MITx Designing for MOOC Learners

Why do people take MOOCs?

Application	**Exploration**	**Connection**
Knowledge or skill acquisition to use for a specific project or goal	For a love of learning, and to expand knowledge and understanding	To connect with an academic community, or to one's own identity as a student

Who takes MOOCs?

Bayu, 26
Government Administrator
Tikong, Indonesia

"For me, online courses are a way to spread knowledge to people around the world who need it but cannot reach it because of limitations like money and time. It's a good thing - keep up the spirits in this mission!"

Connection: He is a little lonely and doesn't have a lot of friends who share his interests. He wants to feel connected to a community of educated, like-minded people.

Behavior: He **audits** courses for free, he likes to watch most of the videos and look at the discussion forums.

Indira, 50
Professor
New Delhi, India

"It helps a lot to see how other institutions approach online teaching, especially when the course is high quality. And if I like it then I can re-use the resources in my classes."

Application: She is starting a research collaboration in a new area and wants to fill in some gaps in her current knowledge. She also likes to look through MOOCs for new ideas and materials for her classes.

Behavior: She **samples** courses, looking through the modules & materials that are pertinent to her goals.

Robert, 42
Economist
Kampala, Uganda

"When you have a sharp, clear interesting course, why not get the certificate? Sometimes when I get on a course I get fired up, I'm so excited to learn. I wake up in the middle of the night just to go and do a lecture."

Exploration: He loves to learn and expand his knowledge base. He likes to take MOOCs as a hobby, and works on them in the evenings after work.

Behavior: He pays for courses, and tries to **complete** all of them as designed. Sometimes he has to drop out of a course because of other responsibilities, but he is eager to try again the next time the course is offered.

Aleema, 28
Lawyer
Lahore, Pakistan

"When I started this course I thought I was going to skim it, just looking for the answers to get my work sorted. But when it turned out really interesting, I thought I should really spend the time to do this properly."

Application / Exploration: She often takes courses seeking particular skills for work, but if a course is particularly interesting or insightful, she will take the whole course.

Behavior: Depending on how interesting the course is, she will **sample** some of it for free or pay to earn a certificate and **complete** the entire course.

Elias, 44
Waiter
New York City, USA

"I have been diagnosed with severe learning disabilities, and the way these MOOCs are broken into chunks is really helpful for me. Especially when it is very clear and logical, and also challenging, not watered down."

Connection: He left a PhD program in Math a while back, but still really likes to learn and keep his math and programming skills sharp, especially since he isn't using those skills in his current work.

Behavior: He **audits** courses for free. He watches most of the videos and does all the problems and exams he has access too, but he doesn't want to pay for the certificate because he has no use for it.

Hui Yin, 32
Accountant
Singapore

"I don't have a strong math background, though I feel it is important. If you truly want to understand concepts in finance, you have to have this strong foundation, and these courses help me catch up with those things."

Application: She is currently working as an auditor, but wants to move into financial engineering. She takes courses that will help strengthen her math and programming skills.

Behavior: She pays for the courses, and **samples** or tries to **complete** them. She will earn the certificate if she has a use for it, like putting it on her resume to trigger job search algorithms with certain key words.

These are just a few examples of the types of learners you will see in your courses, and their motivations for taking MOOCs. You will see everyone from high school students to retirees, and each course attracts a slightly different group of learners.

Design Tips & Tricks:

1. Don't be afraid to be yourself! The more you can bring your own personality and interests into the material the better. This helps learners to understand why you care about this topic, and to inspire them to learn more.

2. Keep your videos short (≤10 mins), and intersperse them with opportunities to actively engage and apply what they are learning through problems, case studies, exercises and discussion forums. Learners appreciate some variety in activities.

3. Think modularly! Make sure materials are organized and indexed clearly allowing for units to be assigned individually, or rearranged. This is particularly helpful for other professors who may want to assign some portion of this course to their students.

4. Engage your learners in course creation! They love to help edit course materials by catching typos or mistakes, moderate the forums as community TAs, or contribute information to the course that could expand case studies, readings, or examples.

5. Give the learners a dedicated space where they can reflect on what they've learned, describe their experiences with the material, or connect about whatever they like. You can create a dedicated discussion forum at the end of each module for this.

6. Learners are drawn to MITx courses because they are intellectually challenging, so it's ok to ask a lot of them. To help all learners succeed, you can provide scaffolding, optional resources, or the abilitiy to choose the level of difficulty for an assignment.

7. Keep in mind that your learners comprise many different abilities, backgrounds, and nationalities. Use language and media that are accessible to folks that are learning English, have different cultural references, or have visual or auditory impairments.

8. Use real world examples as often as possible. It helps learners to understand how this material applies in their own everyday lives. As much as you can, give the learners flexibility to apply what they are learning to their own projects.

9. Maintain a vibrant, supportive community. Set clear guidelines about the behavior you will and won't tolerate in the forums, and moderate frequently. Learners love when faculty / instructors join in -- it's a good way to encourage active engagement.

10. Ultimately, you can't please everyone! Create the best course you can given time and resources. A course is not static, it is offered many times. You can iterate on what you have learned, or tackle that piece you had to leave out in the next version.