# BUILDING AN ONLINE COURSE

There are broadly two kinds of online learning courses, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and Small Private Online Courses (SPOC). One can choose between these based on the learning objectives and target audience.

Quest Alliance is a non-profit trust
working to bridge the
education and skills divide
by enabling self-learning for
young people 10-35 years old.

Quest is fuelled by research,
strengthened by partnerships and
driven by innovation and technology.
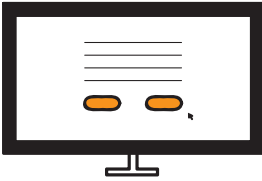
What are online courses and how can I use them to facilitate learning?

Online courses are especially useful in adult education as they offer a flexible learning environment that even working professionals are able to navigate. They are a great way to host media-rich educational content and conduct assessments at scale.

The two kinds of courses, MOOCs and SPOCs, have differing utility depending on what the desired learning outcome is.

• MOOCs, are open to all users, self-paced, virtual, standardized and designed for scale. These courses are helpful when the main purpose is to impact large numbers of users.

• SPOCs are designed for a more defined group and allows for closer interaction between peers and the learner and educator. These courses are more personalized and allow the educators to support the learners more intimately.

There are also courses that fall somewhere between MOOCs and SPOCs and try to use the best features of both.

What are the steps involved in designing an online course?

Some general steps that can help in the process of designing an online course include:

1 Identify your niche

Recognizing the domain in which one's expertise lies or where the learning need is most urgent can help define the nature of the course and its subsequent design.

2 Define your audience

Once the domain is identified, it is important to understand the learners of this course and begin to define their profiles, needs, and aspirations.

3 Define your purpose

It is important to be clear on specific learning objectives while designing a course. This will determine the content and mode of delivery.

4 Identify key outcomes

To be able to gauge effectiveness of a course, it is imperative to identify what the outcomes should be. This could be improved communication skills, better self-awareness, a community of practitioners, and so on.

5 Determine core content areas

Based on the audience, purpose and desired outcomes, begin to determine what the core content would be in the course. For instance, topics like understanding self and understanding one's learner can be core areas for a course on improving facilitation skills of an educator.

6 Visualize the learning experience

Once the basic goals and content areas are identified, one needs to visualize the nature of the learning experience we want to create. This will help determine the guiding principles for designing the course.

The next section contains examples.

What are some things to keep in mind in this process?

Some key principles to keep in mind while designing an online course include:

- **Show the "Big Picture."** It is helpful, especially with adult learners, to go through an overview of the course at the beginning so they know what to expect.

- **Balance structure and flexibility.** While the flexibility offered by an online course is invaluable (e.g., self-paced), it is crucial to have a clear framework within which to conduct the course to prevent it from becoming uninteresting and confusing.

- **Prepare learners for the online experience.** This can include getting familiar with the platform itself, getting over their hesitation to share opinions online, and so on. Having targeted orientation sessions and creating discussion forums can help achieve this.

- **Build in regular check-ins.** To ensure continued engagement of the participants a regular system of feedback is crucial. Including the learner in the feedback sharing process can help make this even more effective.

- **Provide immediate feedback.** It is important to have immediate feedback so that learners may incorporate it in their next assessment or activity. Consolidated feedback at the end

of the course is helpful for reflection, but more regular, continuous feedback is also necessary.

- **Orient the assessment criteria towards the learning outcomes.** What the learners get assessed on should be clearly mapped to the outcomes that you want to create from the course. This helps learners truly see the value of the assessments.

- **Build concepts gradually.** It is helpful to break down a concept into simpler parts and introduce it at different stages throughout the course for better learner comprehension and retention.

What are limits and challenges in using online courses?

Some challenges have recurred in the last few years of the existence of online courses:

- **High dropout rates.** Learners often suffer from the "buffet syndrome" and take on too many courses at once, finding themselves unable to finish most. Incentivising completion with certificates and periodic recognition can help curb this.

- **Replicating discussions online.** It can be difficult to recreate the classroom scenario online where free ranging discussion is possible. Tools like a discussion forum and allowing audio recordings to be exchanged is one way to enable this.

- **Catering to speakers of multiple languages.**
  With open courses, the users may speak a wide variety of languages with varying degrees of proficiency. It is, thus, important to keep language use simple and coherent. Use of videos and multimedia can also help.

Is there a successful case study I can use to learn from?

At QUEST Alliance, there was a need felt for a professional development course that facilitators could complete at their own pace. Being able to apply a concept and have the skill to contextualize it to different learner groups was something facilitators needed support with.

Research into the needs of the facilitators and the question of how to address it in a flexible way led to MasterCoach, a blended learning online course for in-service professionals to develop their facilitation skills. The course has been completed with two cohorts already and is being conducted this year with two more.

Watch this video to find out more about the MasterCoach blended learning course.

MasterCoach Teaser

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj9dvAy28zs

What are the value propositions for different stakeholders in taking an online course?

Learners:
- **Access to quality content** and courses from notable institutions.
- **Flexibility** that allows learning at one's own pace.
- **Inexpensive way of learning**, as several online courses are unpaid.
- Means of **self-learning** and **continued learning** at any stage in life.

Educators:
- **Wider outreach** and connection to learners across geographies and domains.
- Means of professional **self-development.**
- Ability to **leverage different media and technology** while educating on this platform.

"You have to ensure some interactivity while designing an online course. This helps break the monotony of too many lectures."

- Prof. Rahul De, IIM Bangalore

QUEST ALLIANCE

www.questalliance.net

#108 , 2nd Main, 6th Cross
1st Block, Koramangala
Bengaluru 560034
Ph +91 80 4098 3304

Email: info@questalliance.net