

Can MOOCs meet your learning needs?

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Abstract

This paper looks at the role of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in fulfilling your learning needs; from looking at what MOOCs are through to examples of courses from different Universities and advice for completing a course. The sequence of activities takes you from looking at your learning needs, to finding a course, thinking about how to plan and prepare for learning using a MOOC then writing a review or reflecting on the impact of your learning.

Introduction

If you have a personal development plan (PDP) as part of your continuing professional development (CPD) could a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) help? The aim of this learning activity is to look at what MOOCs are and whether there are any that could fulfil your learning needs as a medical illustrator. Just as reminder do look at previous editions of the journal that include guided learning activities to support your professional development including developing your PDP (Bryson 2011) and choosing a mix of learning activities (Bryson 2010).

What are MOOCs?

MOOCs have now been around for over 11 years and have grown in popularity with large numbers of participants if not completers of courses. The key attributes of a MOOC are covered in the title.

Massive

Recruitment can be in the 1,000s if not 10,000s

Open

The courses can be taken by anyone with no restrictions as to qualification, no charges for the course, though on occasions there may be a charge if you want to be assessed or be given certification for your learning.

Online

All the materials are accessible from a range of learning providers through learning management systems (LMS) like Khan Academy, Udacity, FutureLearn, Coursera and many more.

Courses

The materials are designed to meet your learning needs by offering the expertise of lecturers and Universities around the world from USA to Australia, UK to Europe all without having to leave the comfort of your own home. The courses do have different structures and modes of delivery some may give you all the materials at the start and you manage your own progress termed self-paced or the materials may be scheduled over a period of weeks or months in sequence. A good example of the latter is the Identifying the dead MOOC from the University of Dundee where the complete story, written by Val McDermid, was progressively revealed over a 6 week period <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/identifying-the-dead>.

One other feature that varies from course to course is when they are available. Some courses run all the time others have very specific runs for a cohort and may only open once a year or every few years. These courses will let you register your interest so they can let you know when they are available.

For a broader overview of MOOCs it is best to look at resources like wikipedia's entry, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course, which is very thorough with 190 references.

Activity 1 What are your learning needs?

If you have a personal development plan it is likely that you have some learning needs which have come out of your personal career directions, to support your role as a medical illustrator or your staff appraisal. For this activity make a list of your learning needs from your PDP or undertake a review of your PDP to be sure your learning needs are up-to-date. The Review and Preparing for Action stages of the PDP Cycle (Bryson 2011). If you want to study for fun or enjoyment there are plenty of MOOCs available that can cover your passion or interests beyond career development.

What MOOCs are available?

The beauty about MOOCs is that unlike the offerings locally, from a university, college or employer, which may be limited, when looking at MOOCs you can access learning materials and expertise from anywhere in the world. The list in Table 1 is designed to get you thinking and to give an idea of the range available. To access the full range online there are MOOC aggregators see Dhiman's 2015 blog post and links to find other courses.

Institution (Platform)	Course titles
Birmingham Medical School (Future Learn)	Improving your image: Dental photography in practice
University of Derby Online (FutureLearn)	Understanding Autism, Asperger's and ADHD Bridging the Dementia Divide Digital.Me
University of Michigan (Coursera)	Instructional Methods in Health Professions Education, Introduction to cataract surgery Teaching and assessing clinical skills.
University of Newcastle Australia (edX)	Drawing nature, science and culture: Natural history illustration

University of Dundee (FutureLearn)	Identifying the Dead: Forensic Science and Human Identification Compassionate Care: Getting it right The Diabetes Epidemic: a Patient-Centred Approach
University of Wollongong Australia (FutureLearn)	Bioprinting: 3D Printing Body Parts

Table 1. Examples of MOOCs available from Universities that might be suitable for medical illustrators.

Activity 2 Matching a MOOC to your learning needs

Using one of the MOOC aggregators like <https://www.class-central.com> (Dinham 2015) or a search using Google <https://www.google.co.uk> to find a course that matches a learning need. Look beyond the titles at the content to be sure it will support your aims. Courses entry pages will have an overview and list of topics as well as the amount of time required to do the course. Many courses have a short introductory video which will give you a flavour of the course and its content.

Getting the most out of a MOOC

Learning providers and Universities provide advice for students studying online courses in general and MOOCs. Others might put this in the form of a learning charter along with your entitlements as a learner. For example from University of Derby Online, <https://www.derby.ac.uk/online/moocs-learner-charter> or a learning guide on registering <https://www.futurelearn.com/learning-guide> from FutureLearn.

Other online resources can help you plan and prepare for your MOOC. One example is Campus Explorer with its post on 5 Study tips for MOOC students; schedule time for your MOOC, participate in the learning community, practice your computer literacy, study at a desk or table rather than in bed and don't take more courses than you can manage. For details on these tips and other links go to <http://www.campusexplorer.com/college-advice-tips/D39FA742/5-Study-Tips-for-MOOC-Students/>.

MOOCs are rooted in a supporting environment as successful learners on MOOCs often go onto pay for online degrees, masters or even doctoral programmes. This means that providers strongly support their MOOCs to get students used to learning online. However, like any course it is important that you plan and prepare for joining a MOOC by doing your research.

Activity 3 Plan and prepare for your MOOC

Once you have chosen your MOOC it is key to plan and prepare for the course, especially if your only prior experience has been face-to-face learning. A good way to start is to search online for example using the phrase "How to learn using a MOOC" which can lead to links like "How to make the best use of a massive open online course" from the British Council "Learning to how to learn" from Coursera and learning guides like that from FutureLearn or books like "How to be a successful MOOC student" by Maggie Sokolik (2014) or "How to learn anything: The power of MOOCs" by Jesuloba Eyitayo (2017).

Activity 4 Reviewing and reflecting on your learning.

Taking and completing the learning from a MOOC should be followed by reflecting on its impact and benefit for service delivery and patients as a CPD activity. Another way of following up on a course could be writing a review of your learning experience for this journal or more informally the journal blog <https://jviscomm.wordpress.com>.

References

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