

9 Steps for Converting an In-person Course to an Open edX Course

There are numerous reasons why instructors or institutions are increasingly converting their traditional face-to-face courses into online courses. From cost-effectiveness and scalability to their naturally wider reach, online courses offer an abundance of advantages to both instructors and learners alike.

When it comes to the right platform, [Open edX](#) platform continues to lead in the learning technology space owing to its rich user experience, cross-platform accessibility, and intelligent analytics. However, successfully converting an in-person course to an Open edX course requires a fair amount of analyzing, strategizing, and planning because, without it, you'll probably end up publishing a long e-book that nobody wants a part of instead of the engaging online course that your material deserves to become. Check out this [definitive guide to creating a killer online course](#) that keeps people coming back for more.

Without further ado, here are the 9 critical steps that you need to take to make sure this transformation is a surefire success.

1. Taking Content Inventory

Much like in most other endeavors, the first step here is analyzing what you already have. This could be your PowerPoint slides, classroom lecture recordings, in-class handouts, teaching notes, and pretty much anything that you utilized to curate your course. It's a good idea to create a spreadsheet of all this material so that you can sort, flag, add and remove things from it all in one place.

This is where you need to start flagging your inventory based on the following three questions:

- a) What material can I keep as is?
- b) What material will I need to redesign when taking it online?
- c) What material will I need to add to match the online learning experience to its traditional counterpart?

This spreadsheet will also help you sort the content elements based on what's essential and what can be siphoned off in the 'additional' category. The latter can be added as supplementary material to the course so that you keep track of your course completion time by only delivering upfront what's absolutely necessary.

By undertaking this content chunking exercise, you'll simplify your content into smaller learning units that are far more likely to offer a balanced learning progression and workload to students week-on-week.

2. Determining Learning Objectives (LO's)

You may already have your LO's ready from the in-person course but revising them for the Open edX course is crucial. You'd be surprised by how different the in-class learning process is from its online counterpart which makes this step even more important than the content, media, and technology aspects that follow.

Consider shaping your course LO's with the help of [Bloom's Taxonomy](#). It explains the different levels of learning and places them across a spectrum of *lower-order* to *higher-order thinking skills*. The six knowledge dimensions here include: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Once you've figured out what exactly your course sets out to achieve and enable students with, you'll have a much easier time with your LO's terminology and ultimately, with delivering on your course objectives.

3. Choosing the Course Format

Your course format refers to how simple or interactive your course will be. In-person courses are naturally more interactive because of their two-way communication format. However, with the Open edX course, you are completely in control of the level of interactivity that your course will offer. Picking a format usually depends on the kind of content you have, your budget, and the limitations of your technology provider.

The three main modules here include:

a) Read and Click

Perhaps the easiest format to implement, this module offers basic course progression to learners where they click through files/reading material as and when they are done with its contents. This format usually works well for compliance courses where learners are only required to read through basic information and pass a series of simple assessments to pass.

b) Interactive Learning

This module offers learners a rich variety of content formats enabling them to learn through textual, audio, and video-based media. There's a lot more engagement on offer here which creates a deeper learning experience for students. Most online courses out there adopt this format for instruction because of its relatively easier course authoring requirements in exchange for high levels of engagement.

c) Simulation

As the most complex and cutting-edge course format out there, this module facilitates online learning through live two-way sessions, forum discussions, gamified assessments, and real-time leaderboards that keep learners engaged and competitive throughout the duration of the course. This format does require you to partner with a high-caliber online learning platform with a strong course authoring team, all of which Open edX platform conveniently offers.

4. Planning Course Design and Structure

Getting the structure of your Open edX course right is a make or break deal. For a course to be successful, it needs to deliver on the expectations it sets, add value to the learner's life, and offer a sense achievement with its evaluation tools, all while keeping the learners engaged. It may sound like a tough ask but with the right instructional design, you'll find all these pegs falling into place.

There are two main categories that you need to consider when planning your course design and structure: content and assessments.

Both need to offer clear learning paths to keep the learners hooked.

The best way to go about this is to:

- Look at the greater picture that drives your course and break it down into milestones
- Design each course module in a way that drives learners closer to that milestone
- Break each module into units spanning over the desired completion duration with each session contributing to the module's objectives

By keeping each session, unit, and module closely tied to the 'greater picture', you will ensure that each course component contributes to the learner's journey allowing them to successfully engage with the material and meet expectations.

Instructional design (ISD) quite simply refers to planning the path of your course. There is a chance that you'd be able to take care of it yourself but there are professionals out there with very high success rates in developing simple and effective learning journeys for e-learning courses. The [Open edX platform](#) also showcases the latest in course authoring and instructional design which allows you to benefit from their expertise and build your online course with an end-to-end service provider.

Why is ISD important?

Simply because your learners will be able to tell if you didn't plan your course path. This can cause them to lose interest in the course and trust in the journey that you've set for them. In the absence of good ISD, you also stand the risk of placing more complex topics before their time causing confusion and frustration among learners.

A good practice during this stage is using storyboards for your course units. If you're managing the ISD aspect on your own, start by going over the content outline and learning outcomes for each unit. Then, develop each storyboard with the text, visuals, audio narration/cues, and interactions that will go on the screen.

Keep in mind how each storyboard contributes to your learning outcomes and transitions purposefully across the points you want to cover. If you're partnering with a professional, your role will only require reviews and audits at this point instead of planning and creation from scratch.

There are quite a few [ISD models](#), each based on different principles and theories. Although it's worthwhile reading through each to see which one suits your needs the most, don't get too bogged down by the bells and whistles associated with making your course the best online version out there. You just need to have a well thought out plan for your course with a functional design and robust settings; all the rest can get a 'pass'.

5. Selecting Tools

Your in-person content can easily be transitioned into online content with the right set of tools. By pairing up with a [competent LMS provider](#) that's powered by Open edX technology, you can utilize a range of online tools that can bring your content and assessments to digital life. Here's a quick list of what you can easily convert and how:

- Lecture slides → Powerpoint presentations/Google Slides
- Class discussions → Communities/Online discussion forums
- Group work → Private group wikis
- Exams → Online timed assessments
- Peer assignment grading → Online response grading
- Study sessions → Digital handouts and fact sheets
- Hands-on work → Interactive online tutorials
- Worksheets → Interactive LMS lessons

If you want to include a lecture from your classroom in the Open edX course, you can either upload a classroom recording into your courseware or record a fresh video of yourself explaining the concept to the camera.

6. Creating your Open edX Course

Once you've wrapped up the planning bits for your course's transition, it's time to start plugging the elements into the Open edX platform. There are two ways you can start:

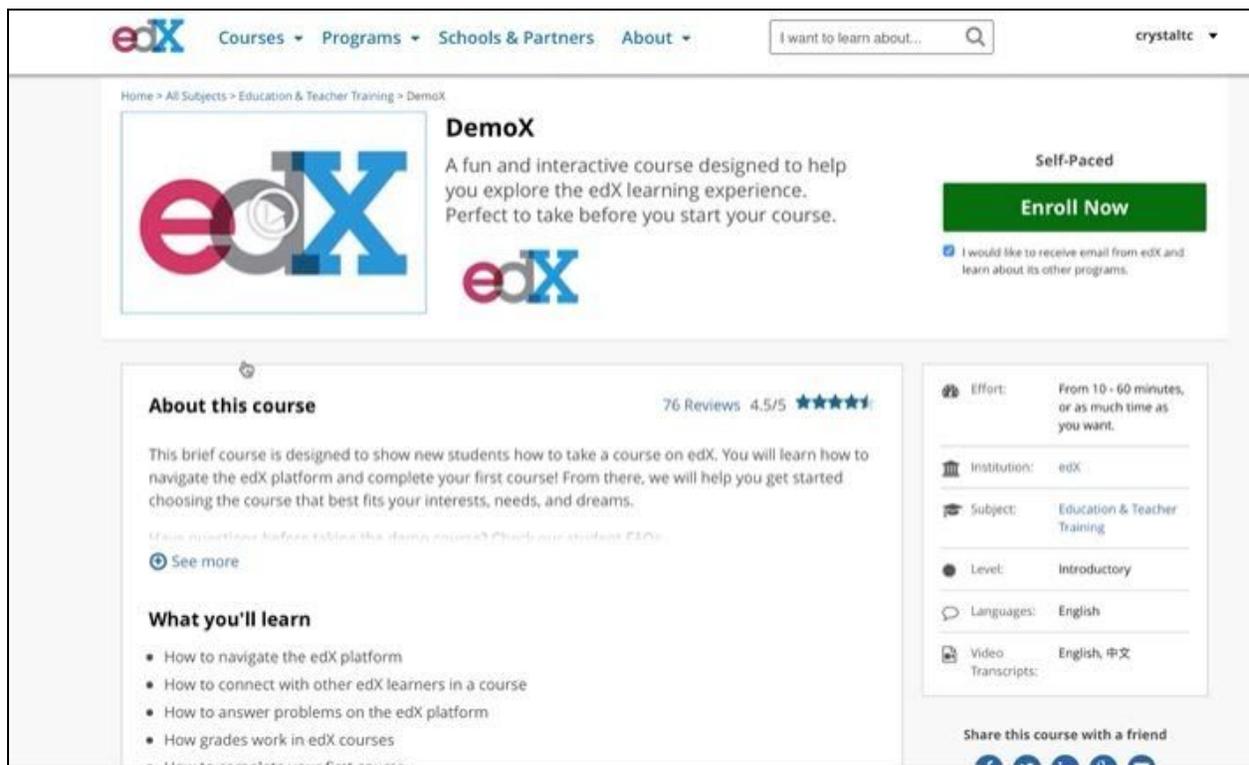
- a) You can partner with an LMS provider that is an Open edX service provider - this will relieve you from the technicalities behind getting your course up and running because the vendor will take care of the engineering and designing that goes behind setting up an engaging and functional course.
- b) You can take this on yourself by hiring an external team of ISDs, front and back-end developers, UI/UX designers and course authors to give your campus course its new digital life.

Once you've decided on this, you can complete this step in 4 simple phases:

Phase 1: Getting the Word Out

Simply having a great course isn't enough to reel learners in. People are spoilt for choice in the plethora of courses out there covering the same topics and so to make yours stand out, you need to have a great course 'About Page' and 'About Video' that gives learners a taste of what to expect on enrolling for your course.

Your Open edX course landing page will look something like this:

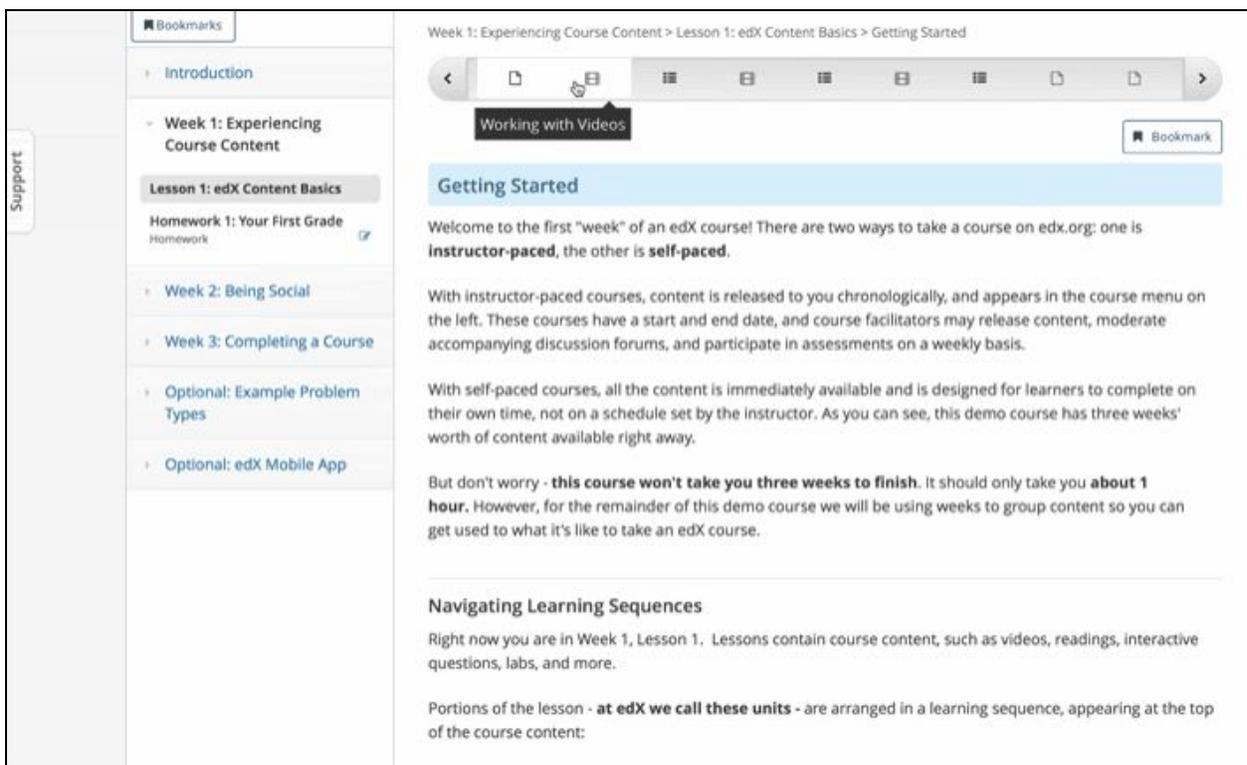


As you can see, it conveys all the information that a prospective learner will need to pick your course. You will also be publishing your course learning outcomes on this page under the 'What you'll learn' section.

Open edX platform also assists course creators in driving course enrollment through their own marketing channels. They help promote your course through their newsletter, social media and blog. This of course has to be supplemented by your own efforts to market your course far and wide using your personal partner network, website, and social media among other channels.

Phase 2: Creating Course Content

The Open edX platform makes it very easy for you to set up a learning sequence that maximizes retention. These content blocks enable learners to interact with course content in a more meaningful way. Here's what the sequence looks like to learners:

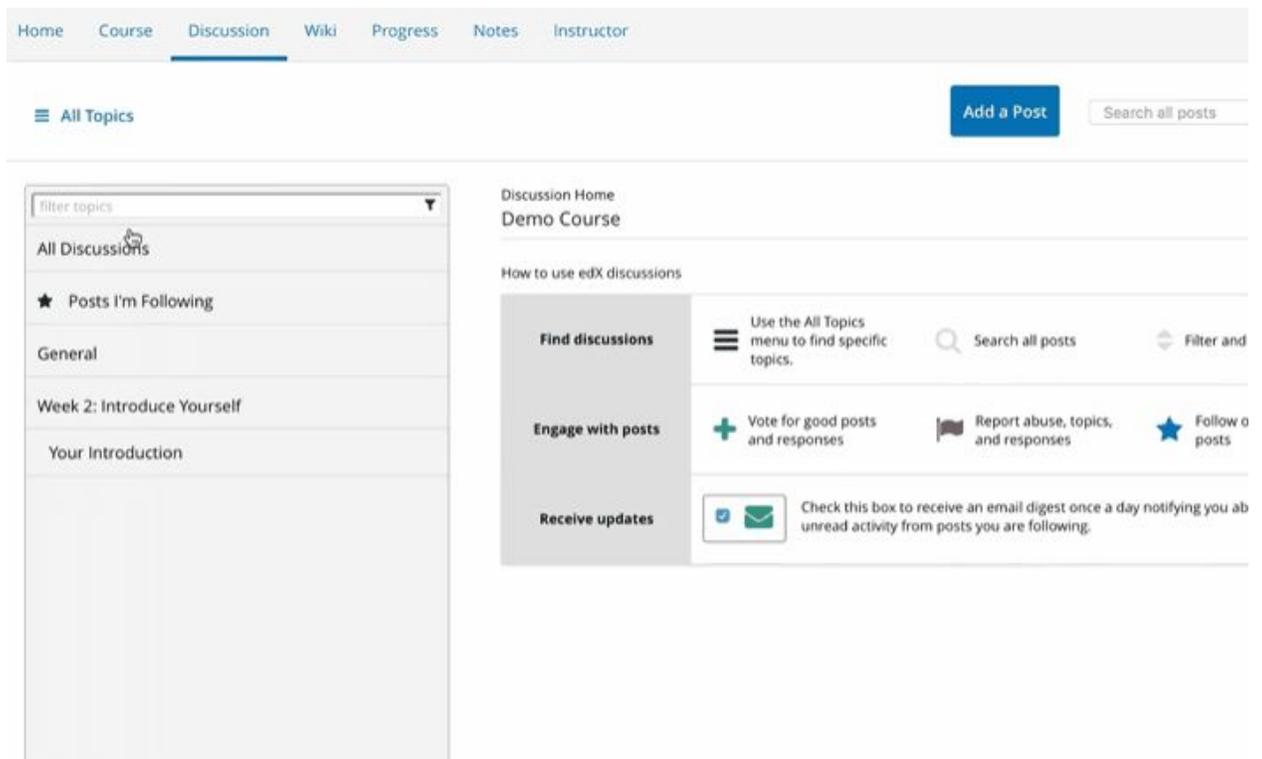


You can pick between four content blocks here:

- a) **Problems:** This is where you can create assessments and assignments for learners. You can pick from over 20 problem types ranging from multiple choice questions to open response assessments. These problems can be time-bound and can be assigned weights to contribute to the overall course grade as well.
- b) **HTML:** You also have the option to add a custom-coded component to the course through this block. You can use images and iFrame components to customize an element of the learning experience that best suits the evaluation method your course requires.

- c) **Discussions:** To make your online course as engaging as its on-campus counterpart, you need to foster academic discussions that build a sense of community among your learners. With this block, Open edX platform allows you to leverage multiple chat-based engagement tools to amplify the online learning experience by enabling teachers, moderators and students to create discussion threads on numerous topics and engage with responses in real-time. Some instructors also have discussions added to the course grade to ensure that exchanges are always meaningful.

Here's what a typical Open edX course discussion forum looks like:



- d) **Videos:** You can create numerous types of videos for your online course with Open edX platform including tablet capture videos (like Khan Academy style videos), live captures from classroom lectures, on-location shoots and studio recordings where you speak directly into the camera to students. Experts at Open edX course authoring recommend having several 3-7 minute videos interspersed throughout the learning sequence of a module to really drive engagement.

Phase 3: Creating a Grading policy

Open edX platform allows you to set the grading criteria manually so you may choose to have a simple pass/fail course versus one that has predefined grade brackets to automatically deliver final grades to students once they complete all the assessments.



You can set these bands yourself and even add or remove the number of grades that your course awards.

You can also define due-dates for each graded course component to keep students on track with their deadlines and deliverables.

Open edX platform also offers a robust dashboard for instructors that allows them to analyse learners grades/records, access learner data, enroll and unenroll students, send out emails, create student cohorts and assign roles and permissions within the course:

Instructor Dashboard VIEW COURSE IN STUDIO

To gain insights into student enrollment and participation visit [edX Insights](#), our new course analytics product.

Course Info | Membership | Cohorts | Student Admin | Data Download | Analytics | Email

COURSE INFO

Enrollment Information

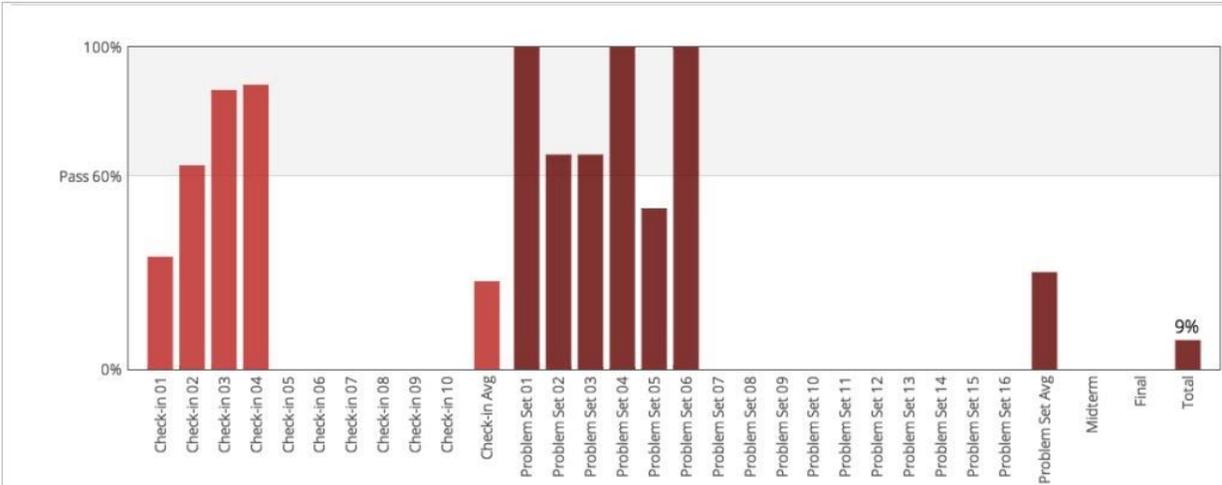
Enrollment data is now available in [edX Insights](#).

Basic Course Information

- Organization: **edX**
- Course Number: **DemoX.1**
- Course Name: **2014**
- Course Display Name: **Demo Course**
- Course Start Date: **Aug 01, 2014 at 04:00 UTC**
- Course End Date: **Dec 31, 2017 at 00:00 UTC**
- Has the course started? **Yes**
- Has the course ended? **No**
- Number of sections: **8**
- Grade Cutoffs: **Pass: 0.5**

Pending Tasks

Instructors can also visualize the progress of their course through the progress tab:



Phase 4: Preparing Course for Delivery

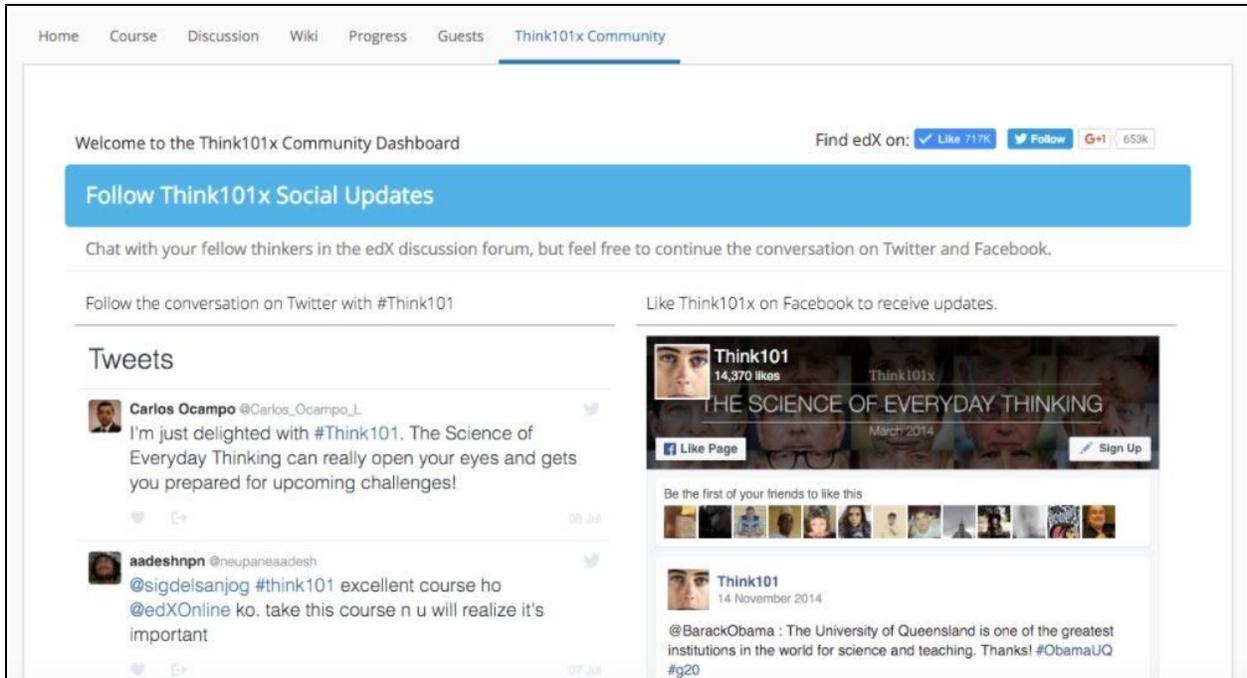
This is where you need to publish your course syllabus, weekly schedule, deadlines and deliverables. Mostly accessible through the course homepage, this information will enable students to get a quick glance of what the course entails and how much of their time will they have to commit to it.

You should also use this space to deliver welcome announcements or any new information once the course is live to keep all important information in one place.

Phase 5: Course Delivery

Once your course is up and running, there are a few nifty tools that you can use to further enhance the learning experience and test the overall performance of your efforts.

Integrating a few social media groups within your Open edX course is a great way to keep students engaged and motivated. You can even add a ‘Community’ tab to your course where students can quickly access all the groups that the course is using and contribute from there directly.



The screenshot displays the Think101x Community Dashboard. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, Course, Discussion, Wiki, Progress, Guests, and Think101x Community. Below the navigation, a welcome message reads "Welcome to the Think101x Community Dashboard". To the right, there are social media sharing options: "Find edX on:" followed by buttons for "Like 717K", "Follow", "G+1", and "653K". A prominent blue banner says "Follow Think101x Social Updates". Below this, a message encourages users to "Chat with your fellow thinkers in the edX discussion forum, but feel free to continue the conversation on Twitter and Facebook." There are two sections for social media: "Follow the conversation on Twitter with #Think101" and "Like Think101x on Facebook to receive updates." The Twitter section shows two tweets: one from Carlos Ocampo (@Carlos_Ocampo_L) praising the course, and another from aadeshnpn (@neupaneadesh) mentioning the course's importance. The Facebook section shows a post for "Think101" with 14,370 likes, titled "THE SCIENCE OF EVERYDAY THINKING" from March 2014, and a tweet from @BarackObama dated 14 November 2014.

There are also numerous reports on learner analytics, enrollment, and engagement that you can leverage to see how the course performed against expectations, the environmental factors that made your course run unique, what further actions are called for and when to take them.

Open edX platform also allows you to run content experiments like A/B testing to see how one content type or assessment performs within a fraction of your learner-base. By using these results, you can pick the best-performing material to implement across the board and supercharge your course learning outcomes.

You can also automatically grant different types of certificates to learners based on their specific course tracks and completion schedules.

You can take this [in-depth course offered by edX on creating an Open edX course](#) to learn more.

7. Delivering the Course

In-person courses are both live and linear but with an Open edX course, you can choose between three main modes of course delivery:

- **Synchronous:** This method is largely instructor-led and you get to decide on the pace of the course. Learners are expected to complete units and assessments against a deadline, most student-instructor interaction occurs in real-time through chat or videoconferencing, and online learners tend to feel more like participants in the process

and less isolated.

- **Asynchronous:** This method flips the former on its head and is entirely led by the learner. There are no strict course start or close dates and learners pace their own progress by completing modules and assignments as and when their time allows. There's still a fair amount of communication between learners and the instructor but it happens with a time delay usually through Q&A monitoring, discussion forums and email.
- **Hybrid/Blended:** This approach is rapidly becoming popular in the e-learning space because it offers the best of both worlds, all three actually. It combines the online real-time interactions of the synchronous method, the self-paced flexibility of the asynchronous method and the hands-on learning experience of face-to-face learning to deliver a course that allows learners to consume content at their pace and apply themselves in-person with their instructor and peers.

Choosing your course delivery method will determine how much time and effort you end up investing in planning your course. Although the synchronous method may look like the easiest transition from your brick-and-mortar course to an Open edX course given they both are instructor-led and live, some research into your target learner-base may tell you that going the other route may actually be worth it. If most of your prospective learners are professionals or have other time commitments, having a fully or partially self-paced element to your course will really help them out without costing you too much.

Note: No matter what method you pick, building modularity in your course will be critical. This means breaking up your course elements into bite-sized chunks that are easy to consume for students, even when they're on the go. The war for keeping people's attention online is intensifying with our plummeting attention spans so make full use for your content chunking exercise from Step 1 to simplify your course units for maximum retention.

8. Revising Vigorously

After being so heavily involved in this conversion process, it's always a good idea to step away from it all and assess your efforts from a distance. Adopting a bystander's perspective can be challenging, especially when you're evaluating your own work so consider involving some trusted friends or peers to act as your fresh pair of eyes.

Here are a few simple steps you can take during this revision process:

- **Conduct surveys:** Gather a few people that closely resemble that target audience for your course and ask them to assess your course, navigation, design, and aesthetic.
- **Alpha testing:** Create an expert panel of colleagues, course developers, and instructional designers to test your course out in its entirety.

- **Revise:** Use the data from both of these exercises to tweak your course to accommodate the most crucial points.
- **Beta testing:** Pilot your course for the first few units on an actual audience through this beta-version and collect feedback, both from the learners and from your course administration experience.
- **Analyse:** Put all the learning to the chalkboard once again and score all data points on their importance. Use this scorecard to see what changes you can make to your course to bring it up to speed.
- **Final revision:** Based on what you conclude with the analysis, start implementing the final changes yourself or involve a professional, depending on task complexity, and launch your course for the wider audience.

9. Staying Current and Taking Feedback

Welcoming feedback with an open mind is critical to improvement and your new Open edX course is no different. You may be convinced into thinking that now that you've transitioned your course to its new digital home, you can retire and reap the fruits of your hard labour but that's exactly what makes most online courses dated and ultimately obsolete.

Change is inevitable and you'll continue to learn from your experience when running your online course and from learner feedback. The changes can apply on either of the unit, module or semester level and therefore you should journal every new insight or suggestion that comes your way. For instance, you may notice that several students ask questions pertaining to one section of the course or that the majority underperforms on one assessment. This should signal that that section of the course needs to be re-evaluated for its content and clarity.

It's also wise to grant access to course sections periodically instead of all at once. This will allow you to modify upcoming modules based on the feedback obtained from past and current modules. Alternatively, you can always store all feedback to publish a new and improved version of the course the next semester. As long as you're improving, you can't go wrong.

To Sum It Up

When converting your in-person course to an online Open edX course, try not to think of it as a copy/pasting exercise that simply aims to get the task over with. Online courses are supposed to be fun, engaging and valuable and given their dynamic medium, they require a little more thought and effort. Think of this conversion as your course's *transformation* to its digital version as opposed to a *transfer* because that's the only way you'll set yourself up for success and ensure that your content goes a long way to pay you the dividends that all your hard work deserves.

The author of this blog is Alina Majeed from [edly](#).