

Teacher's Corner: What is a MOOC?

Introduction

Are you looking for a way to learn more about a certain topic but don't have time to enroll in a class? Do you need supplemental materials for some of your classes? Would you like to participate in more professional development opportunities? MOOCs just might provide the answer to all these needs.

This month's Teacher's Corner looks at MOOCs. MOOCs make excellent resources for educators, both as a means of improving their own knowledge and teaching skills and as content they can use in their teaching.

What is a MOOC?

The term "MOOC" stands for Massive Open Online Course. Essentially, a MOOC is an online course that is open to anyone who wants to enroll. Potential learners don't need any sort of specialized degree or other qualifications to enroll in a MOOC. The average length of a MOOC is about four to six weeks, but some MOOCs are longer. MOOCs have a variety of learning components, such as videos, reading activities, lectures, and discussion platforms. Most MOOCs also have assessments, such as quizzes, tests, or peer-reviewed assignments. Successful completion of a MOOC generally results in a certificate.

Where to Find MOOCs

Below is a list of some common MOOC providers. Keep in mind, however, that this list is continually growing as new MOOC providers enter the market.

Canvas <http://www.canvas.net>
Coursera <http://www.coursera.org>
EdX <https://www.edx.org>
Future Learn <https://futurelearn.com>
Kahn Academy <https://www.khanacademy.org>
OpenLearning <https://openlearning.com/courses>
Udacity <http://www.udacity.com>

Why MOOCs?

First of all, MOOCs provide access to a broad range of subjects. For whatever topic or skill you are interested in learning, you can probably find a MOOC. Additionally, MOOCs have a degree of flexibility in their design. Although there are certain tasks learners need to complete each week, learners can complete tasks to fit their individual schedules. Moreover, MOOCs repeat several times throughout the year, so there are plenty of opportunities for learners to start a MOOC. Another great benefit of MOOCs is that they provide a place online for participants to interact in meaningful ways. Through MOOCs, learners can share information about related resources, can provide each other with feedback to support learning, and can develop cross-cultural understanding.

Ways to Work with MOOCs

MOOCs can be used in different ways. In the traditional format, a learner follows a MOOC, completes all required tasks, and receives a certificate for successful completion at the end of the course. While learners certainly benefit from MOOCs in this way, MOOCs can be used in a variety of other ways to fit individual study and teaching needs. Some MOOCs are Open Educational Resources (OERs), which means that anyone can use, share, or adapt the contents and materials. This means that teachers can use MOOC content to help prepare for classes or as materials for a lesson and do not need to follow all the tasks in a given MOOC. For instance, if a teacher is developing a lesson on resume writing, that teacher might enroll in the English for Career Development MOOC (an American English MOOC) and review materials related to resume writing. This teacher could then adapt some of these materials to specifically meet the needs of their learners. Teachers might also direct their own students to a certain MOOC for supplementary study on a topic or might ask students to complete certain MOOC tasks as homework or an assignment. To summarize, you could use a MOOC in its entirety, or you could use it for some of its parts depending on your needs.

American English Provides the Following MOOCs:

English for Career Development

English for Journalism

English for Media Literacy

English for Business and Entrepreneurship

English for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

These MOOCs can be found at <https://americanenglish.state.gov/american-english-moocs>.

MOOCs as a Professional Development Tool

MOOCs can be a great way to do professional development. There are a number of MOOCs specifically designed for English language teachers. These MOOCs can help teachers improve English language skills or learn new teaching techniques, and they can provide a platform for interacting with other English language teaching professionals around the world, sharing ideas and supporting learning goals. Successful completion of a MOOC or a series of MOOCs, which is called a specialization, can result in a certificate. Certificates for completion of individual MOOCs or specializations serve as evidence of dedication towards lifelong learning.

MOOC Providers with MOOCs on English Language Teaching

Canvas <http://www.canvas.com>

Coursera <https://www.coursera.org/>

Future Learn <https://www.futurelearn.com/>

American English MOOCs for Teachers

Information on American English MOOCs can be found at <https://www.aeteacher.org/MOOC>

MOOC Camps

Another way of working with a MOOC is to hold a MOOC Camp. A MOOC Camp is a series of sessions where people meet together to learn the content from a MOOC. A MOOC Camp is hosted by a facilitator, a person who organizes and directs the in-person sessions. Camps can be held in any location that has enough space to accommodate MOOC Camp sessions. Possible MOOC Camp venues include classrooms, libraries, and community centers. A teacher might hold MOOC Camps for students during the regular semester or over a vacation period. MOOC Camps can also be an excellent form of professional development for a group of teachers. A teacher or administrator might organize or initiate a MOOC Camp for professional development, and teachers participating in the Camp can interact and support one another as they work through the contents of a MOOC.

Conclusion

MOOCs can be instrumental in helping educators achieve learning and teaching goals. The following blog post provide additional information on MOOCs for English language teachers. We hope that this month's Teacher's Corner will provide some insight into how you can tap into the usefulness of MOOCs as a resource for both learning and teaching.

Additional resources

For additional information on MOOCs, visit the following blogs:

The MOOC Solution: How to Become a Better ESL Teacher

<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/esl-mooc/>

Improve your Skills with 9 Absolutely Free MOOCs for ESL and EFL Teachers

<https://www.thinkinenglish.org/thinkinenglishblog/improve-your-skills-with-9-absolutely-free-moocs-for-esl-and-efl-teachers>

Massive Open Online Course Helps English Language Learners Improve Writing Skills

<https://blog.edx.org/massive-open-online-course-helps-english>

For more information about online learning, follow this link:

<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/teachers-corner-online-learning>

Next Steps

Please join us as we explore this topic in further depth on the American English for Educators Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>). Each Monday we post something new for you to explore or do. Here is the schedule for this month:

1st week: Join our private Facebook group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AETeachersCorner/>.

2nd week: Respond to the question prompt that will be posted Monday morning on the AE Teacher's Corner Facebook page.

3rd week: Discuss MOOCs with other group members, using the prompt that will be posted on Monday on the AE Teachers Corner Facebook page.

4th week: Browse the list of resources on this topic, which will be posted on the AE Teacher's Corner Facebook page.