How to Create an Online Class

With a topic this broad, there are too many things I want to include! More than I can fit into a 45-minute session anyway. This document is designed as a guide for my webinar presentation for the Rabbinical Assembly on April 16, 2018. It's a working document, so please bear with me. And don't hesitate to reach out with any questions you may have.

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Getting Started

“With an online course, you can build a classroom anyone can access, from anywhere. You can teach potential students anything — from physics to philosophy to community-building. Whatever your subject, you can build a course with lessons, assessments, and interactive assignments.” - Google

But first … **What do you want to do?** Attract an audience, inform, educate, inspire … ? Without some direction, the options and decisions can quickly become overwhelming.

Learning Objectives

Clarify the purpose of the experience you are about to create. Key questions to consider as you get started:

- **How should the learner be changed after completing the lesson?** Will they:
  - Know or understand a new concept
  - Perform or apply a new skill
  - Analyze and evaluate a situation
  - Synthesize multiple concepts
  - Change their attitude, motivation, or values?

- **How will you know the change has taken place?**
  - Tests, exams, quizzes
  - Papers, presentations, projects
  - Learning checks
  - Other activities and assignments
  - Rubrics

- **At what level are you writing these objectives?**
  - Objectives can be written on multiple levels – program, course, module, lesson – and should be connected or aligned with the objectives at different levels.
  - Have higher-level objectives already been written?

- **Do performance standards already exist that might guide your work?**
  - Depending on the context of the learning experience you are creating, and the content topic (think medical training, teacher education, etc.) there may be

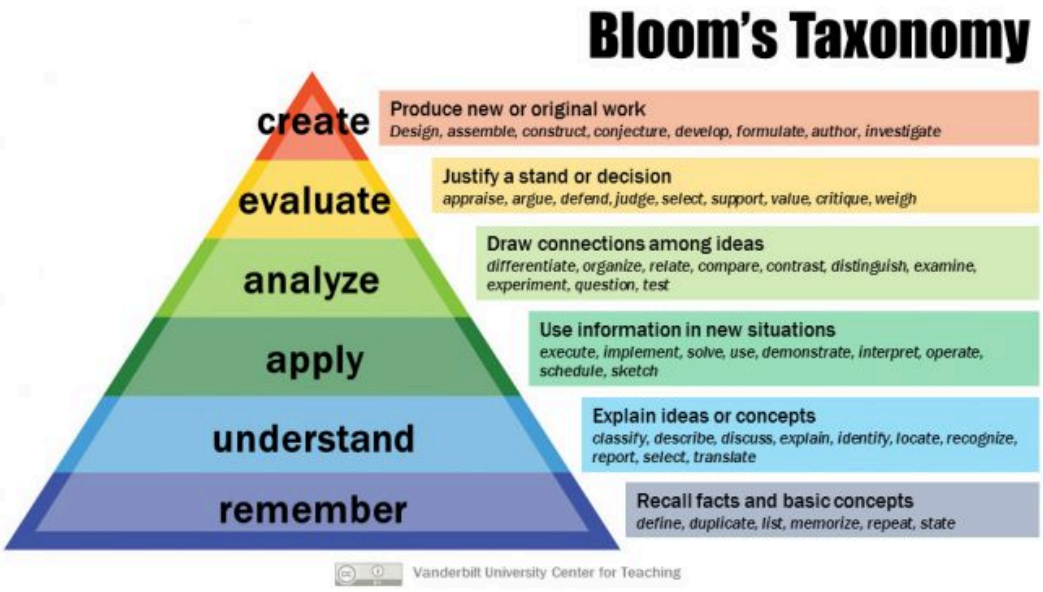
professional organizations or regulating agencies that provide standards that need to be met.

All too often the writing of learning objectives is rushed or left out completely resulting in a product that is not as effective as it was intended to be. This results in a failure to provide the learners with what they need to achieve that 'change' that was required and expected.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy is often used as a guide for writing learning objectives, and helps educators think through the level of learning we hope students will achieve, as well as how we will know when they have achieved it. This framework focuses on the use of action verbs to describe learning performance.

- Writing Objectives Using Bloom's Taxonomy, University of Arkansas
- Awesome Action Verbs, University of West Georgia



Designer Julie Dirksen provides additional insight about identifying learning goals and writing specific objectives from the perspective of an educator or instructional designer. Her process includes the following questions:

- Is the objective of the lessons something the student will actually do in the real world?
- How will you know when they've done it successfully?

  A learning objective should address both of these questions.

So, instead of:

- *The student will understand the limitations of JavaScript as a programming tool.*

A more descriptive objective might be:

- *The student will be able to identify whether or not JavaScript is an appropriate programming tool for a specific task, and explain a rationale for the decision.*

You can review Chapter 3 – Design for How People Learn (Julie Dirksen, 2011).

More examples: A Quick Guide to Writing Learning Objectives. Big Dog & Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition

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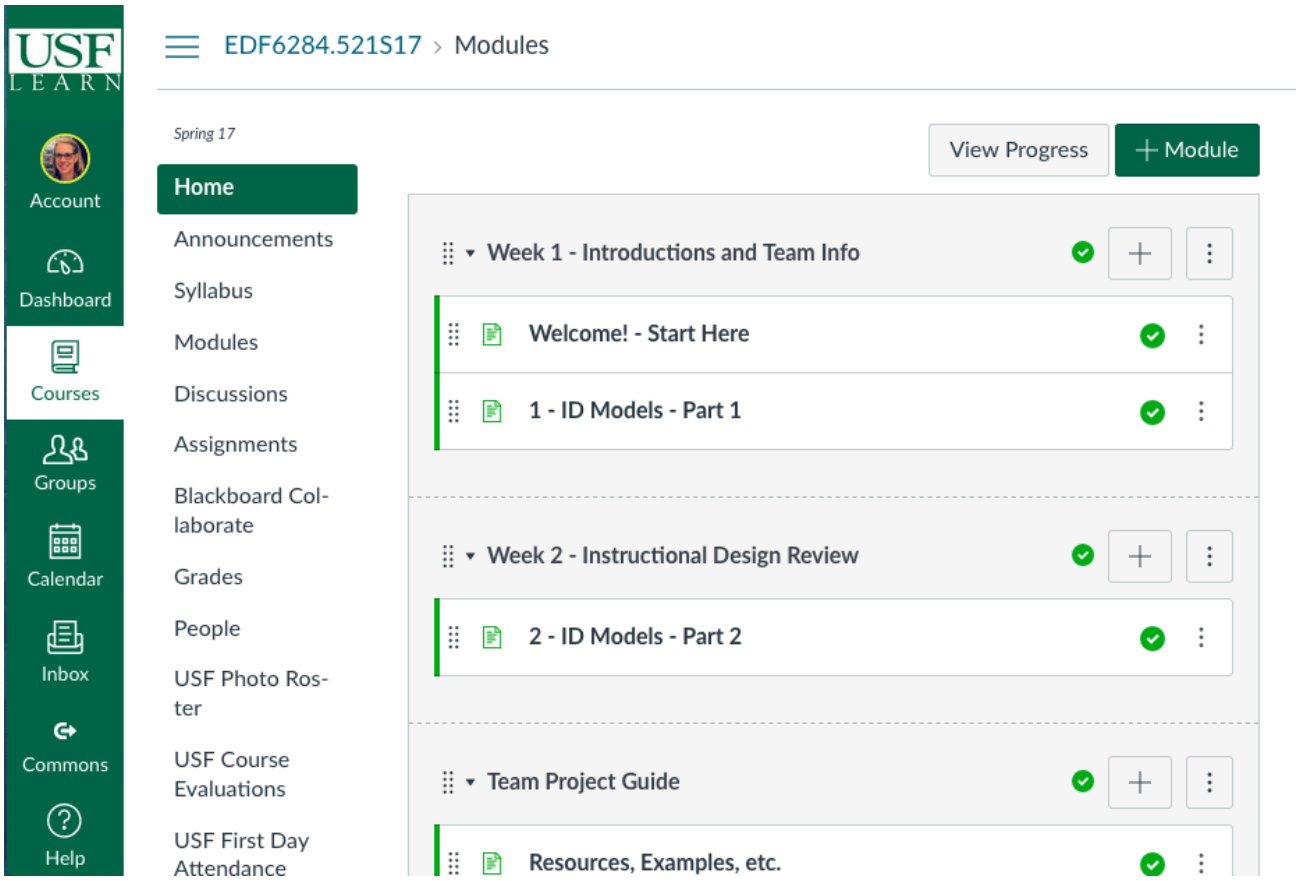
Technology Tools

How will your students access your course materials, each other, and you? There are many tools to choose from, depending on the length and structure of your course, as well as your interest in learning how to use new applications (which are getting more user-friendly all the time).

- For a full, academic-style course that covers multiple weeks and formal assessments, a learning management system is recommended.
- For a more informal course, with self-paced content, you may want to explore a website that integrates tools for interaction, such as email, shared documents, and video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Skype).
- For a one-time seminar or workshop, a webinar tool may be all you need, with additional resources provided via email or your website.

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

+ One-stop student portal
+ Structured layout - consistent look and feel, navigation, organization across lessons and courses
+ Lots of built-in features - communication, assignment upload, grading
+ Tracking and reporting



[Canvas Course Interface]

When comparing multiple options:

- What will it cost (e.g., per user, per month)? Are there discounts?
    - Free/open options: Moodle, Canvas Network, OpenLearning
- Does the LMS company provide training and support?
- Which third-party tools are integrated (e.g., Google Drive)?
- Is the platform mobile-friendly?
- Are there eCommerce options? (e.g., collecting registration fees)
- Look at reviews!
    - PCmag.com - The Best LMS for 2018
    - Capterra - LMS Software Reviews

Websites+

+ Fully customizable “course site”
+ Use the tools you have, or want to use

+ Can take more planning and coordination



[Click to access this full course online]

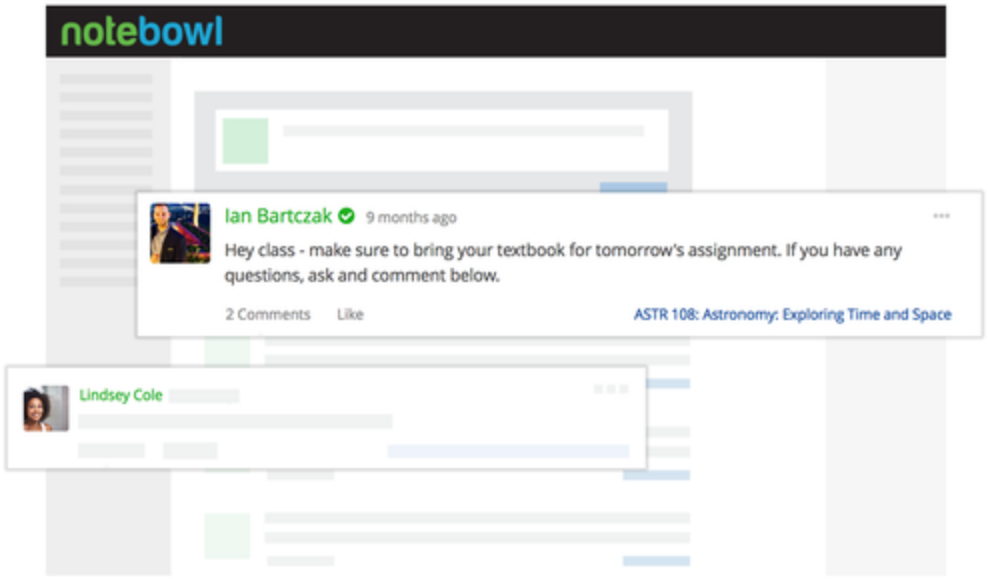
A few website tools (no coding required):

- WordPress (+ LearnPress plugin)
  - How to Create an Online Course with WordPress - WPEXPLORER.com
  - Teaching with WordPress - example 4-week course
  - DS106 - another example, open online course
- Weebly (and Worldclass plugin option), Weebly for Education
  - The Minimalist's Guide to Creating a Class or Course Web Site (w/ Weebly) - EmergingEdTech.com
- Wix
  - Learning Activities for Wix, ideas from UMass Blogs
- CourseCraft

Add communication tools (links to them, anyway):

- Live meetings (see webinar tools below)
- Surveys and Polls (PollDaddy, SurveyMonkey, Google Forms)

- Social Media (Facebook Groups, Google Hangouts, NoteBowl)

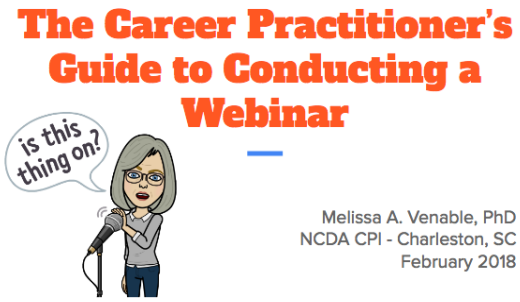


Webinar Platforms

+ One-time presentations
+ Live and recorded

Platforms:

- Zoom
- Join.me
- GoToMeeting (fee-based)
- Blackboard Collaborate (fee-based)



[click to view slideshow]

Course Content

This can be one of the most daunting aspects of creating an online course. The nature of online classes is that the content (i.e., reading materials, videos, assignments, activities) needs to be in place before the class starts. Getting organized is the first step. Consider how you might use, reuse, or revise existing materials before you begin creating new content from scratch.

Organize Your Lessons

Through a mix of text, video, and images you can present educational and training material to your learners. Consider how you'll organize the material. Instructional designer David Merrill provides three key components to consider how you'll organize and present this content - see his brief video [YouTube]:

- **Show** students what you want them to learn (demonstrate, don't just tell).
- Provide **opportunities to practice** or apply what they are learning (with feedback).
- Link to a **real-world context** (around a real-world problem).

Your learners need to know that the experience will be relevant to them in some way. Think about how you can build on their past experiences and prior knowledge, and clearly convey the results they will achieve (remember those learning objectives?).

Curate Existing Content

"If someone can say it better than you, then let them." - John Orlando, PhD Don't feel like you have to create your entire course from scratch. Use relevant resources in your topic area that are already available online. If these materials are copyrighted, provide attribution, links, citations, etc. as appropriate.

Some sources of existing content may include:

- Professional associations
- Websites and blogs
- Libraries
- Textbook publishers
- Slideshare, YouTube, and other user-generated collections

Learn more about educational fair use and copyright law in an online learning environment. What can you use without getting permission first? There are four primary factors to consider:

1. **The purpose of using the material** - use for teaching and scholarship may not require permission of purchase from the author or originator.
2. **The nature of the work** - nonfiction and reference materials may be more likely to be considered eligible for fair use than fiction and other creative works, such as photos and music.
3. T**he amount of the material used** - there's a difference in sharing a small section or excerpt vs. the entire work.
4. **The effect on the market** - will sharing this material in your online course have an effect on the value of the work?

Here's a handy PDF matrix you can print out.

Consider Open Educational Resources

"Open Educational Resources (OERs) are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license … anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them." - UNESCO

Search the following collections for OERs (including syllabi, notes, assignments, images, videos …) that may be useful in your course:

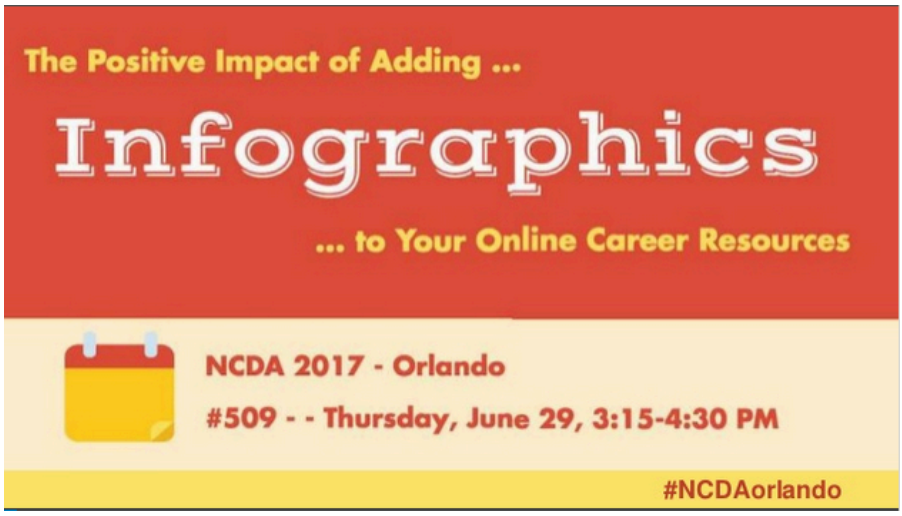
- OER Commons
- Creative Commons
- MERLOT.org
- OpenStax
- MIT OpenCourseWare
- Project Gutenberg
- OpenCourseLibrary
- Library of Congress
- National Archives
- … and more

Create Original Content

Creating an online course means "designing for the web." Some of the earliest online classes were based on transcribing or recording in-person lectures. While this material can still be useful, it needs to be modified in ways that are conducive to an online learning environment - **visual, interactive, exploratory**.

Infographics

Use a tool like Piktochart or Canva to create graphics that can help you tell a story, provide an introduction or summary, and convey expectations.

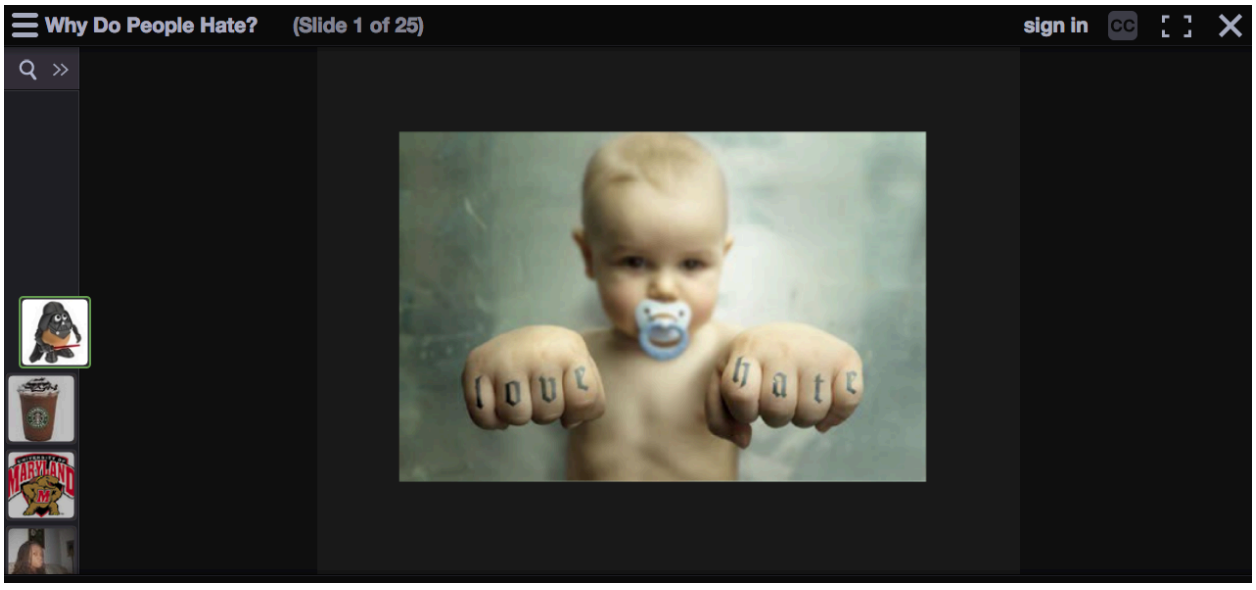


[click to view slideshow]

You can also search for existing infographics on platforms like Pinterest. For example, here is my recent search for “Jewish” - http://bit.ly/JewishInfographics

Multimedia

Look for opportunities to encourage student engagement and interaction with tools and presentations that include text, audio, video, images, and/or two-way communication. VoiceThread is just one example.



Class Discussion example provided by Rutgers Instructional Design and Technology [view video on site]

Usability Design

While many of the intuitive tools you will use to create your course have been developed with usability design and accessibility in mind, it's good to have a grasp of the basics. What is the user's (or learner's) experience in an online environment?

"In order for there to be a meaningful and valuable user experience, information must be:

- Useful
- Usable
- Desirable
- Findable
- Accessible
- Credible."

-Usability.gov

Usability.gov provides a large collection of tools, templates, and guidelines to help you learn more about everything from project management and usability evaluation to visual design.

Teaching Online

The same rules apply. That is, strategies for effective teaching in a physical classroom can translate well to an online learning environment. Be prepared for a learning curve that comes with the technology, and for the time it takes to not only prepare an online course, but also facilitate it with students learning at a distance.

Principles of Good Practice

Begin by reviewing the "Seven Principles for Good Practice" from Chickering and Gamson. While these were developed for on-campus, undergraduate education in 1987, I think you'll see how they apply to a wider range of contexts and levels of learning.

1. Encourage contact between learners and instructors.
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among learners.
3. Encourage active learning.

4. Give prompt feedback.
5. Emphasize time on task.
6. Communicate high expectations.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

For a list of low-stakes strategies for checking online learner understanding and progress, review the PDF provided by the University of Texas at Austin's Faculty Innovation Center - Checks for Learning During Instruction. These strategies can facilitate many of the principles listed above, including encouraging contact, giving prompt feedback, and communicating high expectations.

Online Teaching Competencies

Beyond subject matter expertise, online teaching requires the development of facilitation skills related to connecting students with each other, course content, and yourself at a distance. It's probably not a surprise that technology and communication skills are the crux of it all.

Active Teaching Presence

- Set clear expectations - timelines and due dates, assignment instructions, instructor responsiveness
- Connect with students individually - introductions, journaling, activities, discussions, email
- Don't be afraid of video - brief welcome, module introductions, module wrap-ups
- Write effective discussion questions - more than yes/no responses, more than reading comprehension

Technology Management

- Basic troubleshooting with students
- Manage LMS, website, or video conferencing platform
- Modify posted information as needed - e.g., syllabus, announcements, calendar
- Use email and other communication tools effectively
- Internet search
- Installing updates and plugins

Administration Skills

- Time management
- Monitoring learner progress and providing follow up

Communication Skills

- Excellent written communication
- Able and open to conveying personality and emotions via digital tools and in writing

Continuous Improvement

No online course is really “done.” Getting that first course up and running will take time, as well as an iterative approach. Start small and build. As you build the tools you use will change, and the subjects you teach will evolve. Take steps to make sure your courses and materials are up-to-date.

Run a pilot (a.k.a. a trial run) pre-launch.

- Start with a small number of learners (or modules).
- Find a few people to log in and “test” your course who will provide helpful feedback.

Seek student feedback.

- Send out an evaluation/survey after the course.
- If the course runs for multiple weeks or months, consider a “midterm” check in as well.

Regularly review and revise your course.

- Keep the content up-to-date.
- Fix broken links, navigation issues.
- Update your software as needed.

Find professional development opportunities.

- Stay current in your topic/field.
- Stay current with the technology you use to teach.
- Enhance your online teaching skills.

Your attendance and participation in this webinar show that you are a willing online learner! If you haven’t already done so, consider enrolling in a full online course (at a college or through an open platform like edX or Coursera) to gain the perspective of a student and see first-hand how various tools and strategies can be used to achieve learning online.

Additional Resources

I’ve added a number of links throughout this document, but … there are more you may want to browse.

Books

What the Best College Teachers Do, Ken Bain
Designing for How People Learn, Julie Dirksen

Self-Assessments

Faculty Self-Assessment: Preparing for Online Teaching, Penn State Online
Online Learning Readiness Questionnaire (for students), University of North Carolina

Articles and Documents

Top 10 Rules for Developing Your First Online Course, Faculty Focus, John Orlando
From Objectives to Outline, Google Open Online Education

More Tools

Rubrics, UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning

Organizations

Online Learning Consortium
EDUCAUSE