

Best Practices for Course Creation

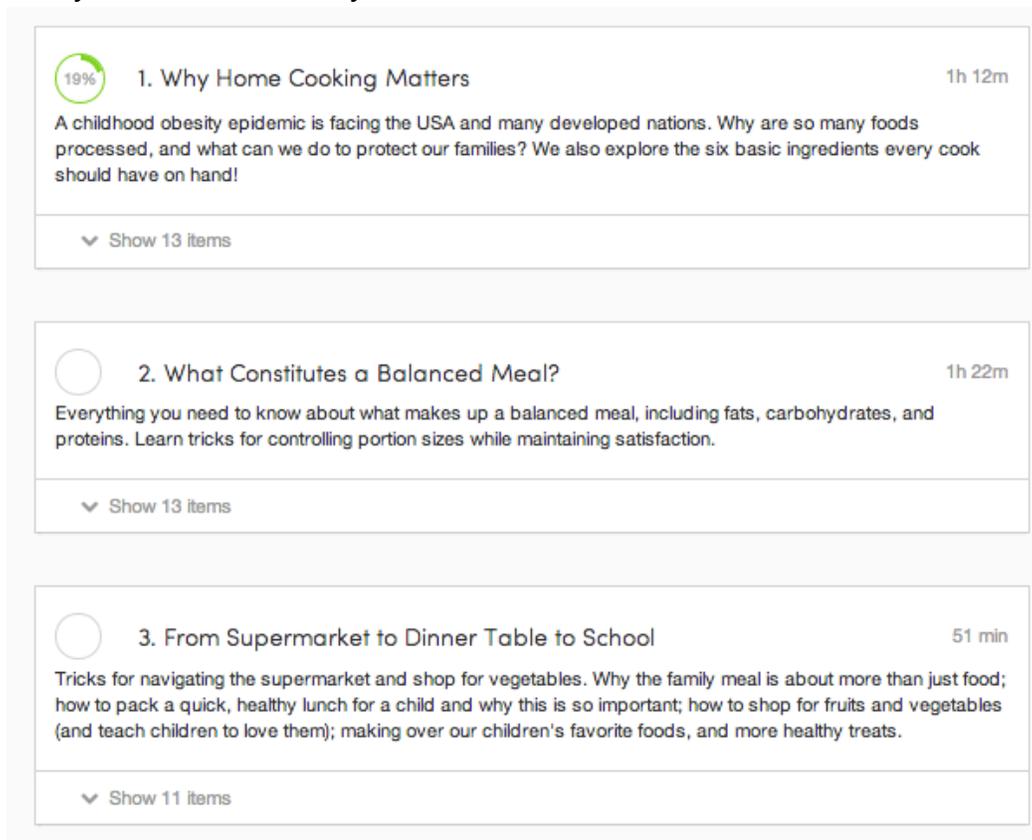
Coursera is undertaking a comprehensive platform upgrade that will significantly improve the architecture of the platform and will allow for faster feature development and cleaner data storage and reporting. The first releases on the new platform are On-Demand courses, in which learners can begin courses when they arrive and progress through them at their own pace. (View our first On-Demand courses [here](#)).

The #1 complaint from learners is that courses run infrequently and are not accessible. In addition, 55% of learners who drop courses cite missing a deadline as the reason. This On-Demand format will allow us to address this concern, continually add features to the platform to improve the course experience for learners, and also open up better ways for instructors to improve content or use it in on-campus instruction.

This document provides best practices for creating courses that can adapt easily to the On-Demand format. It is intended for anyone creating a new course or revamping materials in an existing course.

Basic Anatomy of On-Demand Courses

Each course is composed of Modules, which are self-contained units of content targeting one or two key learning objectives. Modules are often roughly the length of one week of content, and a course may contain as many Modules as necessary.



The screenshot displays three modules from a course, each with a progress indicator, title, duration, description, and a 'Show items' button.

- Module 1:** "1. Why Home Cooking Matters" (1h 12m). Progress: 19%. Description: "A childhood obesity epidemic is facing the USA and many developed nations. Why are so many foods processed, and what can we do to protect our families? We also explore the six basic ingredients every cook should have on hand!"
- Module 2:** "2. What Constitutes a Balanced Meal?" (1h 22m). Progress: 0%. Description: "Everything you need to know about what makes up a balanced meal, including fats, carbohydrates, and proteins. Learn tricks for controlling portion sizes while maintaining satisfaction."
- Module 3:** "3. From Supermarket to Dinner Table to School" (51 min). Progress: 0%. Description: "Tricks for navigating the supermarket and shop for vegetables. Why the family meal is about more than just food; how to pack a quick, healthy lunch for a child and why this is so important; how to shop for fruits and vegetables (and teach children to love them); making over our children's favorite foods, and more healthy treats."

Each Module is composed of any number of Lessons, which ideally contain roughly a half hour of content, including both lecture and assessment materials. Learners often do not have large chunks of time to devote to courses at once, and it is helpful for them to have meaningful portions of courses that can be accomplished in a relatively short amount of time.

19%

1. Why Home Cooking Matters

1h 12m

A childhood obesity epidemic is facing the USA and many developed nations. Why are so many foods processed, and what can we do to protect our families? We also explore the six basic ingredients every cook should have on hand!

Introduction to Child Nutrition	3 min
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Introduction To Child Nutrition 3 min	
Why Home Cooking Matters	21 min
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Why home cooking matters 3 min	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Why are there so many processed foods? 4 min	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Food is more than just nutrition 7 min	
<input type="radio"/> Quiz: Why Home Cooking Matters 7 questions	
Elements of a Healthy Kitchen	24 min
<input checked="" type="radio"/> The Six Ingredients Every Kitchen Needs 4 min	
<input type="radio"/> Stocking a Kitchen Pantry 5 min	
<input type="radio"/> USDA nutrition guidelines 8 min	
<input type="radio"/> Quiz: Elements of a Healthy Kitchen	

Although contents for the entire course are available at all times, students can still track their progress and are encouraged to move through Modules in the recommended sequence to create a complete course.

Best Practices for Module Creation

- **Ensure that Modules are self-contained** and include their own short introduction and conclusion. This allows Modules to stand on their own and to be remixed with Modules from other courses. For example, a Module on basic probability could be relevant to courses in statistics, biology, game theory and other disciplines. This makes content more versatile, portable, and less likely to go out of date.
- **Plan learning objectives for each Module** so that students understand the logic behind the grouping of content and what they can expect to learn.
- **Separate intros / conclusions into separate videos from core course content.** This allows your content to remain relevant in multiple contexts, and for either set of videos to be updated independently.
- **Create connecting content.** Additional videos or explanations may be necessary to tie multiple Modules together into a cohesive course experience. Don't hesitate to create these and slot them into or in between Modules as necessary.
- **Avoid referring to "weeks" in the course.** Learners will move through the course at their own pace and may complete a large amount of content in a short amount of time. Refer to Module 1 instead of Week 1.

Best Practices for Lesson Creation

- **Separate videos into 4-8 minute chunks.** Some evidence suggests this is helpful for increasing retention and decreasing video load times on mobile. This will also help increase the longevity of the course; if there is new research in your field or content goes out of date, it's much easier to replace a 5 minute lecture than to replace a 50 minute lecture.
- **Every Lesson should have an activity or assessment** to measure learning, and to track whether the the learning objectives are being met by the content. There is considerable evidence that frequent opportunities for application and assessment increase learning.

Best Practices for Course Creation

- **Create additional Modules for beginners or advanced learners.** Some learners will never have seen the content before, and others will have a Ph.D in the field. Creating optional remedial content is extremely helpful for bringing everyone to the same level at the beginning of the course. Additionally, more advanced Modules can always be added for those who want more depth in the topic.

- **Assume the platform may change.** Separate videos about logistics or deadlines and videos including screenshots of the platform from any core content. This decreases the need to update contents frequently.
- **Where appropriate, make content “timeless” and “borderless”.** Beginning a lecture with, “It’s a beautiful summer day here in San Francisco on the final day of the Stanley Cup,” may not resonate with learners from Guangzhou taking the course in February.
- **Create content that can be viewed on any device.** More than 30% of enrollments and 25% of unique user visits on Coursera are on mobile devices, and this number will only increase. Other students may access courses from iPads or large monitors. Avoid Javascript, iframes, and embedded videos in course pages where possible, since these are most likely to appear strangely on different devices.