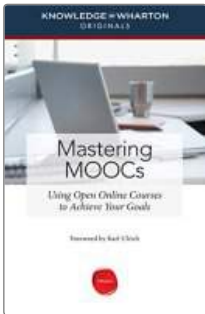


Firas Horany    English



Book

## Mastering MOOCs

Using Open Online Courses to Achieve Your Goals

Karl Ulrich

Wharton Digital Press, 2015[Buy the book](#)

Prestigious universities offer top-flight, mostly free MOOCs – massive open online courses.

## Recommendation

Prestigious universities offer many, top-flight massive open online courses (MOOCs), and most of them are free to the public. MOOCs are a new and exciting development in distance learning. Now you have access to the level of education offered at top universities and to classes such as Contract Law: From Trust to Promise to Contract and Fundamentals of Neuroscience from Harvard, Introduction to Negotiation from Yale, and Calculus and Principles of Synthetic Biology from MIT. Millions of online students participate in MOOCs. *Knowledge@Wharton*, the online business journal of University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, produced this useful MOOC manual: a superb, hands-on guide that explains how online learners can get the most from these classes. *getAbstract* recommends this timely, useful e-book to anyone intrigued by – or already participating in – online learning.

## In this summary, you will learn

- How massive open online courses (MOOCs) work
- Who offers them
- What they cost
- What they require
- What benefits they offer

## Take-Aways

- Hundreds of prestigious universities offer massive open online courses (MOOCs) on a variety of educational subjects – and most are free to the public.
- Some MOOCs involve optional completion certificates that cost nominal fees.
- Millions of learners partake of MOOCs.
- MOOC students face no entry or participation requirements.
- Anyone with a computer, browser and adequate web connection can join a MOOC.
- Learners take part in MOOCs according to their own needs and schedules.

- Most learners spend four to six hours weekly on MOOC study and related work.
- Learners sign up for MOOCs to expand their skills, increase their knowledge, enhance their professional credentials, refresh their memories and solve business problems.
- MOOCs require self-direction, self-discipline and the desire to learn.
- Online reviews and critiques help learners evaluate MOOCs.

## Summary

*“The rise of MOOCs has made it possible for people across the world to learn concepts and topics that just a few years ago could only be accessed by students in elite universities.”*

*“Independent learning is difficult, but you can learn from a MOOC...It’s not a degree, but you learn things that can be applied immediately.”*  
(Deidre Woods, University of Pennsylvania)

*“The best MOOCs are academically challenging, especially if the course is in a new field for the learner.”*

### The Value of MOOCs

Max Buckley was close to graduating from Ireland’s Cork Institute of Technology when he learned about massive open online courses (MOOCs). A business administration student, Buckley wanted to broaden his knowledge about up-to-date technology and computers. He signed up for MIT’s free Circuits and Electronics MOOC. Although he couldn’t finish the course because of his final exams at Cork, he loved the online-learning experience and enrolled in more MOOC computer-programming courses offered by some of the world’s most prestigious universities.

Buckley was already enrolled in a data-analysis course when he interviewed for a Google internship. The Google staffer interviewing him was enrolled in the same MOOC. Buckley won the internship, and Google later hired him full-time. Today, Buckley is a Google product-quality analyst. Buckley and his interviewer shared the experience of self-directed learning. Enrolling in MOOCs doesn’t guarantee anyone a job, of course, but Buckley’s tale illustrates how much learners with the necessary “time, commitment and Internet connection” can gain when they enroll in MOOCs.

Many universities offer MOOCs in conjunction with educational technology firms such as edX and Coursera. To illustrate how this works, if you enroll in a MOOC at the University of California, Berkeley, you take the course through the edX website. EdSurge reports that more than 400 universities now offer an estimated 2,400 different MOOCs, mostly for free and in “more than a dozen” languages.

### At Your Convenience

Online learning has been around since the early 1980s. However, the earliest efforts failed due to the limits of technology at the time. The availability of “low-cost, high-bandwidth Internet connections” and cloud computing launched MOOCs like a rocket. MOOCs don’t demand special admission requirements or prerequisites. There is no application process. Most MOOCs don’t take as long to complete as typical college courses. Students can view classes any time and on any schedule. MOOCs eliminate many of the barriers between learners and new knowledge.

### Millions of Online Learners

Colleges make MOOCs available on the web so people around the globe, in the largest possible numbers, can take advantage of them, usually at no cost. Since their introduction, millions of online learners have participated in MOOCs, which became extremely popular by 2012.

Some MOOCs do charge “learners” – the preferred MOOC term instead of “students” – small fees for certificates they can use to prove that they completed a course satisfactorily. For around \$50, edX and Coursera provide learners with certificates of completion. For a monthly fee to Udacity, learners receive a “verified certificate” and office-hour access to coaches and instructors.

*“Even the most casual use of [MOOCs] takes a certain level of self-direction, an ability to learn independently and a dedication that not everyone can provide.”*

*“MOOCs aren’t a substitute for college credit, but they...provide a more immersive learning experience than other solo options, such as picking up a textbook.”*

*“MOOC providers are increasingly making their courses mobile-friendly.”*

*“MOOCs may be shorter and somewhat less rigorous than traditional college courses, but that doesn’t mean they don’t require a time commitment.”*

Because MOOCs generally provide excellent learning experiences developed by world-class universities and renowned professors, they offer a substantial return on the investment of your time. Some learners report that they have earned higher wages thanks to taking MOOCs.

### **Components and Characteristics**

Besides standard educational components such as video lectures, online quizzes and reading assignments, MOOCs feature interactive forums where students and professors communicate electronically. Learners grade all MOOC assignments.

On an educational spectrum, a MOOC lines up “somewhere between a textbook and a college course.” Many businesspeople take MOOCs to develop their knowledge and skills, to enhance their professional credentials, to secure helpful background knowledge for running or starting a business, or to accomplish similar purposes. Others turn to MOOCs to gain the information they need to fix outstanding business problems or to upgrade the skills of their team members.

Some learners take MOOCs for recreation or to satisfy their intellectual curiosity. However, businesspeople who want to stay competitive must maintain their skills. MOOCs are ideal for this purpose. They provide résumé-enhancing quality information and a superior learning experience. As MOOCs have become increasingly popular, more managers have begun to accept them as legitimate professional credentials.

### **Basic Requirements**

Thanks to the availability of MOOCs, anyone anywhere with a sufficiently robust Internet connection, adequate computer processing power and a quality browser can acquire valuable knowledge in an efficient format. Such information previously was available only to university students. The typical MOOC requires four to six hours of study and learning per week. However, the courses aren’t always easy and can be quite challenging.

### **Learning Alternatives**

MOOCs represent only one option among many for those who want to add to their education. These courses involve greater interaction than simply studying a book. However, they aren’t as immersive as the typical classroom experience. MOOCs can’t replace the rich educational experience of a traditional college education or measure up to MBA programs, which offer constant networking opportunities and special cachet. However, “industry-specific educational” programs can prove valuable in addition to traditional educational options.

MOOCs can serve as a portal to more in-depth learning alternatives. They are useful for learners who want to investigate different areas of knowledge to determine if they are interested in further study that involves a greater commitment and a more comprehensive educational experience. MOOCs enable learners to test the waters of an area of study without a big financial commitment.

### **Multiple Educational Choices**

MOOCs cover an incredibly diverse range of engaging topics. Usually, you can find a course on whatever subject you want. “A lot of information that wasn’t available before is out there now,” says Piotr Mitros of edX. He explains, “In most cases, these advanced courses were created by one professor...for a very small class.”

Consider these MOOCs: Buddhist Meditation and the Modern World, from the University of Virginia via Coursera; The Ethics of Eating, from Cornell University via edX; Foundations of e-Commerce, from the Nanyang Technological University through Coursera; and Financial Analysis of Entrepreneurial Ideas, from Babson College’s Babson Global via NovoED.

*“Although the average workload for a MOOC hovers around four to six hours a week, the time required can vary greatly.”*

*“Many MOOCs archive materials online after the course has ended... giving learners the chance to review key takeaways, check a reference or review video segments.”*

*“It becomes a question of choosing among many books in the library.”  
(MacArthur Fellow Daphne Koller, Coursera president and co-founder)*

*“For MOOC learners seeking personal enrichment and those looking to improve their professional skills, the spectrum of courses is broad, and...can be a bit overwhelming.”*

With the huge number of choices now available, selecting the right MOOC can be a challenge. Expect to spend time – and considerable trial and error – investigating a variety of MOOCs before settling on one that will work best for you.

Rely on your peers for guidance. Former learners usually post reviews and critiques of MOOCs. Additionally, most MOOCs have landing pages that offer useful course information and guidance. These often include sample videos from the course and information about its time requirements. Whichever course you choose, be sure to set aside a sufficient amount of time for your MOOC studies. Be ready to increase your time allotment, if necessary. For a successful MOOC, also consider these tips:

- To benefit from your MOOC, make sure you commit sufficiently to doing the work. Plan when and where you will study. Once you set your MOOC schedule, stick to it.
- Determine if you will need a successful completion certificate or some other type of recognition. These certificates demonstrate that you did everything necessary to gain the requisite knowledge from your course.
- Check that your computer, browser and web connection can handle the MOOC you plan to take. If you intend to access the Internet through a mobile device, find out if it is compatible with the MOOC you want. “All computers and Internet connections are not created equal, so check the MOOC’s provider tech requirements in their frequently-asked-questions section.”
- You may find that the MOOC that interests you doesn’t deliver all the knowledge you seek. If so, search out supplementary MOOCs to fill in any information gaps.
- Ask your relatives and friends to support your MOOC learning efforts.

### **Your Fellow Students**

Often, you gain the most from a MOOC by connecting with other people in your course. Communicate with them regularly through the learners’ forum or social media. MOOC learners who live near each other often can set up mutually beneficial “study groups.” Your peers can help you understand your course material and its applications.

Use your completed MOOC as a starting point for more education, whether through additional MOOCs, books, traditional college courses or other training options.

### **Movable Goes to Wharton**

Mike Belsito is director of product and strategy for Movable, a health and fitness start-up firm. The company’s primary product is the Movband, a personal-fitness tracker. Belsito wanted to learn about gamification and how it might enhance his users’ experience. He signed up for a Wharton gamification MOOC and sent an email to his employees about the course asking, “Who wants to go to Wharton with me?”

Nearly a third of his 25 employees signed up to watch the lectures as a group. They discussed the class after the lectures. Besides encouraging his employees to participate in the gamification MOOC, Belsito also gave them books on the subject. He appreciates the value of MOOCs for his own education and for educating his team members.

Thanks to the Wharton MOOC, Movable employees learned more about developing an attractive user platform. More firms like Movable have come to see MOOCs as valuable employee training and learning options. Guidelines for bringing your employees to MOOCs include:

*“There are three types of MOOC learners: those who are just browsing, those who want to view the material but won’t do the homework, and those who will do...the work and complete the course.” (Professor Karl Ulrich, Wharton)*

- Don’t force MOOCs on employees. Promote MOOCs as available training options, along with books, seminars and specialized individual training.
- Utilize handouts and vocabulary or conceptual guides for your MOOC. This ensures that everyone on your team works from the same information.
- Enroll in the same MOOC as your team members, so you share the same learning experience.
- Tie the MOOC course closely to specific problems your team needs to solve. Use team meetings to discuss the relevance of the MOOC to pressing business issues.

### **The Right MOOC**

While MOOCs can be of immense value, make sure they meet your specific educational goals before you join. MOOCs are not suitable for everyone. They require dedication, self-direction and the desire to learn on your own. Consider two other crucial points to ensure that the MOOC you choose will be right for you:

*Each class “felt like a full semester, not just a seminar and an overview. I was being delivered great information.” (Antona Brent Smith, MBA, MOOC student)*

1. **“Map your goals”** – Decide what you hope to achieve when you choose a specific MOOC. Do you want to learn specialized new knowledge, develop a new skill, improve your existing skills or simply satisfy your intellectual curiosity? Choose the MOOC that will help you attain your goals.
2. **“Look for immediate, practical applications for your lessons”** – Will your MOOC help you to enhance your professional abilities? Determine how to make practical use of your new expertise. Consider how the members of your team may also benefit.

## About the Author

**Knowledge@Wharton** is the online business analysis journal of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. It publishes a global edition in English and regional editions in Spanish, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese.

This document is restricted to the personal use of Firas Horany (Firas.horany@gmail.com)