

DesignPLUS for Canvas

What Is DesignPLUS?

DesignPLUS is a suite of tools that integrates directly with Canvas and helps instructors create visually engaging, organized, and interactive course content without needing to write HTML or CSS.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/zfO3UwQRAec?si=kSIdA0KxwZ_7MaoL

At Arkansas State University, DesignPLUS is available to all instructors but is **optional**. Courses can be built and taught successfully using Canvas alone. However, DesignPLUS can make it easier to create consistent course designs, improve content organization, support accessibility, and engage students through interactive learning activities.

Note: Many university course templates include DesignPLUS elements. You do not need to know how to create or edit DesignPLUS content to use these templates successfully.

Getting Started with DesignPLUS

DesignPLUS works alongside Canvas's **Rich Content Editor (RCE)**, allowing instructors to create layouts, interactive activities, and visual content directly within Canvas pages, assignments, discussions, announcements, and other course materials.

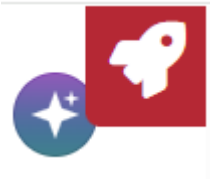
If you are new to DesignPLUS, we recommend exploring the following resources:

- [What is the Rich Content Editor \(RCE\)](#) (Canvas LMS Basics guide)
- [DesignPLUS User Guide](#) (self-paced training course)
- [DesignPLUS Training Series](#) (short instructional videos)

Opening the DesignPLUS Sidebar

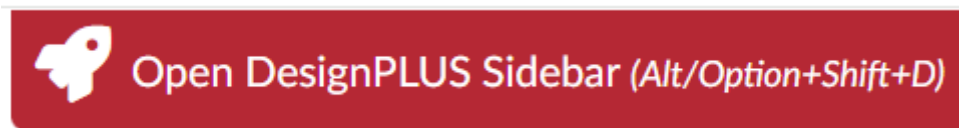
To open the **DesignPLUS Sidebar** while editing content in Canvas:

- Click the **red rocketship icon** in the upper-right corner of the Rich Content Editor.



OR

- Press **Alt + Shift + D** (Option + Shift + D on a Mac) while the Rich Content Editor is open.



Once opened, the sidebar provides access to page layouts, interactive content, accessibility tools, and other DesignPLUS features.

Key Features of DesignPLUS

? Create Professional Course Pages

DesignPLUS provides drag-and-drop elements that allow instructors to create attractive and consistent course pages without editing HTML.

Examples include:

- Banners
- Content cards
- Callout boxes
- Icons
- Multi-column layouts
- Pre-built page sections

These tools can help organize course materials and create a polished learning environment.

? Organize Content

DesignPLUS includes several tools that help structure information and improve navigation.

Common organizational elements include:

- Accordion
- Dialog Box
- Expander
- Flip Cards
- Module List
- Popover
- Tabs
- Tooltip

These elements can help break large amounts of information into manageable sections, reduce scrolling, and improve readability.

? Add Interactive Learning Activities

DesignPLUS allows instructors to embed simple learning interactions directly within Canvas pages.

Available activities include:

- Fill-in-the-Blank
- Flashcards
- Match Items
- Order Items
- Quick Check
- Select All
- Sort Items

These activities can support:

- Retrieval practice
- Self-assessment
- Knowledge checks
- Vocabulary review
- Student engagement
- Formative assessment

Because these interactions are embedded directly within the lesson content, students can check their understanding without leaving the page.

Tip: Consider placing knowledge checks throughout a lesson rather than only at the end. Frequent opportunities for practice can help students monitor their understanding as they learn.

? Support Accessibility

DesignPLUS includes an **Accessibility Checker** that reviews individual pages and identifies common accessibility concerns while content is being edited.

Common issues identified include:

- Missing alternative text
- Improper heading structure
- Table accessibility issues
- Color contrast concerns

The Accessibility Checker is one component of a broader set of Cidi Labs tools available to instructors.

► See: [Course Accessibility Tools and Support](#)

? Create Consistent Course Designs

DesignPLUS layouts and templates help instructors maintain a consistent visual structure throughout a course.

Consistency helps students:

- Navigate course materials more easily
 - Locate important information more quickly
 - Understand course expectations
 - Focus on learning rather than navigation
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Best Practices

? Design for Learning First

Effective course design begins with clear learning objectives and well-organized content. DesignPLUS should support learning rather than simply enhance appearance.

? Use Headings Consistently

Use Canvas heading styles to organize content into logical sections. Consistent headings improve both readability and accessibility.

? Avoid Overloading Pages

Interactive activities and design elements can improve engagement, but too many on a single page may overwhelm students. Use them intentionally.

? Check Accessibility Early

Run the Accessibility Checker while building content rather than waiting until the page is complete.

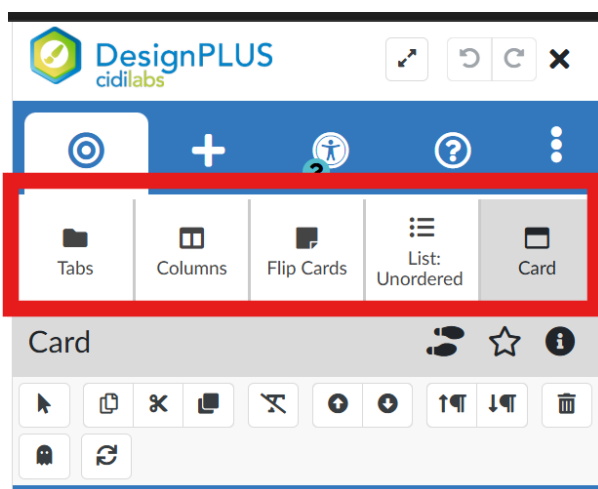
? Preview Content in Student View

Always review pages from the student perspective to ensure that layouts, media, and interactive components display correctly.

Working with Existing DesignPLUS Elements

? Use the Breadcrumb Trail

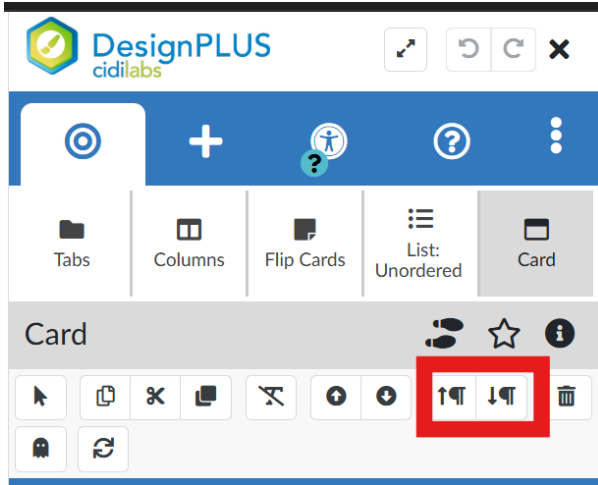
When your cursor is placed inside a DesignPLUS element, the **Edit Current Element** tab displays a breadcrumb trail showing the nested elements surrounding your current location.



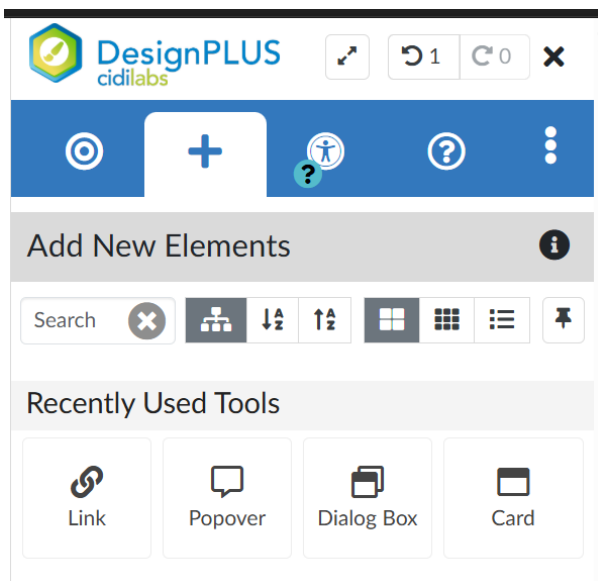
Selecting the appropriate item in the breadcrumb trail helps ensure that edits and actions affect the intended element.

? Create New Insertion Points

If you are having trouble placing a new DesignPLUS element exactly where you want it, open the **Edit Current Element** tab and use **Insert Paragraph Before** or **Insert Paragraph After**.



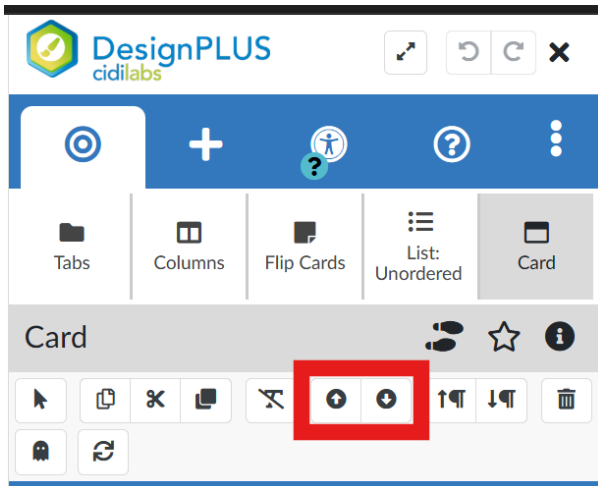
These options create a new paragraph location before or after the selected element. You can then place your cursor in that new location and use **Add New Element** to insert a DesignPLUS component where you want it.



Many instructors find this workflow particularly helpful when editing existing pages that already contain several DesignPLUS elements.

? Move Elements Up or Down

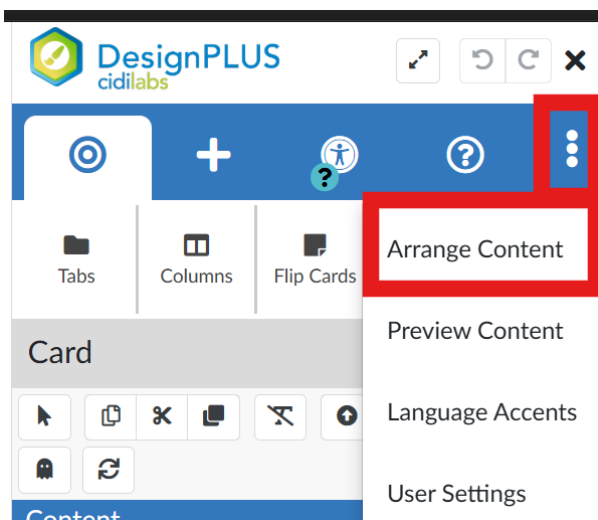
The **Move Text Up** and **Move Text Down** buttons can move an entire DesignPLUS element higher or lower on the page.



These tools are useful when reorganizing content and often provide a quicker solution than rebuilding existing layouts.

? Use Arrange Content for Complex Changes

The **Arrange Content** option is available from the three-dot menu within the **Edit Current Element** tab.



Arrange Content displays the page structure and allows elements to be manually reordered using drag-and-drop controls. This can be especially useful when working with pages that contain multiple nested DesignPLUS components.

DesignPLUS makes it possible to transform Canvas pages from static content into interactive learning experiences where students read, practice, review, and assess their understanding within a single environment.

Need Help?

If you need assistance using DesignPLUS, developing Canvas content, or designing engaging learning experiences, contact your faculty support office:

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Email: CETL@AState.edu

Phone: 870-972-2334

Location: Dean B. Ellis Library, Suite 301

A-State Online Faculty Support

Email: facultysupport@astate.edu

Phone: 870-680-8464

Faculty teaching in fully online degree programs should also consult with their assigned course builder or the A-State Online Faculty Support team before making significant course design or structural changes. Online degree programs may have program-specific requirements, templates, or standards that should be maintained.

Related Content

- [Templates and Canvas Commons](#)
 - [Course Accessibility Tools and Support](#)
 - [Embedding Media in Classes](#)
 - [Integrating Video into Canvas Activities](#)
 - [Instructional Media from Public and Open Sources](#)
 - [Open Educational Resources \(OER\) & Open Publishing](#)
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Revision #5

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