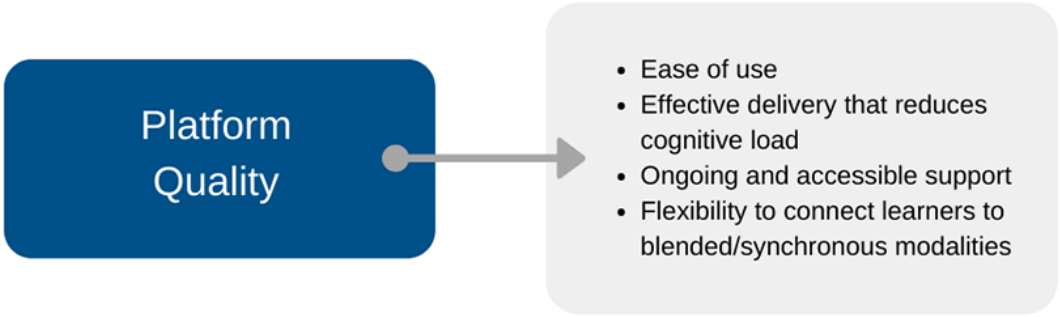
Platform Quality



From online shopping to getting a prescription filled to managing personal bank accounts, user experience matters—and people crave “user friendly” experiences. When it comes to platform quality, simplicity and intuitive functionality are usually key. For learning platforms specifically, this becomes even more critical, because the user, or in this case, the learner experience directly impacts the platform’s effectiveness.

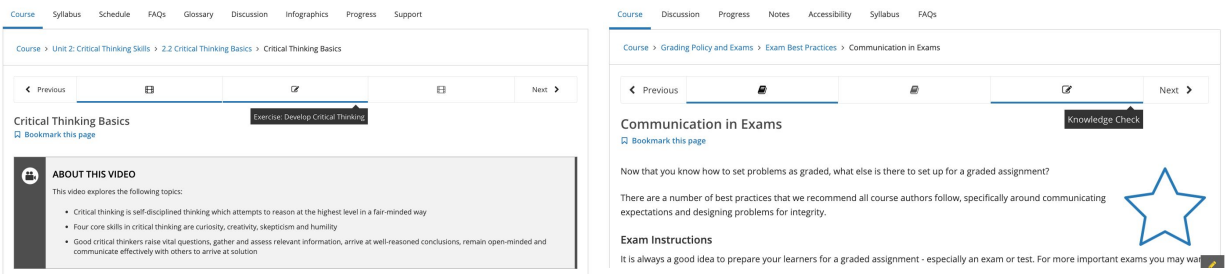
A negative user experience can decrease motivation, bring about frustration or even cause panic. Consider a platform that requires a learner to click through multiple screens to navigate to a desired page. And once the page emerges from deep within the site, the text and images feel “off” because they aren’t responsive to the screen size. Imagine now, the panic that sets in when it’s hard to find saved work—or even worse—when an assignment doesn’t go through on time.

A high-quality platform is simple and intuitive, with visual and auditory cues that help a user navigate the experience. Learners can sign up in a few short steps, easily access the platform across multiple devices and quickly identify how to navigate the platform. They can find technical support when they need it most, which often comes in the form of FAQs, help center pages, crowd-sourced community forums or chat bots.

The look and feel of a platform can bring learners in, but how does platform design encourage learners to stay? It’s actually pretty similar to how a strong teacher engages learners. Most learners tune out after just six minutes of passive consumption of knowledge, so like high-quality teachers, high-quality platforms break instructional content down into small, easily digestible chunks.

That content can take a variety of forms—readings, videos, case studies and graphics. But regardless of its format, the content needs to be bite-sized.

This looks different depending on the platform. Content providers for both Coursera and edX are encouraged to limit video content to 3-10 minute snippets, and interleave videos with practice exercises, formative quizzes or other knowledge checks. That means learners get content in small doses, with opportunities to demonstrate understanding at every turn by, for example, answering questions, engaging in online peer discussions or performing experiments in a virtual lab. Content providers see the value of this approach as well, reporting that keeping the videos short forces them to focus on the material that matters.



Example of interleaving video content with knowledge checks on edX platform (Source: edX)

Some asynchronous platforms, such as Neuroteach Global, for example, take the idea of bite-sized learning one step further. The platform, which is designed to help educators learn Mind, Brain and Education (MBE) strategies to use in their classroom, offers micro-courses, which are divided into 10 components that each take 3-5 minutes to complete. Learners can only complete two components at any one time before the platform locks them out for 12 hours. This approach is intentionally put in place to prevent learners from binging on the content. Learners confess that the lockout period forces them to sit with what they have just learned. The lockout period encourages learners to process incoming content and then challenges them to retrieve the information upon re-engaging with the platform.

Neuroteach Global learners can only complete two components at any one time before the platform locks them out. (Source: Neuroteach Global)

When it comes to learning platforms, the platform quality can make or break a learner. A positive user experience can lead a learner to effectively complete a course with mastery, while a poor experience can force a learner to abandon a goal when challenges and frustrations arise. That's why it's key that platforms keep simplicity and intuition at the forefront of design decisions.