7 Steps to Create an Online Course (That Doesn't Suck)



You're about to discover how to create an online course.

Not just any course.

Certainly not what passes for an "online course" these days.

But a great course.

- ... An online course that delivers transformation and not just information.
- ... An online course people will actually pay you for.
- ... An online course you enjoy teaching.

Sure, you could get away with an ordinary online course. You might even make money with it.

But do you really want to do that?

Think about it. If you built a lousy course, even if you managed to <u>sell it well</u>, it would erode your brand over time.

Why Some Online Courses Suck

You've probably taken one or a few of those online courses that suck.

They suck because they don't work!

They promise to solve one of your problems, and you may learn a ton about how to do it. But in the end, the course doesn't help you change your behavior and so the problem persists.

That's because few people realize that education isn't just about acquiring new information. It's not even just about developing new skills. Sure, both of those are valuable and necessary, but education is ultimately about *behavior change*.

Most online courses don't get you there because, let's face it, it's hard enough to change our own behavior, much less somebody else's. Most course creators simply don't know any better.

But the other reason is because many course creators are in it to "make money online," "earn passive income," or "create something once and make profit while you lay on the beach." Not necessarily because they're greedy, but because that's how some online business gurus position online courses.

And so they approach online course creation as marketers, whose sole job is to create courses that people will buy. No wonder, they're not around after they make the sale!

On the other hand, if you're in this for the long haul, creating a flywheel of success in your business boils down to creating valuable outcomes for your students.

And that means focusing on the happiness and success of your students. THAT is the key to real success.

Turning strangers into students—getting them to buy your course—is just the beginning of the process. Once you have students, you need to turn them into people who get results.

That creates an interesting effect because people who get results want to continue to be <u>your customers</u>. They want to buy more things from you, take more courses, and continue their journey.

Not only that, people who get results also tend to tell other people, which spreads the word and brings more strangers into your orbit.

This is the complete picture of a successful course business.

That's the virtuous cycle you have to build if you're in this for the long haul... where strangers turn into customers, customers get results, then successful customers bring in more strangers.

So You Want To Build A Great Course

Ok, now we're all on the same page that we want only to create great courses.

The way most people do that sets themselves—and their students—up for failure.

The classic course creation story goes like this:

You lock yourself in your office for weeks, if not months, slaving away at a mammoth of a course, pouring your entire being into sharing everything you know about your topic.

You scrape your life savings to produce the slickest, most sophisticated course.

You then come out and <u>launch</u> the course on a gamble. First, you wonder if people will buy it. And then, you wonder if your students will, in fact, get the outcomes you promised.

Most of the time, the gamble doesn't pay off.

In this post, you'll discover a way to create an online course that doesn't entail any of that because you'll be leveraging two powerful concepts that set you up for success: piloting and co-creation.

2 Keys to A More Successful Course

Piloting

The first key to a successful course is piloting and, by that, we don't mean flying an airplane.

Piloting refers to testing an idea to see how people respond to it.

In the television industry, a pilot episode is a test episode or prototype of the entire TV series. Producers present it to TV networks to sell the whole series. If there's no interest, they can cut their losses and move on to their next idea. They would've found out before using all their resources to create the entire series.

Similarly, a pilot course is a test or prototype of the full online course you plan to teach eventually. You present the pilot course to your audience to gauge if they would be interested in your full course. And if not, you would find out before investing all the time, money, and energy creating a full course.

By creating a pilot course first, you'll get off on the right foot and get paid even before you build the course.

Nice, right? But that's not all....

Co-Creation

The second key to creating a great course is co-creation.

This means your students participate in creating the course. You read that right. They will actually be helping you build the pilot course.

It's as if they've become part of your team: they get the benefit of early access to your material and more personalized attention, while providing invaluable feedback and insight into how to make your course the best it can be.

You'll need to actively seek their feedback, observe their consumption of the course, and use that information to decide what you'll teach and how best to teach it.

This is why, if you follow the steps that follow, you don't need to have teaching experience or education knowledge to teach effectively. Your students will show you how to teach them.

But co-creation is crucial for another reason: **the IKEA effect.**

Researchers at Harvard, Yale, and Duke discovered that people would pay more for furniture they had assembled than on the exact same furniture somebody else put together.

In other words, if people were involved in creating something, then they perceive it to be more valuable than the same thing created by somebody else.

When you run a pilot course, you sweep up your audience into a co-creation narrative. Even if they don't enroll in your pilot course, they would've been involved in the idea for the course. And if they do enroll, then they'd be even more deeply involved, because they'd be co-creators of the full course.

This process binds your audience to you in a powerful way, a way that can make marketing your full course easier later on.

Keep these two themes in mind—piloting and co-creation—as we go through the steps of how to create an online course.



STEP 1

Determine your pilot direction.

Your first step is to come up with the general idea for your pilot course.

If you've been thinking of creating an online course for some time, you probably know what topic you want to teach... for your full course.

Remember, this step is about your pilot aka test aka prototype, so it won't be as comprehensive as your full course. It will most likely be a snippet or "taste" of what your full course will be.

In this step, you'll narrow your course idea by formulating your "who-what-why" sentence or Instant Credibility Formula. You'll use this statement to describe what you do, who you serve, and what transformation you can deliver with your online course. It's also a quick and easy way to establish your credibility in your area of expertise.

"My pilot course will teach [WHO] to [OUTCOME] through [TOPIC]."

...where:

WHO refers to your ideal students.

This is a specific group of people you want to help and have access to. You need to be able to communicate with this group to get their feedback and to offer your course (more on that later).

OUTCOME refers to the ultimate reason why someone would enroll in your course.

Think about why your ideal students want to achieve the transformation. Consider both the obvious, more immediate benefits, as well as the deeper drives that motivate them.

TOPIC refers to the subject matter you're going to teach in your pilot course.

This should relate to problems or desires your ideal students have, are aware of, and are actively seeking a solution for. You'll refer to the topic in just one word or a short phrase.

Here are some examples:

"My pilot course will teach postpartum women to look great and feel confident by losing their pregnancy weight safely."

- Fitness Trainer

"My pilot course will teach employees with high-stress jobs to be happier and more productive at work through EFT."

- Emotional Freedom Technique Practitioner

"My pilot course will teach busy CEOs to save time and become more effective communicators by writing effective emails fast."

- Freelance Writer

Once you have your Instant Credibility Builder, you can begin to get ideas about how you're going to help your students achieve this transformation.

But don't get bogged down by that yet because, first, you need to make sure your pilot idea is solid.

STEP 2

Do market research.

You have two goals in this step:

- 1. to validate and further refine your pilot idea; and,
- 2. to identify the transformation or outcome you want your students to achieve.

You may be thinking, "I have over 20 years in this topic and I know what my potential students want to learn."

If that's the case, then the quickest way to validate your pilot idea is to try and sell it. You can skip ahead to Step 3, Planning your pilot course.

It's still a good idea to do market research, because you may be making wrong assumptions about what problems are important to your audience and whether they're willing to pay for a course to solve it. This step will help you present your online course in a way that's meaningful and emotionally engaging for your potential students. You'll discover the language they use to describe their problem or desire, as well the future state they're aspiring for.

With research, you'll also zero in on the specific transformation or outcome you can facilitate for your students.

There are two types of research:

1. Low-Touch Research

This refers to passive research that gives you a general understanding of your course topic and prospective clients.

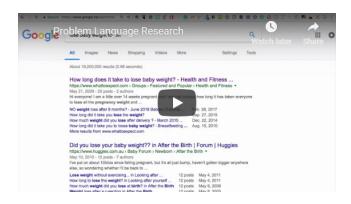
This includes:

 Keyword search analysis. Find out what keywords people are searching for related to your topic.



Looking for problem language. Go
 on related blogs, review sites, forums,
 and websites like reddit and Quora to
 discover how people are expressing
 their problems and desires.

 Eavesdropping on social media conversations on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and elsewhere. Take note of what people are saying around your topic and some of the solutions they've tried.





Because this research is passive, spend no more than 3 hours doing this. You want to go deeper by doing...

2. High-Touch Research

High-touch research involves talking to people, ideally face-to-face or voice-to-voice (on the phone, Skype, or Zoom).

You may balk at the idea, but this interactive approach is valuable for several reasons. First, you'll get practice talking to people, a skill that will serve you as you move forward in your course creation journey, but also in the other areas of your life.

You'll also get much richer, more detailed information than you'd get from a survey or general web search.

Finally, you'll make personal connections with potential students, opening the door for further communication and possibly, sales, of your course.

High-touch research can come in two forms:

• **Informational interviews.** Take 20 minutes to interview your target audience, individually, about their problems and desires around your pilot course topic. You can also reach out to industry leaders and ask them what problems and desires they see people in your market having.

When you reach out to them, you can say something like:

"I'm doing some research for a new project about [your broad topic]. Could I have 20 minutes of your time to ask you some questions? It would be immensely helpful to me in figuring out my next steps."

• **Free coaching calls.** If you have an audience who sees you as an authority, then offer free 20-minute coaching calls. Get on the phone or do video chats with potential customers, using your subject matter expertise to give free, one-on-one coaching calls to build interest and lead to your pilot course. You don't need an email list to use this strategy, because you'll be reaching out to your personal and professional networks.

As a bonus, you can also use this method to get coaching clients! (More on that later when we talk about selling your course.)

Offer your free coaching calls to potential students by saying something like:

"I want to give back and better understand what people are struggling with the most. Can I offer you a free 20-minute laser coaching call about [your outcome]? And I promise not to try to sell you anything on the call."

During the call, listen and take note of their biggest challenges, problems, and pain points. In the last 5 minutes, offer them some suggestions.

A Note About Free Coaching Calls: You may find that some people you speak with will ask if they can hire you to do more coaching, because you've provided value. If that happens, set up another call to talk about your coaching services. After all, you promised not to sell them anything during the coaching call.

As you do the research, keep your ears open for "problem language": statements people make, questions they ask, and stories they tell that expresses a problem your pilot course can help them solve.

Aim to collect and record 30-50 different snippets of problem language. Armed with these results, you can determine the outcome you will help your pilot students achieve.

Step-by-Step:

- 1. Make a list of connections who are either potential students, industry leaders, or someone who could refer you to ideal students.
- 2. Reach out to the people on your list to arrange for either the information interview or the free coaching call.
- 3. Conduct the interviews and/or coaching calls, documenting problem language.
- 4. Review and analyze your findings.

Minimum Viable Outcome

The Minimum Viable Outcome, or MVO, is the quickest result you can help your students achieve that will address their problem or bring them closer to their desire.

One way to determine your MVO is by using Magic Wand technique developed by BJ Fogg, a behavioral science researcher at Stanford University.

Here's how it works. Ask yourself:

"If I could wave a magic wand and give my audience anything they wanted, related to the problem my pilot will address, what would they wish for?"

Most likely, your answer will be something fantastic—so outrageously good that even the best online course in the world couldn't possibly deliver.

For example, the fitness trainer from our previous example could answer:

If I could wave a magic wand and give postpartum mothers anything they wanted related to the problem my pilot will address, they would wish to look like they'd never had a baby.

Keeping your student's ultimate wish in mind, ask yourself, "What's the next best thing?"

The answer will probably involve skills, knowledge, or circumstances they need in order to make their wish come true.

Keep working back and asking, "What's the next best thing?" until you hit on an outcome you can facilitate in 4–6 six weeks—the typical duration of a pilot course.

Going back to our fitness trainer, she may decide on the following MVO:

"Develop the habit of exercising three times a week and adopt one healthy change in their diet."

When you have an MVO, go back to your Who-What-Why statement from Step 1 and incorporate the MVO in your pilot course idea.

Thus, our fitness trainer's pilot idea is now:

"My pilot course will teach postpartum women to develop the habit of exercising three times a week and adopt one healthy change in their diet so that they can look great and more confident."

Now you're ready for the next step.

Minimum Viable Outcome (MVO): the quickest result you can help your students achieve that will address their problem or bring them closer to their desire

STEP 3

Plan your pilot course.

After all the research, you now know two crucial things about your students: their current "location" (problems or desires) and their target destination (Minimum Viable Outcome).

Now your task is to map out their route to get from where they are now to where they want to be. You will do that by thinking through the dependencies of what it really takes for them to develop the level of ability.

It's time to decide on the six components of your pilot course: format; price; payment options; curriculum; delivery method; and, student onboarding process.

Let's go through each one.

1. Format

Course format refers to what type of course you want to offer. Will it be online or in-person? High-touch (plenty of personal attention from you) or low-touch? And how many students do you want to teach?

Since your ultimate goal is to create an online course, your pilot can be online. However, if it's easier for you to deliver the pilot as an in-person training, that's perfectly fine.

With regards to the level of personal attention, we recommend a high-touch format, so you can more easily observe your students and get rich feedback that will inform your full course.

High-touch formats include:

Individual coaching

This is the most high-touch format, requiring you to teach students one-on-one.

Group coaching

With this format, you'll be teaching groups of people at a time. Keep the group to not more than 20 people, to keep things manageable.

Hybrid

Another format is to combine group calls with one-on-one coaching. For example, your pilot could compose of 4 group calls and 2 individual calls.

2. Price

How much to charge for your course is a common sticky point for online course creators.

On one hand, you want to make it affordable to your students. On the other hand, you want to make enough to make your course creation efforts sustainable.

We've seen time and again that choosing the right number often hangs people up, so to keep things simple, we suggest that you choose one from among these possible price points: \$97, \$197, or \$497.

If you charge less than \$97, you're either not charging what you're worth or you're not delivering something valuable enough.

On the other hand, we've found that charging more than \$497 for a pilot course is a mindset stretch for most new online course creators, and they're not able to sell their course with confidence. That's being said, if you feel that it makes sense for you to charge upwards of \$997 or more for your pilot course, then by all means, do so.

Choose your course price based on these factors:

- **Personalized support.** How much individual support will you provide? Higher-touch formats cost more.
- **Results.** What is the value of your MVO to the student? A course that helps them make or save money warrants a higher price.
- **Industry benchmark.** How much are others charging for similar programs? If your students are used to paying a certain amount, they'll balk at something that's widely different (unless you can effectively justify it).
- **Course price.** How much do you want to charge for your full course? If it will be a \$4997-course, then a \$97-pilot seems ludicrous.
- **Experience and expertise.** How much of an authority are you on the topic? If you've been in the industry for 20+ years and have all the recognized credentials, then you can (and should) charge more than someone who's new in the field.

3. Getting Paid

You know how much you want to charge... but how will your students actually pay you money?

At this stage, keep things simple: Use PayPal.

With PayPal, you can get paid in one of 3 ways:

- · sending people a clickable PayPal link in an email
- · telling people to go to your PayPal.me page
- · embedding a "buy" button on your website

It's free to use PayPal. However, the fee for each transaction is 2.9% plus \$0.30 USD of the amount you receive.

You can also receive payments in various currencies. PayPal will take care of converting to your currency when you withdraw your money (currency conversion fees apply).

Your students don't even have to have a PayPal account themselves in order to send you money. PayPal lets them use their credit cards even without logging into an account.

4. Curriculum Outline

Now you get to draw the map for your students to get from Point A (problem or desire) to Point B (Minimum Viable Outcome). Your lessons are going to be the steps in between.

You need to remember one crucial thing: Do not over-prepare!

Your students will be co-creating the course with you, remember? So don't make an elaborate and rigid curriculum that won't be responsive and malleable. You should be able to diverge from your curriculum, when your students need you to.

All you need to move forward is a loose outline of your pilot course.

The outline contains just enough information—in broad strokes—on what lessons you'll deliver, what each lesson covers, and how one lesson builds on the next.

You'll use this information, not only to guide you in delivering the course, but also to sell the course to your prospects.

A lesson is a segment of material that you'll cover all in one shot, that conveys either one big concept, or a few small but closely related ones.

Plan each lesson to build on the prior knowledge and skills of your students, scaffolding them up to the level of knowledge and competence needed for them to achieve the result of your promise.

Here's what our fitness trainer's curriculum outline could look like for her 5-week pilot course:

Week 1 - Starting Where You're At

- · Safe and effective weight loss: Special considerations for new moms
- · Gathering baseline information: Your current lifestyle
- · Recommended workout and nutrition plan

Week 2 – Pre-empting Obstacles

- · Diary review
- · Common obstacles and proven solutions
- · Formulating your personal strategy to overcome your biggest wellness challenge

Week 3 – Expecting the Unexpected

- · Diary review
- · Travel, holidays, illness, and other special circumstances
- · Formulating your personal strategy to stay consistent despite life's surprises

Week 4 - Tweaking Your New Wellness Plan

- · Diary review
- · What to do when you're not getting results
- Tweaking your personal wellness strategy

Week 5 - Reinforcing Your New Wellness Habit

- Diary review
- · Celebrating wins
- · The science of making your wellness habit stick

With your curriculum outlined, you can now set a schedule for your pilot course.

- 1. Grab a calendar. Give yourself about one month to plan and implement the steps for selling your pilot (more on that later).
- 2. Next, pick a date to deliver the pilot.

Consider your personal schedule, such as travel, vacation, and other major life events. Also take note of holidays and other events that may impact your students.

After looking at all that, you can pinpoint the exact dates you'll be teaching each lesson.

Onwards to the next component of your pilot course plan...

5. Delivery Method

How are you going to teach the course?

We've said it earlier and we'll say it again: keep everything as simple as possible.

Now is not the time to learn a new piece of technology or software. Don't burden yourself by aiming to do webinars or use a fancy learning management system—unless you're already comfortable with those.

Instead, use the tech you're already familiar and comfortable with.

For **high-touch**, individualized lessons, your options include:

- · in-person teaching
- telephone
- · Skype or Zoom

For **group coaching**, use platforms that allow you to get immediate feedback from your students. If you can see them to observe their facial expressions and body language, all the better. Your options include:

- Skype or Zoom group calls
- · Google Hangouts
- · Facebook live in a Facebook group (doesn't allow visual feedback)

You'll also need to share files with your students. The simplest ways to do this are:

- email
- Google Drive
- \cdot password-protected page on your existing WordPress site
- · file sharing in a Facebook group

And that's all you need to figure out in this step!

6. Student Onboarding Process

The last component of your pilot course is student onboarding or how you will welcome students in your course after they enroll.

This step is important because you want to set up your students for success. You'll want to make sure they know how to access the course, what you'll cover, and what they'll learn and get from it.

You also want to make your expectations clear. Remember, you need them to consume the course and give you feedback you'll be using when you create your full course. Onboarding is when you cement the narrative of co-creation with your students.

You can achieve all this by sending one or a series of onboarding emails that are triggered to go out as soon as someone enrolls in your course. You can pre-schedule these emails using your email service provider.

You might also want to have a kick-off call, through Skype or Zoom, to go over the course curriculum, delivery, and feedback mechanism.

Consider having your students sign a contract, or some other document, where they commit to participate in the course and give feedback about where they get stuck, what they find confusing, and other inputs that will help improve the course.

At this point, you have a complete plan for your pilot course. You've made big decisions about the course format, price, payment mechanism, curriculum outline, delivery method, and student onboarding.

You're ready for the next crucial step: selling your course!

STEP 4

Sell your pilot course.

This is an exciting step in your course creation journey.

You're about to get paid—even before you create your course!

This is also an anxiety-filled step. Truth be told, most new online course creators don't have the skills and experience to market their course. And, unless you've been working in sales, selling is an uncomfortable process.

We'll help make it easier, authentic, and more effective.

Phase 1. Make Your Offer Outline

Most people skip this step and jump to asking people to buy their course. And then they wonder why nobody's buying.

This step is crucial if you want to resonate with the people who would make the ideal students for your course, recognize its value, and get inspired to take out their wallets and pay you.

Having an offer outline will also make it much easier for you to talk about your course and segue smoothly into asking for the sale. You'll use this information on social media, in emails, during sales conversations, and even on a sales page.

5 Steps to Craft Your Offer Outline

1. Tell the story of where the offer came from.

Describe the pain points as people experience them. Use the problem language you discovered during your research. When prospects hear this, you want them to think, "That sounds just like me!" Remember to include the consequences of ignoring the problem.

And then tell the story of how you discovered the solution. Did you stumble on it by chance? Did you spend 5 years researching and testing everything on the subject? Did you spend 12 months trying solutions on yourself as a guinea pig?

2. Describe the features, benefits, and outcomes.

Now, talk about your pilot course. What topics does it cover? How long is it and how will the lessons be delivered? Is it individual or group coaching? Those are the features of the course.

Don't stop there. Also point out the benefits of your course. These are the immediate rewards your students can look forward to when they take the course.

Finally, specify the ultimate outcome of the pilot course. This is the Minimum Viable Outcome you identified earlier.

As an example, our fitness trainer's wellness course for new moms has the following benefits:

- · set wellness goals that are realistic and effective
- · create a personal plan for self care that's compatible with her new lifestyle as a mom
- have greater accountability for her wellness targets

And the outcomes of her pilot course are:

- · exercise 3 times a week has become a new habit
- one healthy food practice has been adopted

3. Say how much it costs.

After describing the course and the benefits students will receive, tell them what the cost will be. Do this with confidence. Don't hedge on or apologize for the number.

If you're new at this, it might help to write yourself a script and to practice delivering this part of your offer several times a day, until the words roll off your tongue and you can ask for the sale without hesitation.

Remember, the price of your pilot course makes sense given the transformation it will deliver, the level of support you will provide, and your expertise.

"Anchor" the cost of your pilot against what the price of your full course will be. Research has shown that hearing a higher number first will make the second number feel smaller than if they heard the second number alone.

For example, our fitness trainer might say:

"When I launch my full course later this year, the price will be \$497. But the cost right now for my small group of pilot students is just \$97. Do you want a spot?"

Then, pause.

Breathe.

4. Justify the cost and take away risk.

Respond to any objections they may have about the cost of the course.

Justify the cost by mentioning credibility, such your credentials and certifications that show why you're qualified to help them. You'll also want to use proof elements like testimonials from previous clients and work. Mention the mechanism, such as a unique system or framework, you'll teach in the course to deliver the results you're promising.

And finally, show ways that the student can "earn back" their investment by taking your course. This can be in dollar terms or in terms of less tangible val

Our fitness trainer, for example, might say:

"Now, more than ever, you need to be in the best shape so you can give your family the care they deserve."

5. Tell them what to do next.

End with a call to action: Ask for the sale.

Ask the student if they're interested and tell them how to join your pilot.

Include some element of urgency, scarcity, or both, to give them a reason to act now.

For example, state the number of spots in the pilot, as well as the deadline for signing up.

Now that you have an offer outline, you can move on to the second phase of selling your pilot course.

Phase 2. Implement a Sales Process

We recommend three primary strategies for selling your pilot. There are many more, of course, but these are the ones that will allow you to sell your course in the fastest and simplest way.

These strategies are:

1. Pre-Sell Email Campaign

Of all the sales strategies we're going to share with you, this is the only one that requires that you have a reasonably large email list (at least 1,000 subscribers), but it's also the most straightforward. And it's going to help you understand the logic that makes the rest of the strategies work.

Here are the steps:

- **Step 1.** Float the idea to see if your subscribers are interested. If they respond positively...
- **Step 2.** Ask for specific input as to what they want, using a simple survey.
- **Step 3.** Announce that, based on the responses, it's looking good, and you're going to do it.
- **Step 4.** Give them a sneak preview of what's coming.
- **Step 5.** Start enrolling paying students; announce that the cart is open and send them a link to your enrollment page.
- **Step 6.** Answer questions, reinforce benefits, and then announce that it's the last chance to enroll before you close sales and begin the course.

Remember, this is a process of co-creation. If your subscribers don't show interest, then you'll have to do something else. Or if they are interested, but the survey shows that they want to learn something you can't deliver, then don't proceed with your pilot course. Take their feedback and respond accordingly.

What if you don't have an email list? Then you can approach a partner who would be willing to present your course to their audience. In that case, they would send out 2-3 emails covering steps 4-6 above.

(Note: If you're more advanced, you may decide to use an email + webinar approach. During the webinar, deliver valuable training and then segue to your offer.)

2. One-on-one Sales Conversations

This is the best way to sell your course if you have a small—or no—audience, or if your audience is cold and unengaged. But this is also the most uncomfortable sales strategy, because if the person says no, you feel the rejection acutely.

That's why you're only going to contact the people who might legitimately want what you're offering and present the idea to them. Don't try to sell them anything.

Simply present the idea to them, like this:

- **Step 1.** Make a list of people you know who may be a good fit for your pilot course.
- **Step 2.** Reach out to the people on your list and present your pilot course idea to them. Say something like:

"Hey, I'm thinking about building a course about [your topic]. Is that something you might be interested in?"

Step 3. Respond accordingly:

If they say "yes," give them the details of the course, following the offer outline you created earlier.

If they say "no," find out why. Not because you want to convince them otherwise, but because you're still doing market research and would like to better understand your potential students. And then ask, "Do you know someone who might be interested in it?" Reach out to the people they refer.

If they say "maybe," ask if they can give you a definite yes or no by a specific date.

3. Free Coaching Calls

If you did free coaching calls as part of your market research, then you can leverage those calls to potentially sell your course.

All you have to do at this point is to reach out to the people you spoke with during your market research and present your offer to them. Simply follow your offer outline.

These are only three of the most effective ways you can fill your pilot course. If you'd like to get more detail about how to implement each one, sign up for the free Course Builder's Bootcamp.

STEP 5

Deliver your pilot course.

Congratulations, you've sold seats to your pilot course!

Now it's time to implement the student onboarding process, format, curriculum, and delivery method you outlined in Step 3.

As you deliver your pilot course, remember to:

- **Support your students.** Respond to their questions and take note of where they get confused, lost, or stuck.
- **Gather feedback throughout the course.** Ask students for suggestions and other feedback by sending surveys in the beginning, middle, and end of the course.
- **Revise your plans.** Don't be afraid to change the curriculum in response to feedback from your students, so they will achieve the outcome you promised.
- Document. Record where you made changes from your original curriculum plan and why. Take note of assumptions you had about your students that turned out to be wrong. This will be helpful later, when you create your full course.
- **Conduct a self-assessment.** Throughout the course, observe how well you think the course is doing. It's also important to observe yourself and see if you enjoy delivering the course.

Brace yourself for the work.

You'll probably have to respond to more questions than you expected... on top of preparing course materials... and making last-minute changes!

But embrace the work because this brief period of intense effort will lead to your students' success and the long-term success of your full course.

You're doing all this because you want to validate that you can deliver the outcome you promised, that you like teaching the subject, and that you can earn an income from doing so.

After delivering your pilot and assessing the results, go ahead and celebrate. You've done a LOT and you deserve to recognize that.

Now, you'll have to make an important decision: Will you iterate, pivot, or scale?

Iterate

If you have ideas and hunches about what it would take to deliver a better outcome, but you need to validate those assumptions, then you'll want to iterate with another pilot. Go back to step 3 on planning a pilot course.

Pivot

If your pilot experience has shown that you aren't going to be able to make this great in terms of student outcome, course sales, and your enjoyment, then you'll want to pivot to a new direction. Go back to step 1, determining the direction of your pilot.

Scale

If you're confident that you'll be able to deliver a great outcome and you have no serious hesitations or questions in your mind, then you're ready to scale up and build a full online course. Follow the next steps.

Sometimes, you have to pilot your course two, even three, times before you're confident about moving on to your full course.

That's okay. No pilot is a failure because each one teaches you how to make your next course better.



In some ways, every course is a pilot because you're always looking for ways to improve what you offer, as well as the results you help people achieve.

Nevertheless, there are some differences between a full course and a pilot course:

- **Full online courses are more polished.** They're often pre-recorded, as opposed to being delivered live, and they have a higher production value.
- **Full online courses use more advanced technology and design.** Full courses are often built on learning management systems, online learning marketplaces, or sites built precisely for teaching.
- Due to the scale of online courses, **interaction with the instructor is usually streamlined.** Personalized attention is not sustainable when you have hundreds, even thousands, of students.

With that in mind, let's move on to creating your full online course...

STEP 6

Outline your full course.

Prepare all the details necessary BEFORE you begin the course creation process. All the steps you've completed up to this point will inform your decisions moving forward.

3 Major Questions to Answer When Planning Your Online Course

1. What are you going to teach?

Revisit the original transformation you wanted your students to have. You should also revisit your original Who-What-Why pilot idea statement.

Next, look back at your pilot and take note of what went right. Focus and expand on the things that went right when you do your full course.

On the flip side, consider which parts of your pilot course went wrong. You'll want to either eliminate or revise that in your full course.

Since your pilot was a small test-run or a sub-section of a more comprehensive curriculum, you'll want to expand the content of your full online course. You can do this by expanding either the **depth** or the **breadth** of your pilot course topic.

2. How are you going to teach your online course?

In answering this question, consider two areas:

a. What mode will you use to deliver your course?

Will you have live, in-the-moment classes? Or will each lesson be pre-recorded and therefore scalable and delivered without your presence? Or will it be a combination of each?

b. How much support will you provide?

During your pilot course, you had fewer students and therefore you could provide a lot of one-on-one support. But with a full course, your aim is to have more students. It wouldn't be realistic for you to be as hands-on as you were with your pilot.

The complexity and price of the course will also help determine how much and what kind of support you provide. In general, the simpler and lower priced the course, the less support

you have to provide. But the more complex and more expensive the course, the more individualized support is expected.

The type of support you provide will also depend on the nature of your course topic. For example, individual email or phone support would be appropriate for a financial course, where students would hesitate to share financial details with other students.

On the other hand, a Facebook group may be a good fit for a course on gardening, which lends itself well to sharing and commenting on photos and videos.

And a writing course, for its part, will probably require reviews of each students' drafts. Be guided by what kind of support will best serve your students.

With all these decisions made, go ahead and make an outline of your full course, broken down into modules and lessons. As you do that, think about the...



The 3 S's of Instructional Design

Teaching is about delivering information in a way that's efficient, effective, and appealing. Ideally, learning feels almost effortless, with foundations for new concepts neatly laid out, and new information added, one layer at a time. The 3 S's of instructional design will help you accomplish this.

1. Small Wins

Small wins are simple milestones in your course that give your students a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Ask them to do something, see them do it, and reinforce that as a job well done—no matter how small it was. It can be something as easy as joining a Facebook Group, filling out a profile, or understanding a basic topic and submitting it as homework.

Incorporate small wins early in your program, so you create positive energy that keeps students excited about learning more. Add them throughout the training as well, especially at pivot points where students should have mastered a particular skill and are ready to move on to more challenging concepts.

Small wins will give your students the energy, confidence, and momentum to move forward with the course and tackle more challenging lessons.

2. Scaffolding

Scaffolding means layering the learning experience, so students build on the concepts they already know. Always begin with what your students already know.

From simple concepts, gradually layer in more challenging ideas by providing context and telling students how this new information fits into what they already know. Teach new skills and let them practice what they just learned. Continue to push your students just outside their existing knowledge level.

Organize your lessons so students feel like they're on a solid foundation before moving on to something new. But always push them slightly beyond their current skill level.

3. Storytelling

People are hardwired for stories. Our brains look for a coherent narrative structure in every communication we experience. If it's there, it's easier to understand and retain information.

To structure your lessons for easy learning, organize information into:

- · a beginning, where you introduce new concepts
- · a middle, where you develop and expand on those concepts
- · an end, where you tell students how to use it and what comes next

Use stories and case studies to introduce or reinforce new or difficult concepts. The two magic words that you should use over and over again in your course are: "For example..."

The last thing to think about is...

3. Where are you going to teach your online course?

Where on the internet will you teach your full course? You have three main options:

Self-hosted WordPress Site

Many course creators who blog wonder how to create an online course using WordPress, the platform they're familiar with. You can teach your course on your own WordPress site by using any of the many plugins available. You completely own and control this site, but that also means you're responsible to maintain it.

Examples include AmbitionAlly, <u>LearnDash</u>, <u>LifterLMS</u>, <u>WP-Courseware</u>, and <u>Zippy Courses</u>. See our comprehensive list of WordPress LMS plugins here.

Third-Party Learning Management System

Another option is to create your course on a stand-alone LMS platform. You still own your course, but all the content is hosted by the LMS platform. You'll be constrained with the technology, templates, and features they provide, but you won't have to worry about the technical maintenance of your course site.

Examples include <u>Kajabi</u>, LearnWorlds, <u>Ruzuku</u>, <u>Teachable</u>, and <u>Thinkific</u>. <u>See our comprehensive list of learning management systems here</u>.

Online Learning Marketplace

Your third option is to teach in an online learning marketplace. This is a large e-commerce site that sells many courses, like a Walmart for online courses. They're usually easy to use and you won't have to worry about technical maintenance.

But marketplaces also give you the least control over your course. Some even dictate how much you can charge for your course and when you'll get paid.

Examples include Coursera, Learning. ly, Lynda, Skillshare, and Udemy. See our comprehensive list of online learning marketplaces here.



You have so many choices when it comes to answering this question. Consider the features you absolutely need to teach your course effectively, how much tech you're willing to handle, and your budget.

But don't get bogged down.

This isn't a marriage. You can choose one platform or tool now and revisit it later when you've had more experience delivering your course. Only by actually creating and teaching your full course will you have a clearer idea of what type of platform you want for your course.

STEP 7

Create your full course.

There are 7 steps to creating your full online course. Let's tackle each one:

1. Choose a course style.

Online courses come in all shapes and sizes, but the three most common formats are: slides only, slides + video, or video only.

For example, Danny's first course, Write Like Freddy, was a slides-only course. Here's an excerpt:



Slides-only courses are some of the easiest to create. Prepare your slides and script, then record the presentation along with your voice-over. You never go in front of the camera, so this is the best option if you're camera-shy.

In a slides + video course, you introduce each lesson with video and then proceed with just the slides and your voice. Here's an example, from our Audience Business Masterclass:



As the name says, a video-only course is pure video, with your talking head, cut-aways to related video footages, photos, or illustrations, and even animation, such as the Course Builder's Laboratory:



This is the most difficult, time-consuming, and expensive type of course to produce.

As you think of your choice, consider:

Your personal style

If you're a natural on camera and have infectious energy, then at least part of your course should feature you on video.

The course topic

If you're teaching how to use a piece of software, it doesn't make sense to use slides. Screencast videos, on the other hand, would be perfect.

Your budget

If your budget is enough for slides-only or slides + video, then it's better to move forward with that format than to wait until you can afford video equipment and a professional video editor. There are usually low-budget and high-budget options for creating an effective course.

Keep this rule in mind: Create the best possible course without getting bogged down with technology.

2. Map your production schedule.

I know you're excited to jump in and create your full course. Don't worry, you'll get to that.

For now, step back and make a plan first. You'll find that the course creation process will go more smoothly if you do.

Take your calendar and choose dates for the **four phases of course creation:**

1. Pre-production (1 week)

This is when you'll be thinking through various visual and logistical considerations BEFORE you dive in and start writing and creating your full course.

2. Writing (2-6 weeks)

This phase involves writing the actual content of your course. It has two parts:

- the script for your course **lessons**
- the content of your slides, homework, checklists, and other **supplemental materials** you'll be giving your students

3. Recording (2 weeks to 2 months)

In this phase, you actually record your course content. This will look different, depending on which course format you chose earlier (slides only, slides + video, or video only).

The most efficient way to do this is by blocking off one or two days on your calendar and doing all the recording in a batch. But if this isn't feasible given your schedule, then you'll have to spread out your recording sessions.

4. Post-production (1 week)

In this phase, you'll finalize all the course materials and put them up on your course site or LMS. You'll also get ready to accept students.

3. Pre-Production

Take care of these items before you write a single word of your course:

- **Organize your course content,** notes from your pilot course, research, and case studies from pilot students.
- **Plan the homework assignments.** Ask yourself, "What is the most important task I want the user to accomplish at the end of this lesson, section, or module?"
- **Confirm presentation elements for your slides and/or videos.** Make sure you have the equipment, software, and LMS you plan to use. Test everything to make sure you know how to use them.
- **Book the people and places you'll need.** If you're hiring a VA or videographer, for example, make sure they're available when you need them, based on your production schedule. If you need a specific video location, book it now.
- Confirm your course name and logo. Lock down the name of your course and get a logo done.

4. Write your course content.

It's time to take your course outline and flesh it out into a script. No question about it, this is one of the hardest parts of creating an online course!

These guidelines will help:

- **Follow a logical order.** Review the 3 S's of instructional design to determine the best order in which to present lessons. In general, it's better to go from simpler to more complex.
- Choose the appropriate writing style. Depending on what you're trying to accomplish
 with each lesson, you'll either be explaining, storytelling, teaching, illustrating,
 or testing.
- Write for clarity. Since you're not delivering the course live, you won't get real-time
 feedback from your students to know when something is confusing or unclear to them.
 Be proactive and minimize these setbacks by writing clearly and being as specific
 as possible.
- Let visuals help. Indicate when and where images can clarify concepts.
- **Edit without mercy.** Walk away from your draft script then return with fresh eyes to edit. Delete anything that doesn't directly help with the transformation of your students.

With your course script completed, you can move on to writing the other elements of your course:

- Homework. Create exercises to help your students think deeply and apply what they've learned.
- · Descriptive tagline of your course
- A description of your course, including the transformation you promise
- · Module titles
- · Lesson names
- · A 2- to 3-line description of each lesson
- A script for an intro video summarizing your course. This gives a quick preview for what your course is about you'll use it to promote your course. Keep it between 30 and 90 seconds long.
- · Slides Produce the slides for your course.

5. Record your course content.

You're ready to record your course!

This is a very exciting time, but if you're not careful, it's also when things can escalate quickly in terms of time, effort, cost, complexity, and choices.

Fortunately, you can begin with basic technology and a very small budget when you're just starting out. As your experience—and your sales—increase over time, you can invest more time and money.

If You're Making a Slide-Only Course...

Essentially, you'll be making a video made up of your slides and your voice-over narration. To do that, display your slides on your computer and use a screen capture software like Camtasia or Screenflow to record the slides in a video.

Record your voice narrating each slide as you teach. Use the best microphone you can afford, not the one that's built in your computer. The same screen capture software will record your audio along with your slides. (If you're using Keynote, you can record both the slides and audio with it.)

Save those screen captures as either .mov or .mp4 files so that you can upload and publish them in your learning management system.

If You're Making a Course with Video...

Here are five key elements to consider when recording video:

1. Setting and background

If you're just starting out, the setting can be your house or home office. Just choose a background that's clutter-free and gives some depth and texture (not a plain wall, in other words).

If you're more advanced, you may want to set up or rent a space with a green screen background. This will allow you to change up the background with pretty much anything you want in the video editing phase.

Either way, the setting should make sense for you as an instructor and for the subject matter you're teaching.

2. Microphone

Audio is the most important part of video, so use a good one. Options include a USB mic (to record on your computer), an external mic with 3.5mm jack (to record on your smartphone), or either a wired or wireless lavalier mic (for either computer or smartphone). Use the best one within your budget.

For the more advanced, you can choose to hire a professional videographer, who will take care of the rest of the elements on this list.

3. Lights

If you're shooting video at home or your office, you can simply position yourself in front of a large window or glass doors. But your lighting will vary depending on the time of day, season, and the weather outside.

You can choose to invest in video lights that range in price from for a video light that attaches to a DSLR camera (\$30), to a 3-point umbrella lighting kit (\$40-80), to a ring light with stand (\$100). If you're setting up your own green screen background, make sure you have the appropriate lighting for it.

4. Script

When you appear on camera, you can't simply read your script as you would for a slidesonly course. One option is to prepare bullet points and deliver the script off-the-cuff. If you do this, you run the risk of forgetting things or getting carried away and saying too much.

Another option is to use teleprompter software. Download it on your phone, tablet, or computer, upload your script into it, and read your script while recording.

Either way, place your bullets or teleprompter as close to the camera as possible so that you'll appear to be looking directly at the viewer.

5. Camera

Good news: The camera on your computer or smartphone is probably good enough to use to record your course! Check to see if it records in at least 720p or HD. If you use your smartphone, you'll also need a tripod to keep it steady and a cable or some other way to transfer the video files to your computer.

You can also invest in a DSLR camera for around \$500 that will provide all the features you need to record your course. No need to spend on all the bells and whistles to create an engaging and effective course.

6. Post-Production

You have four tasks in this phase:

1. Editing the recorded content, adding text, graphics, and other elements, and exporting it to the final files for viewing

Edit the course videos yourself if you're familiar with it, or if you have more time than money. Video editing has a steep learning curve so be prepared to spend many hours getting the hang of it. Otherwise, hire a video editor.

2. Publishing the course on the learning platform you selected

Create the course in your LMS of choice and upload the course videos, homework, quizzes, and other elements.

3. Testing the course

Make sure everything works as it should. Go through the course as if you were a student, from paying for the course to completing the lessons and exercises. Ask a friend or two to do the same.

4. Creating the student onboarding experience you designed earlier

Update the onboarding process from your pilot course to help students build momentum and feel successful from the moment they purchase your course. Get them committed from Day 1.



Course Creators in the Real World (Or How to Create an Online Course with Piloting and Co-creation)

Does this entire process really work? Here are a few real-life experiences of online course creators.

Bouncing Back After "Masterpiece of a Course" Failed

On her own, Maggie Cowan-Hughes, instructor of Buteyko Method of Breathing, spent five months creating her masterpiece of a course. Then she launched it to 100 people, along with an offer for a free introduction. Few people signed up for the freebie and nobody bought her course.



Instead of quitting, she learned how to create and sell online courses through piloting and co-creation.

This time, when she offered her pilot course to 70 people, 7 of them enrolled in her course. In doing so, she achieved her two goals: proving that she could teach Buteyko breathing online, and getting testimonials from happy students.

Market Research Breakthrough

Following advice from internet marketing "experts," Mandi Ellefson's first attempt to <u>launch an online course</u> was a bust. She didn't have enough sales, so she ended up not running the program and losing money on it.

Next time around, Mandi followed the cocreation process. Through market research,



she discovered that her prospects were keen on a topic she had been avoiding.

She successfully filled her pilot course, mostly from having conversations with people. The pilot made enough money to finance the development of her full course.

"And now, it's a lot easier for me to work with that [larger] number of people and work a lot less," Mandi says, "In fact, this year, I'm looking at cutting my work schedule down to 15 hours a week. There's no way I'd be able to do that [before]."

From Piloting Skeptic to Believer

Even as a service provider, Nathan Lively, career coach and trainer to sound engineers, struggled to figure out what potential clients wanted. And so, when creating his course, he threw himself into market research.

Aside from surveying his audience, he also had conversations with 12 people. This



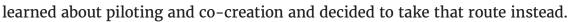
allowed him to "get ideas from them about what people would buy, what courses would be most popular, and the kind of marketing language I would need to sell it to them," Nathan says.

He discovered that the majority of his audience wanted technical training, so he built a pilot course around that. Skeptical of the process at first, Nathan was pleasantly surprised with his results: 22 seats sold. He now uses the same piloting process to get more clients as well.

Scary Coaching Calls Yield Powerful Results

Paul Potter, physical therapist and author of *On Fire: Ignite Your Passion with a Cash Therapy Practice*, sold his physical therapy practice to focus full-time on coaching other entrepreneur therapists how to start their own successful practices.

He was ready to go into seclusion mode to work on his first online course, when he





Paul dreaded rejection, but in the end he did free coaching calls for 25 physical therapists. Those calls opened his eyes to what their problems were and what they wanted to learn. Aside from getting a better understanding of his audience, Paul says those calls "helped me build loyalty among my small audience."

Avoiding A Common Expert Mistake

Kathryn Pottruff, MSPM, PMP, is a consultant who helps individuals and organizations improve the way they manage projects. She used to travel frequently all across Canada to address groups of 20–30 people.

So when Kathryn decided to become an online course creator, she resisted the idea



of doing market research first. She thought, "Nobody is going to tell me anything that I don't know already."

But she was in for an epiphany. "I thought I knew my students well, but not nearly as well as I knew them after I had done the research," she says. "I thought I understood, but now I really get it and that's [made] all the difference in the world."

Your Journey Has Just Begun

Awesome, you're at the end of a 10,000+ word page on how to create an online course that's exceptionally superior to most courses that are out there.

You now know how to use the two powerful concepts of co-creation and piloting. We've covered preparation, research, and validation, as well as how to create and publish an online course that delivers, not just information and skills, but also *transformation*.

You've also learned three ways to sell your course—even if you don't have a large audience or a big advertising budget.

Finally, you've seen how you can evaluate the results of your piloting to create a full-scale online course.

It's an extraordinary process that yields extraordinary results.

If you create your online course this way, both you and your students will have a higher chance of succeeding. And you'll be well on your way to achieving the impact and income you aspire to.

Now all you have to do is to use what you've learned. Go back to Part 1 of this page and implement, step by step, beginning with determining the direction of your pilot course.

We've done our best to make this page as comprehensive, helpful, and actionable, but as educators, we realize that all this may not be enough. You may be someone who needs more accountability and personalized guidance.

If so, then <u>sign up for the Course Builder's Bootcamp</u>. It's a free, 7-day, intensive training program that will take you through the steps we just covered.

We wish you the best as you learn how to create an online course... that doesn't suck!