# 40 Tips for running an Open Online Course or MOOC from those who have experienced them

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To coincide with the announcement of a new [Learning Design MOOC](http://www.olds.ac.uk) (now confirmed as starting in January 2013 - <http://www.olds.ac.uk> ) some of those registering have been invited to tell us about their previous experiences of participating, or helping organise, open online courses. Information about MOOCs can be difficult to come by, so the thirty-five responses we have received so far (which cover 50 separate experiences of 25 different MOOCs) represents a really interesting dataset.

In the survey we asked people about what they had liked and disliked about the MOOCs they had been involved with, what the MOOC did well and not so well, how the issues they had encountered could be resolved and what advice they would give to others planning a MOOC. I’ve taken these responses and attempted to express these as a series of tips – each tip based directly on one or more pieces of advice, suggestions or experiences reported by the survey respondents.

If you would like to add your experiences to those already contributed, please [visit the survey](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dENYRW5KOWp0Y1NTZ0NoekN2YU9VR2c6MQ). Also, as this survey represents the first stage in a broader schedule of monitoring and evaluation for the MOOC, watch out for further reporting over the next six months.

So here are **40 Tips for running a MOOC**(in no particular order)…

**1. Be clear about what type of MOOC you are planning**  – there is no one way of doing a MOOC for, just like any course, it may draw on constructivism, instructivism,  connectivism etc. (or any combination). Be clear about the pedagogy even if just within your design team.

**2. Ensure a balance between the suggested activities (those you have designed) and time allowed for participants to develop/build from them**

**3. Ensure the course rewards participation** – some will be motivated by the promise of awards such as badges or certificates however for others the benefit of an enriching experience, helping others, social interaction over a share interest, or better understanding themselves may be as, if not more, important.

**4. Ensure the course mechanics/design focuses on achieving a coalescing or binding together of knowledge**  – so as to avoid a spiralling fragmentation of posts, content and participation and generating what one respondent termed ‘too much noise’

**5. Consider the expectations and skills of those who will be involved** – what are the prerequisite skills required? At what point might the degree of difference between participants become an issue?

**6. Provide ‘plenty of structure’ in terms of activities, group working and website organisation/navigation** – yet also ensure such structure is not a constraint for those who want to go further or to reorganise knowledge in different ways. Consider the negative impact on motivation some feel during scripted courses and, conversely, others feel during very ‘open’ courses

**7. Consider future participants as well as current participants** – will the post, tweets, links etc make sense to someone new visiting the site in 6 months time? Will the course really be ‘open’ across time as well as open geographically at the time it takes place?

**8. Expect a high-drop out rate** – low barriers to entry may also mean low barriers to withdrawal or lower tolerance thresholds). Take the opportunity to reflect on what a drop-out rate of 50% or 90% of registrations would mean for your course, for the participants registering on the course and your own educational mission/purpose in organising it.

**9. Create a sense of closure at the end of the course** – for example, as one respondent suggests ‘an assessment, a designed activity or summary podcast’.

**10. Build in the potential to scale-up (in terms of numbers), reach further (in terms of accessibility and portability) and be sustained (repeated in future)**

**11. Keep the pace and depth of topics higher than traditional face to face courses –** and in making this change, ensure you recommend or estimate how long tasks should take

**12. Determine and communicate a vision for how different forms of knowledge will be handled and privileged within the course** – are some forms of knowledge more authoritative? Do anecdotal opinions carry equal weight to empirical published research?

**13. Don’t underestimate the preparation required**

**14. Be clear about your objectives** – several respondents made this point complaining of objectives that were ‘too broad’, ‘not clearly defined’, ‘esoteric’  or even absent.

**15. Balance learning tasks** – the OULDI Task Profiler tool uses seven categories: assimilative, information handling, communicating, productive, experiential, adaptive, and assessment. Using it, you can create a bar-chart representation of the balance across your course.

**16. Provide opportunities in learning tasks for interactive engagement**

**17. Adopt a team based approach to design**

**18. Where possible, communicate to participants what aspects are considered essential and desirable** –this practice was found lacking in at least four major MOOCs. Reports of feeling ‘overwhelmed’ are quite common so plan for a hierarchy of engagement – additional resources but only for those who want to ‘opt-in’ and go deeper but also a ‘base’ spine.

**19. Expect and plan for Plagiarism** – surprisingly, even in courses where learning activities are purely there to help the individual learn, people will copy and paste.

**20. Ensure very communicative guides-on-the-side who have good facilitation and motivational skills** – respondents liked ‘good’, ‘engaging’, ‘charismatic’ and ‘professional’ lecturers and facilitators just as much as they disliked poor ones.

**21. Provide feedback and be active and busy during the course –** respondents value formative and summative feedback (be this individual comments or collective feedback in, for example, a weekly round-up)

**22. Expect the participants to expect you to provide support** **and moderation** – for example as regards technical issues, organisational issues and in resolving conflicts.

**23. Avoid changing the course mid-flow / Keep deadlines fixed** – i.e. avoid adjusting assessment deadline in response to only a few people submitting or changing dates for live sessions at short notice.

**24. Be clear about what facilitators are expected to do** – some facilitators may become overwhelmed or feel ‘responsible for everyone’s wellbeing’ so provide clear guidance about roles and what to do if participants begin to demand too much

**25. Keep live/online sessions short** – live sessions that last two hours, even one hour, are often considered too long. Greater concentration is required for online sessions and therefore people tire more quickly.

**26. Have a clear, stated reason for all synchronous session** – be clear about the value of having everyone there in person because attending session can be difficult for those in other time-zones, who are working, or who have other commitments.

**27. If seeking a global audience, consider offering several synchronous sessions so as to allow for different time zones**

**28. Advertise sessions well in advance** – and make sure participants know where to look on the website for information and updates about them so they can plan their attendance

**29. Sessions are able about discovering other people as well as other content**– if you’re lucky you may get feedback like this: ‘the chats are really open-minding, educative and give you the opportunity to get to know other people from other countries and get attached to their cultures…’

**30. Keep your communication steady and measured** – as one respondent said ‘don’t bombard participants with too much [by way of] push emails etc but keep communication to a steady schedule with regularity.’

**31. If using groups** **provide initial groupings and make it easy to self-organise**  - there was more than one suggestion from respondents that the course managers should automatically assign groups to those who want to work in one (if group work is part of the course that is). To help participants self-organise it was suggested lists of who is currently ‘actively’ participating could be provided. One respondent suggested the design should allow for the failure of groups or those only able to study my themselves.

**32. If using groups, plan for the greater complexity of group working and group dynamics** – even building and working in a group in the same building can be a challenge. Doing the same for people who have never meet, live thousands of miles apart and potentially have very different expectations or motivations for the course presents additional challenges

**33. Think very carefully before using peer grading** – if used work out carefully how it will be done and what support is required including whether plagiarism software should be available

**34. Be clear where the main home page is** – this may be especially important if you are using several platforms to run the MOOC

**35. Provide a central place where interaction and discussions can easily take place**

**36. Keep the course schedule up to date**

**37. Give guidance on how peer support should work and ensure all participants are aware of it** – also provide guidelines for self-regulation and acceptable behaviour.

**38. Provide supports to help participants develop their skills in participating in these new styles of course –** ensuring a positive experience for ‘newbies’ was an issue mentioned by several respondents. The OpenED Open Online course provided a number of supports including an introductory module aimed at walking new comers through some of the basics. Also think about how new comers are to be welcomed, how they get involved even once the course has ‘started,’ and if you need examples of the quality of work expected.

**39. Don’t assume that all participants are at the same level of understanding of the tools** – one respondent entreated course organisers to ‘give instructions based on the lowest common denominator’

**40. Consider the fact that participants are ‘used to seamless facebook-style integration’** – whilst unfair, it is perhaps unavoidable that such comparisons will be made. Determine what level of ‘polish’ your audience will tolerate and review what aspects of the site may appear clunky, inaccessible or unprofessional.

REF - <http://latestendeavour.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/40-tips-for-running-an-open-online-course-or-mooc-from-those-who-have-experienced-them/>

What do you think is ESSENTIAL in DEVELOPING A MOOC?

What do you think is ESSENTIAL in TEACHING A MOOC?