Planning a Course

Learn about:

Planning for curriculum development and video production
Staffing an online course effectively
Publicizing and launching an online course
Resources to increase learner engagement and success

For a checklist-style overview of this topic, consult the Course Planning Checklist at the end of this article.

Overview

This document provides a general guide to planning a Coursera course - from content creation, to publicity and launch, to day-to-day management. The planning process begins with conceptualizing course content; subsequent phases include planning and identifying resources for content creation, publicity and marketing, and pre-launch testing and review. Instructors and administrators will need to consider any needs for course oversight, as well as plans to run the course again (for session-based courses).

This planning guide is intended as a general template. Instructors and administrators should discuss course planning and management early in the process with their institution's Coursera Partnership Manager, and work with the Partnership Manager to customize this outline to suit the needs of the partner, instructor, and specific course.

A checklist of all steps involved in building, launching, and running a course is provided at the end of this article. For detailed information on curriculum development and online pedagogy, instructors may wish to consult Designing an Online Curriculum. Institutional program managers may also be interested in Launching a Coursera Partnership.

Planning for Content

Content planning begins with defining the course topic. Often, the topic is best framed as a learning objective for the course as a whole - what skills or knowledge will learners gain by taking the course? Consider browsing active Coursera courses for inspiration; Coursera instructors have created courses on almost every topic imaginable, and new instructors may find it helpful to explore a range of specialized and general-interest courses in relevant subject areas. Coursera's Partnership Managers can also recommend popular or inspiring courses to peruse, and can help partners identify high-demand topic areas for courses and Specializations.

Use the questions below as a guide when defining the topic and learning objectives for a new course. Also consider reviewing Designing an Online Curriculum (for more detailed information on defining learning objectives); Optimizing Assessments (for more information on assessment design), and Building Course Community (for suggestions on building learner community in the course).

What subtopics will the course address, and how much time will be spent learning about each subtopic?

How will the progression of subtopics build toward course-level learning objectives?

How can online videos and supplemental materials be leveraged to teach this topic? Will any subtopics be challenging to present in an online format?

How will assessments be used to measure learner progress and success? Will the course include automatically graded quizzes, peer-graded assignments, programming assignments, or all three?

What role will community features (e.g., discussion forums) play in the course experience?

During the content planning process, the course staff must submit the Course Specification Document to Coursera for review and feedback. This document was formerly part of Coursera's Course Development Agreement (CDA).

Planning for Staffing

Although staffing requirements vary by course, all courses and instructors will benefit from some level of skilled teaching staff support for content creation and course management. Create a detailed staffing plan at the beginning of the course planning process. In addition to any operational course management needs, consider the resources required to script and film videos, draft assessments, upload content to the Coursera platform, review and test content prior to launch, and address any issues that arise while the course is running. Also consider the instructor's other time commitments, e.g., on-campus teaching obligations.

Most Coursera courses are the product of a joint effort by the instructor, teaching staff, and other institutional resources (e.g., audiovisual staff and instructional designers). The table below summarizes one possible division of responsibilities across these three parties.

Role	Responsibilities
Instructor	recruit teaching staff create lecture material and assessments create a syllabus and grading policy help manage course community
Teaching staff	assist in creation of course materials implement course materials on Coursera platform check course for errors and inconsistencies manage course community

	handle problems
Institutional staff	provide support for lecture production provide pedagogical support and resources

Planning for Production

Create a detailed schedule for the production of course content, including all videos and assessments as well as any supplementary materials, to ensure that content production is completed well in advance of the course launch. Video production is likely to be the most time-consuming part of this process. While some institutions provide multimedia production services for course staff, many instructors have created very successful videos using their own small-scale recording setups. In either case, however, it is important to establish a plan for video filming and editing, as well as a budget for any production costs.

> Before creating all course content, course staff must submit a Materials Preview Document (pages 9-24) to their Partnership Manager for Coursera's review and feedback. This document was formerly part of Coursera's Course Development Agreement (CDA).

Building a Course

Once the course content has been produced, it must be built (typically by teaching staff) on the Coursera platform. This step can take considerable time to complete, particularly if the course includes more complex assessment types, such as programming assignments or peer assessments. Plan to begin building content on the platform at least 1-2 months before the course start date.

Creating a session and adding content

The table below summarizes key steps in the course and content creation process. For each step, consult the associated resource for detailed guidelines.

Step	Resource
Creating a course	Course Creation
Adding modules and lessons	Modules and Lessons
Adding video lectures	Video Lectures
Adding assessments	Quizzes, Peer-Graded Assignments,Programming Assignments
Adding readings	Readings

| Adding milestone emails | Milestone emails |
| Offering Course Certificates | Course Certificates |

Staff permissions

Assign permissions to instructors and teaching staff when creating the course. Take care to assign permissions correctly, and limit the number of permissioned users in order to protect student data and minimize the possibility of introducing errors in the course.

Publicizing a Course

Course publicity efforts should focus on reaching a broad audience of potential learners through a variety of channels, and on providing information to help learners determine whether the course is a good fit for their background, interests, and learning goals. The Coursera course description and course welcome emails are all good channels for initial publicity efforts.

Course description page

The course description is one of the simplest, and most essential, channels for course publicity.Learners will base their decision to enroll in the course largely on their impression of the course description; content should be engaging and clearly written, with an emphasis on generating excitement and addressing common questions.

Instructors can customize the course description when creating the course; consult Course Creation for detailed instructions.

Consider the following best practices when drafting the course description:

Be specific

Coursera learners come from very diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. Use general terminology to describe the course topic and prerequisites, and provide examples where possible; e.g., instead of "this course covers Chemistry 101 topics," consider "this course covers basic topics in physical chemistry, including the periodic table, atoms and molecules..." If the course assumes prior exposure to the topic, provide a detailed and specific list of prerequisites.

Highlight course value

Many Coursera learners have extremely practical motivations for learning: to advance their careers, to switch career tracks, or to achieve goals in their personal lives. Pique learners' interest by telling them exactly what skills and experience they'll gain from the course, e.g.:

> After completing this course, you'll be able to build a simple computer game in Python
> This course will teach you the basics of financial management in a small business
> By the end of this course, you will have written five original poems in various forms

Optimize for online search

Learners will discover the course both from within the Coursera platform (through the course catalog) and from outside Coursera (e.g., through social media, Google searches, etc.). All course descriptions are publicly searchable, and learners can see them without creating a Coursera account. To optimize the course description for search, include keywords and common phrases associated with the course topic.

Welcome email

Learners will receive a general welcome email from Coursera upon joining a course; however, instructors are encouraged to customize the enrollment Milestone Email to deliver a more personalized message. The email does not need to be lengthy, but should include some actionable items to sustain learner momentum and interest in the course. Consider recommending pre-course readings or highlighting topics to review, and including a link to the course forums or the first lecture video.

Launching a Course

Once course content is finalized and implemented on the Coursera platform, there are just a few remaining steps to prepare the course for launch.

Sign legal releases

All instructors, guest lecturers, or anyone else who appears in course videos must sign the appropriate speaker release form prior to their course launch. Return signed release forms to the institution's Coursera Partnership Manager. Please copy executed-docs@coursera.org, and include **Partner name** and **Instructor name** in the email. Any questions related to these documents may be directed to the Partnership Manager.

> Courses cannot launch without all course content production completed, all content imported to the platform, and releases signed.

Test course content

Coursera's course authoring interface provides a standard pre-launch check to ensure that every course launches with essential content complete and polished. For instructions on running and reviewing the pre-launch check, consult Course Creation.

In addition to running the pre-launch check and addressing any issues, the instructor and teaching staff should preview the course from the learner view and check that all resources - including videos, readings, assessments, and discussion forums - display and function as expected.

Submit the course for launch

Prior to launch, all new courses must be approved by both an administrator at the partner institution and a Coursera staff member. For a detailed description of the review process, and instructions on submitting a course for launch, consult Course Creation.

Running a Course

Once a course is launched, day-to-day operations are typically carried out by teaching staff. Although many operational tasks can be automated, some oversight is recommended, as is having a staff member on hand to address any problems that arise. Engaging with the active course is also fun and rewarding for instructors and staff - this is the time when the effort of creating the course pays off in benefits to Coursera's global community of learners, institutions, and instructors!

Announcements

Announcements may be sent at any time to address common errors in assessments, respond to common questions asked in the forums, or alert learners to new materials and other updates to the course. For detailed instructions on creating and sending announcements, consultAnnouncements; for guidelines and best practices, consult Building Course Community.

Forum participation

Forum participation is an essential part of the Coursera experience for many learners, and instructors are often excited to engage directly with learners in the course forums. Review Building Course Community for guidance on using time in the forums efficiently to ensure a good experience for learners and the course team.

Learner support

Learners can visit the Learner Help Center to review help articles and contact Coursera's support team with technical questions or concerns. Course staff are advised to direct learners to the Learner Help Center for technical support, rather than attempting to troubleshoot platform problems or questions in the forums; forum support is time-consuming for the instructor and rarely leads to an efficient resolution for the learner. If a problem reported through the Help Center requires the instructor's attention, Coursera will notify the partner.

Consult Learner and Partner Support for more information on Coursera's support team and services.

Course Planning Checklist

> Institutions will have varying timelines for course production, depending on institutional policies, available resources, and other factors. This timeline is intended merely as an informative overview of a typical course production process, not a required process. Note that this checklist is primarily geared toward session-based courses.

4+ months before launch

Plan content

Discuss strategic areas for course creation with Partnership Manager
Refine topic and subtopics
Develop learning objectives
Develop assessments to support objectives
Review Coursera resources
Start completing Course Specifications document

Plan staffing

Determine staffing plan and budget
Recruit and hire course staff

Plan production

Identify institutional resources for video production
Estimate cost and plan budget for production
Review Materials Preview document

3+ months before launch

Submit content plan

Complete Course Specifications document and submit to Course Success for feedback
Iterate on content plan based on feedback
Complete Materials Preview document and accompanying sample videos and assessments
Submit Materials Preview document

2+ months before launch

Create content (this stage is most variable in time required, depending on number of lectures, available production resources, etc.)

Draft assessments
Record and edit lectures
Create a course promotional video

1 month before launch

Create a session and add content

Create the course shell on Coursera
Add permissions for staff
Complete the course description
Add videos and assessments
Create milestone emails

Enable Course Certificates

Sign and return legal releases for instructors, guest speakers, and other teaching participants.

1 week before launch

Complete pre-launch testing

Post-launch

Send occasional announcements

Participate in forums

Respond to learner support issues

Correct errors surfaced by learners through Coursera's support team
Escalate issues to Coursera if necessary