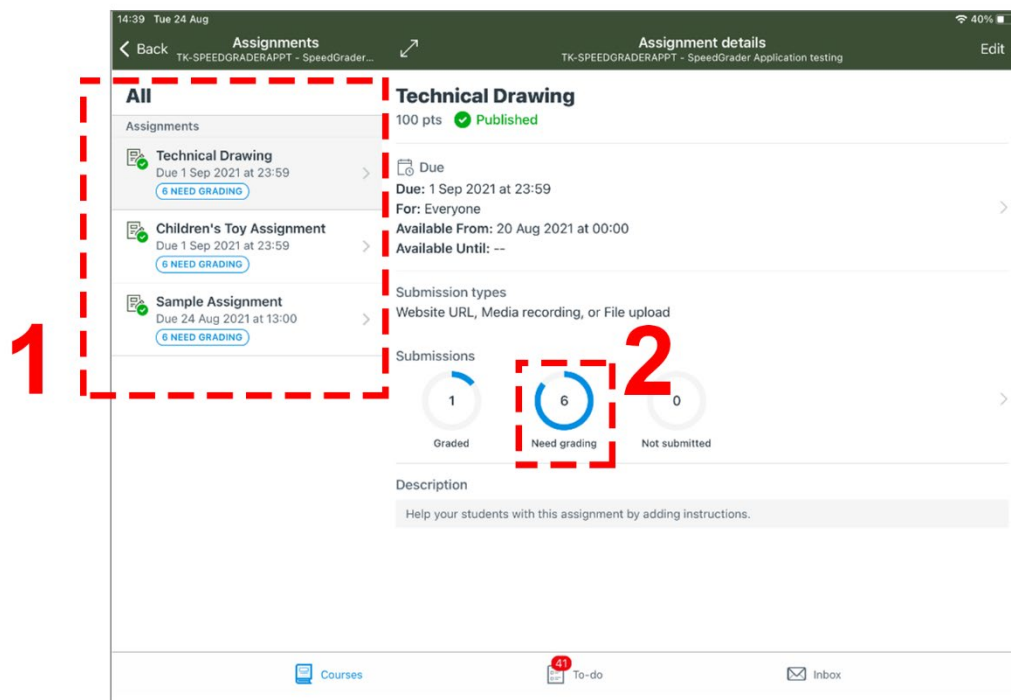

Figure 1: This is a screenshot of the Assignment screen for a course within the Canvas Teacher app. A list of assignments appears as a menu on the left of the screen from which the tutor can select an assignment to see more details. Links to submissions that are already grades, or needs grading appear on the right-hand side as pie charts.

2. Select which assignment you would like to mark from the left hand menu. You will then be shown details of the selected assignment.

3. Click the **Needs Grading** pie chart (number 2 within diagram) to be taken to a list of all student submissions. With large numbers of submissions, there can be a short delay here, but the app should return with a list of student submissions as shown in the next screenshot.
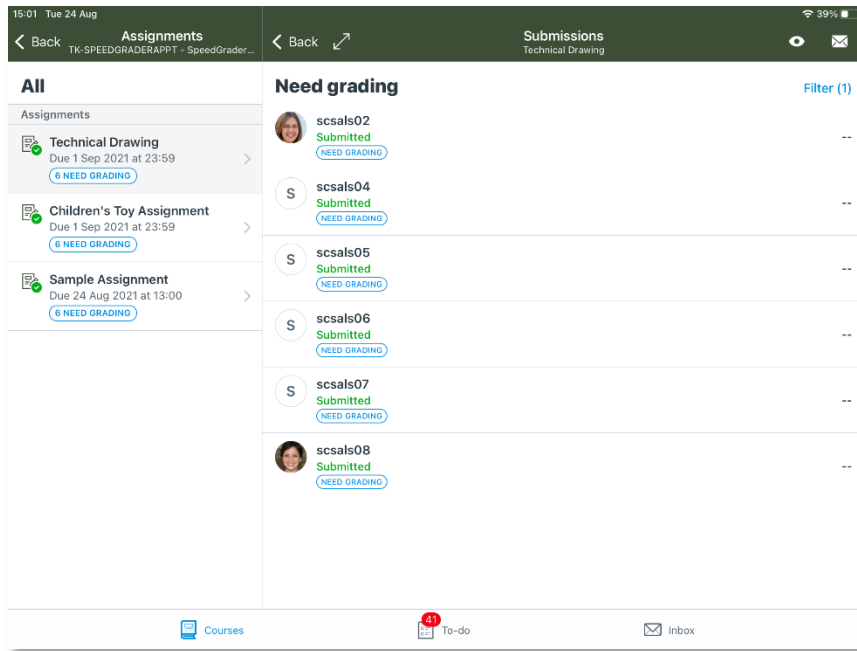
Figure 2: Screenshot of the Canvas Teacher app showing a list of student submissions for the assignment that need grading

4. A list of student submissions will appear, from which you can select a submission to start grading.
5. The SpeedGrader interface within the app will now open, giving you a view of the submitted work. The visual configuration of SpeedGrader will differ depending upon your device, orientation and size of display, broadly it will resemble SpeedGrader within the desktop browser version of Canvas with the student submission on the left, and grading tools on the right. (If on a smaller screen device or using in portrait then these will appear under tabs at the bottom of the screen)
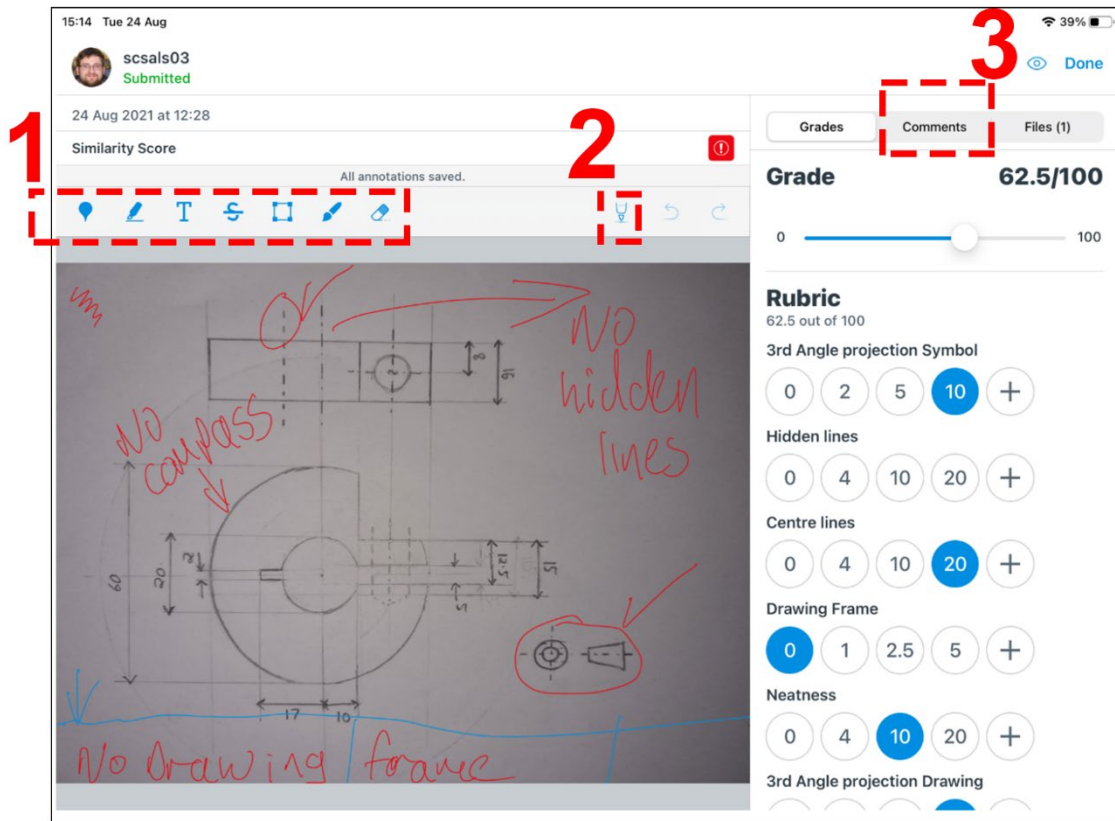
Figure 3: This screenshot shows the SpeedGrader grading interface of the Canvas Teacher app. A student's work appears on the left of the image, with a tool palette from which the tutor can select tools to place 'in-line' annotations on top of the student work. On the right-hand side of the screen are places to leave overall feedback such as a completed rubric, overall comments and a grade.

6. To apply annotations directly on the submitted document use the toolbar that appears above the student work to select the required annotation tool (indicated by box number one in the screenshot above). The main tools are:

   a. The **Paintbrush** tool ( ) is used to create free-hand digital annotations. Change the colour and weight of your pen by clicking on the **pen colour** tool [box 2 in diagram].

   b. The **Eraser** tool ( ) is used to remove digital ink.

   c. The **Point Annotation** tool ( ) is used to drop a pin on a specific area, on which you can add a typed comment.

   d. The **Highlighter** tool ( ) is to highlight any written text.

   Add your annotations as required. Annotations will be automatically saved as you leave them.

7. If the assignment is set up to use a rubric, this will appear on the right hand side. Depending on your rubrics configuration, a running point total may be shown here too, but this value needs to be manually entered in the grade section of the screen as a final grade.

8. Enter a grade for the work using either the sliding bar or by clicking on the grade number to enter numerically. The submission will not count as graded until a value is entered here.
9. If you wish to leave further feedback click the **Comments** tab. This gives you an area where you can leave typed comments about the work. Depending on your device you can use your text-to-speech facility, or clicking on the **+** button allows you to attach audio or video recordings or other files.
10. To move swiftly to the next piece of submitted work you can swipe left on the screen. You can also go backwards by swiping from the right.
11. Once you have finished marking click **Done** to exit SpeedGrader. You will be taken back to a list of all **Graded** submissions where you can review the final marks for each student. You can re-open SpeedGrader to change any marks by clicking an individual students' submission.

More detail on marking submissions with the app can be found here:

- [How do I grade an assignment submission in the Teacher app on my Android device?](#)
- [How do I grade an assignment submission in the Teacher app on my iOS device?](#)

Tips on using rubrics

Current users of SpeedGrader in the mobile app have fed back that having rubric in place can really speed up marking, especially on a touch sensitive device where it is so easy to use. To further speed up point allocation **Ratings** can be added to quickly allocate points for each criterion. In the above example each criterion has been split into four ratings in order to quickly allocate the available points at the click of a button.

More information about adding rubrics and allocating ratings can be found here;
[How do I add a rubric in a course?](#)

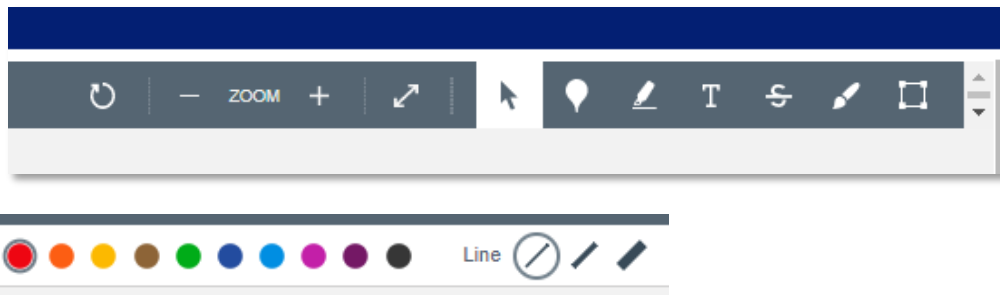## Using the desktop browser version of Canvas for digital inking

For this guide the desktop version of Canvas was accessed using Google Chrome on a Windows 10 machine. A Wacom Intuos Art touch tablet was used to create digital annotations.

If you would like to get started with digital annotations but do not have a suitable Apple or Android device, then it is possible to use a stylus within SpeedGrader on the desktop browser version of Canvas. A USB graphics tablet such as the 'One by Wacom' is a cost-effective way to add a stylus into your current setup (about £35), whereas some laptops come with stylus functionality such as the Microsoft Surface PC. (This equipment can also be useful for the creation of recorded learning materials, for example carrying out a screen recording using Canvas Studio in which you use the stylus to illustrate or demonstrate something in realtime).
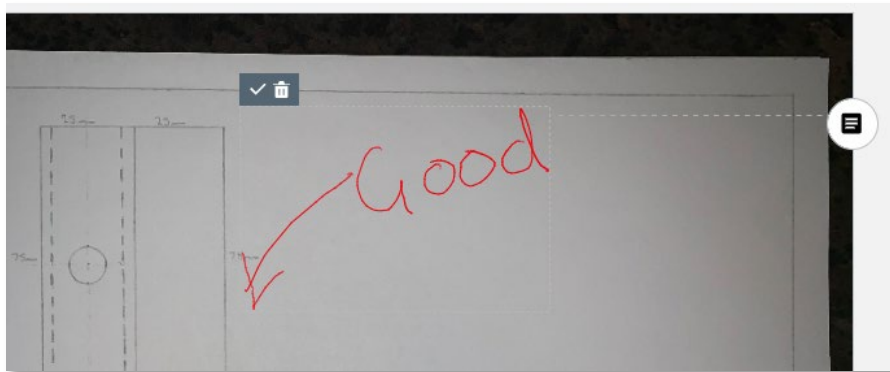
To get started:

1. In the desktop browser version of Canvas locate the course and assignment you would like to mark.
2. Select the assignment and then open **SpeedGrader** using the link in the top right-hand corner.

3. Looking specifically at the assignment annotation options, use the toolbar above the submission to select the required annotation tool:
    a. Select **Paintbrush** tool (⬜)to begin freehand digital annotations. Once the Pen tool is selected another toolbar will open that allows you to change the colour and weight of your pen.
    b. Use the **Area Annotation** tool (⬜) to draw a box around a specific area.
    c. Select the second tool for **Point Annotation (⬤)** to drop a pin on a specific area and then add a written comment.
    d. Select the **Highlighter** (⬜)to highlight any written text.
    e. Click **Selection (⬚)** to return to a standard mouse arrow.

4. In the browser version of SpeedGrader, once you have created an annotation you will need to **Accept** or **Discard** the annotation by clicking on the checkmark or trashcan symbol that appears next to your annotation. Accepting the annotation will allow you to create a separate annotation in a different area. You can continue to annotate without clicking accept, this will group all annotations together until you do click accept. In addition, you can click on the page symbol to leave additional text comments attached to the annotation.

5. Once you have created your annotations you can use the standard Selection tool from the toolbar to click and drag annotations to relocate or discard them.
6. The rest of the SpeedGrader works in the normal way, with options for applying rubrics, grade and comments. You can switch between student submission without leaving the SpeedGrader interface by clicking the arrows in top right-hand corner.

This article suggests that browser utilisation of stylus input is a developing area, so it might be worth comparing Chrome against Firefox or Edge: Thoughts on Stylus Support in SpeedGrader. Also here is another discussion, that readers may wish to engage with, which calls on Instructure to launch a Windows Store version of the Canvas app: Stylus and Feedback in Speedgrader.

FAQ

Can I use the app and grade assignments without internet connection?

The app relies upon a constant internet connection to retrieve and save material, so working offline is not currently something you can do.

Can multiple people grade papers on the same assignment concurrently?

In theory it's possible to do this, however if both markers are marking the same submission at the same time then it's possible that conflicts may occur. Each marker would need to refresh their paper to see comments left by the other marker, and it's possible that under these conditions some grading or feedback may be lost. Another consideration is that once a first marker grades an aspect of the paper, Canvas may consider that the paper is 'graded' and removes the paper from the 'Need Grading' queue – this applies for both where there are two graders or for when a single marker is marking submissions in two or more passes (for example marking by question). Our recommendation is to agree with colleagues a system of dividing up work, or explore features such as sections or using SpeedGrader filtered by groups.

Is it possible to see an Originality Score or Report?

Yes, as in the desktop browser version of Canvas, as long as the Canvas assignment is setup with the Plagiarism Review option enabled, then as with the browser version you will see a 'Similarity score' appear on the submission within the app. However, to view the full report you would need to access this through the browser version.

Can I 'mark by groups' as I can do on the desktop version of Canvas?

Canvas does have a really nice feature on the desktop version 'Launch SpeedGrader filtered by Groups', which is great for filtering your view of submissions to a specific group. This is a great way to divide up marking, especially if each group is submitting on a different topic or marking is anonymous (more information can be found here: How do I enable SpeedGrader to launch filtered by student group?). Sadly, whilst you can enable this on the desktop version it has no effect in the app. There is however a way to filter submissions by Section of students, however this relies upon Sections to divide up students instead of groups which is a bit more of a process to setup. Have a look at: How do I add a section to a course as an instructor?

What formats of submission work in the SpeedGrader on the app?

Canvas accepts many types of submission formats. We've tested it out with all of the main Office and pdf documents, images, also website and video and these display and are accessible. Some of the annotation features become available for anything other than the main document formats. Of particular interest to some staff may be the grading of 'non-submission' type assignment, where feedback can be left digitally via the app for example on a performance or other non-physically submitted work.