## The Ultimate Course Creation Resources Guide

flyplugins.com/course-creation-resources-guide/



This list of course creation resources includes some of our favorite tools for building online courses.

With this foundational work complete, we now move into the second phase of the course creation process...

It's time to do some preparation to make things more efficient when we begin outlining our course content and actually producing our course lessons.

There are a number of tools you can research and gather now to speed up your course creation workflow and we'll be discussing those tools in this guide.

While taking these steps now can help you create your course faster and ensure high-quality course content, keep in mind that once you develop your own unique course creation workflow it's very likely that you will replace some of these course creation resources with others or eliminate them from your workflow altogether.

This is completely fine. Since we launched our first online course back in 2010, new tools have become available to make our course creation process easier and some tools we used then are now defunct. Just be open to making changes once you begin your own course creation journey...it's part of the process.

### **Research Collection and Course Outline Tools**

### **Mind Mapping Tools**

When we initially begin outlining our courses, we prefer to use a mind map to create a broad overview of the content we'll be presenting and how lessons will be grouped. Mind maps allow you to start with a central concept (*your course*) and then create a series of *nodes* related to different course subject matter.

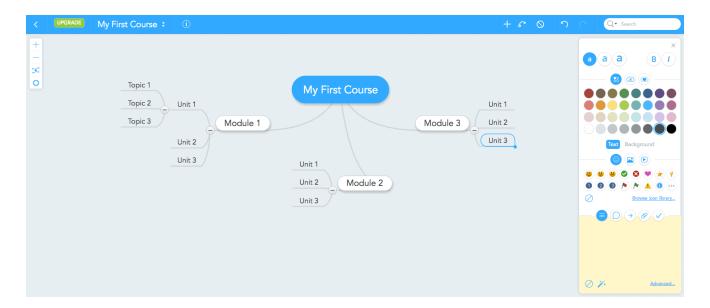
We generally start with our course title as the primary node and then create a node for each module and attach multiple lesson nodes to the modules. Mind maps aren't the best solution for getting into the nitty-gritty details like writing scripts for individual videos, but they're perfect for quickly adding lesson ideas as you think of them and then organizing them into the most logical order.

Now is the time to create an account with one of the web-based mind mapping tools, start a new map for your course, and have it available to access quickly as ideas pop up.

For our course outlines, we use <u>MindMeister</u>. You can sign up for a free account with them which includes up to three mind maps. That will be more than enough for the course creation process. We chose to upgrade our plan to the \$6.00 per month *Personal* plan as it allows you to attach files to nodes within your mind map. This can sometimes be helpful when you come across helpful research or resources but don't know where it will fit into your course quite yet.

MindMeister also includes free mobile apps for iOS and Android. These tools offer a great way to add to your course outline from your phone or tablet anywhere you go. We very often find ourselves getting inspirational ideas when we're away from the constraints of our dedicated work spaces and these apps are a great way to quickly capture that inspiration.

Other popular free web-based mind mapping course creation resources include <u>Coggle</u> (which we've been using quite a bit lately as well), bubbl.us, and WiseMapping.



### **Project Management Tools**

Again, while mind maps are a great way to organize brainstorming for your course outline, they aren't an efficient tool for organizing the fine details for your course.

Once we create a mind map of our course outline and have a good feel for the modules and units we'll begin creating, we transfer that outline to a dedicated project management tool. There are a number of free web-based project management tools available and if you already have one you're familiar with and like using, just stick with it.

For our course creation process, we use <u>Trello</u>. Trello free is a free web-based kanban tool, but it has quite a few powerful features and its user interface is dead simple which keeps you from wasting time trying to learn more complicated platforms.

Once you set up your free Trello account, you'll be able to create a project (*your course*), a *board* for each of your modules, and *cards* within each board to represent your course lessons. Within the cards, you can add notes, checklists, attachments, labels, and more.

If we're producing a video for a particular lesson, we'll include all of the information related to the production of that video in the card's notes. For example, we'll indicate if the video is a talking head video or a screencast. Then we'll write an outline of what we'll be saying and covering in that video. If we'll be producing a downloadable action guide for the video we'll attach it to the card. Finally, we use colored labels to indicate the status of each lessons production...*red* indicates it has not been started, *yellow* means it is in production, and *green* means that lesson's content is complete.

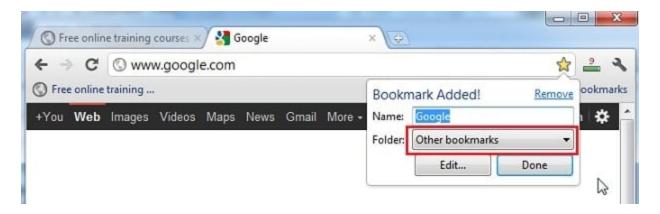
Other similar free course creation resources include AirTable, Asana, and Kanban Tool.



#### **Bookmark Folders**

Once we begin researching our course content, we prefer to create a special series of bookmark folders in our web browsers. You're likely already familiar with managing your own bookmarks, so we won't go into much detail here.

But we prefer to create one master bookmark folder for the entire course, a second level of folders for our modules, and a third level of folders for individual lessons. As we come across interesting websites which we think we can use to create content for a lesson, we bookmark the page in the appropriate folder. This makes it super quick and easy to grab that exact group of webpages and open them all once when we begin producing a particular lesson.



## **Cloud Storage and Folder Structures**

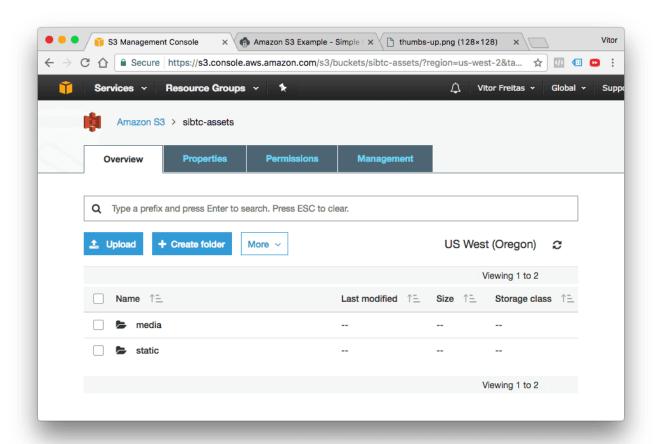
Similar to bookmark folders, we set up course o module o unit level folders in our cloud storage platform. We use the very cost-effective <u>Amazon Web Services S3 cloud storage system</u>. It's a bit tricky to configure, but it's a powerful system that will offer unlimited storage at a low price point. It has some other advantages as well, which we'll discuss shortly.

Online courses can often reach several gigabytes worth of video content and resources, so it's not wise to store them only on your local hard drive. You'll also want to be sure that your course content stays backed up and cloud storage provides this security.

Finally, by organizing all of your course content in Amazon S3, when it comes time to deliver your video content through your course's website you can simply embed your media files without ever having to store course videos on the same server that your site is hosted on (bad idea!).

Within Amazon S3, we create a primary bucket for our course and then secondary buckets for each module. Within each module bucket we upload our finished course videos as well as any additional resources such as our presentation slides or downloadable PDF action guides.

When it comes time to place your course lesson videos on your site, we do have a plugin called <u>S3 Media Maestro</u> which includes a media player and file sharing protection to prevent paying customers from sharing your video with others.



# **Branded Course Assets and Templates**

## **Course Logos**

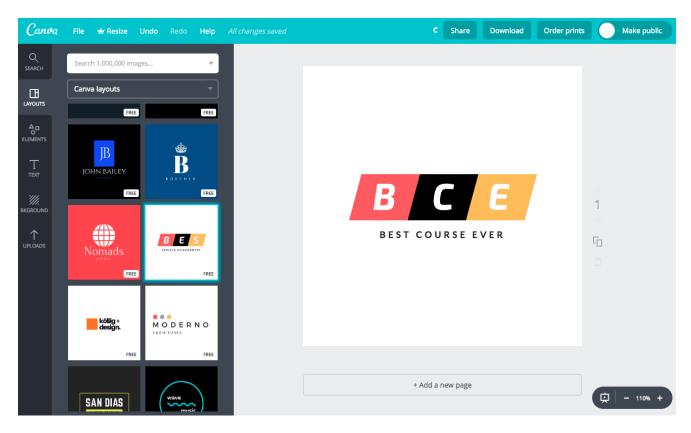
As we move on to other course creation resources you'll need to gather before you begin the production of your course lessons, we'll be compiling some necessities which will be branded for your course. So before we start working on those, we'll take some time to produce a logo

for our course materials.

Where you go to produce a logo for your course depends on your creative skills and your budget. You don't need to spend a great deal of time or money on a logo for your course, but you should put some thought into creating something which will appeal to your ideal customer. We have one client who sells courses that teach theater costume production. That logo looks much different than the logos we find on our clients' sites that teach how to trade in the stock market.

We have produced most of our logos for free using <u>Canva</u>. It's a great tool that we've <u>written</u> <u>about before</u> and it includes dozens of logo templates which you can get started with and not have to create your logo from scratch.

If you'd like something more professional, you can post a job description on <u>99Designs</u> and graphic designers from around the world will submit their proposed concepts to you. Once the project invitation expires, you can choose the logo you like best and purchase it for \$299 with a 30-day money back guarantee and design revisions provided by the winning designer.



## Slide Templates

Once you have a logo and color scheme completed, you can move on to producing a couple of other course creation resources that you'll be using daily during the course completion process.

If you'll be producing video content for your course, you'll need a variety of presentation slides handy. These will be used as the background for the on-screen content you produce. At minimum, we recommend creating the following types of slide layouts:

- **Lesson intro slide**: This would be branded and presented consistently at the beginning of each video.
- **Screencast slide**: This layout can be branded with your logo and used as a *frame* for videos which will include screen recordings, such as demonstrations of how to execute a task on a website.
- **Presentation slides**: These branded slides will be used for standard text and image rich presentations, just like a traditional in-person presentation.
- Talking head slides: These slides provide a template on which text and images can be
  presented alongside a small video window of you talking about the content.
- **Lesson outro slides**: This would be branded and presented consistently at the end of each video.

While outsourcing logo creation can get a bit pricey, purchasing a done-for-you set of up to 200 custom slides is a cheap date. We prefer to use <u>GraphicRiver</u> to purchase slide template packages for all of our projects and generally pay less than \$20 for up to 200 slide templates. It's a massive time-saver when you have so much else to do to prepare your course.

If you'd like to work from the templates we use for our own courses, you can download that in either Keynote or PowerPoint formats in the *Article Resources* section at the top of this guide.



#### **Action Guide Templates**

For our courses, we offer a downloadable PDF action guide within each lesson. The action guide is originally created using presentation software (*we use Keynote for Mac OS*) and includes:

- Lesson title
- Key concept summary in bullet points
- · Action items or checklists
- A unique and interesting additional fact which was not presented in the video
- Space for note taking

If you choose to use action guides in your course lessons, they don't need to be complex. You can keep them to 2 or 3 pages for most lessons, but now is the time to create a template that you can quickly edit for each course unit.

If you'd like to use our action guide templates for your course, you can download them in Keynote or PowerPoint formats in the *Article Resources* section at the top of this guide.

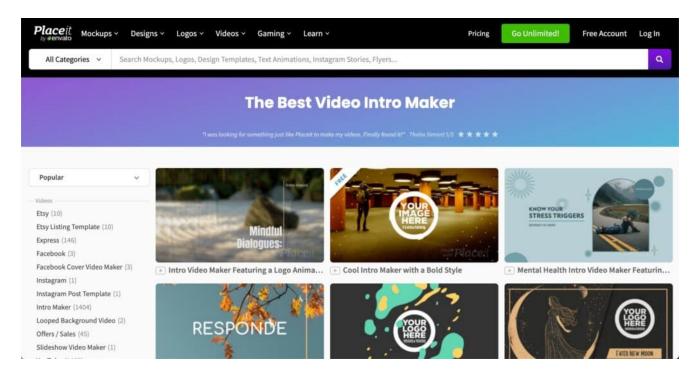


## Logo Reveals

Earlier, we discussed creating creating template slides for the beginning and end of your lesson videos. However, for every course we've ever created, we've stepped this up a notch.

Logo reveals are the short 8 to 15 second videos you've seen which are an animated sequence that ends with a logo. These are a fantastic touch for branding your course videos, making them look very professional, and they're just, well, *fun*!

They can also be inexpensive. However, we recently found <u>Placeit</u> by Envato which is a really cool online mockup, video, and design template generator. Create digital assets for all of your branding and marketing needs. You can do all of this righ from your browser without having to download another piece of software.

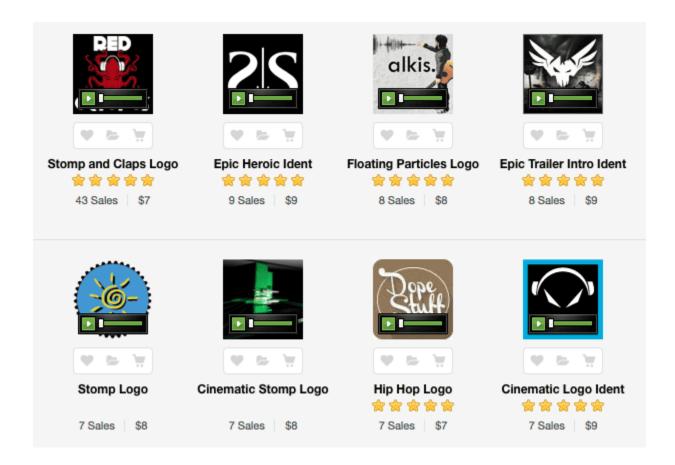


#### Stock Music

In addition to using a logo reveal video in our intro and outro course slides, we add a short, upbeat music track of just a few seconds at the beginning and end of our lesson videos.

We generally clip the length of the music snippet to match our logo reveal video and fade it out after the intro and fade it in prior to the outro. We'll talk more about the software we use for this in just a moment.

<u>AudioJungle</u> is a great place to find a short audio track for the beginning and end of your course media content. You can search through the available offerings by category which allows you to choose a specific genre of music or tone. Most of the tracks designed for logo reveals cost around \$7 or \$8.



### **Audio and Video Production Course Creation Resources**

For all of the courses we've created, we have considered them business opportunities, as you likely are viewing your prospective course. And as we've all heard before, "It takes money to make money."

Successful business ventures require an investment. And investing in audio and video quality is a wise decision. Nothing will turn your students off faster than low-quality video or sound recordings. Not only can it be distracting, it causes your paying customers to perceive your course as less valuable. After all, if you're asking them to spend money on your course, don't you owe it to them to invest in the quality of your content?

That being said, the cost of capable cameras, microphones, lighting, and backdrops is lower than it's ever been. In this section, where applicable we'll present two options...a more expensive, higher quality option and a second budget-conscious option that will get the job done and get it done pretty well.

#### Cameras

### Panasonic Lumix G7

Growing up with a mother who spent her career working in professional photography studios, I've had the opportunity to experiment with cameras from almost every major manufacturer over the last 25 years. None of them have fit me as a "*lifestyle*" camera like Panasonic's Lumix series.

Not long ago, in the midst of creating one of my first online courses, my family and I decided to sell our home and travel the world for a year while I worked remotely from different countries. I needed to invest in high quality video for the course I was creating, but also wanted a compact, lightweight camera which could pull double-duty while we were sightseeing during my time away from work. The <u>Lumix G7</u> was a perfect fit.

Most of the DSLR cameras which offered full 1080HD video capabilities *and* an external microphone input were expensive and bulky. Not this one. It's small enough to take anywhere which will provide you a lot of flexibility when you want to keep your course videos interesting. And since it's lightweight, it can be used on small, inexpensive tripods.



## **Logitech 1080P ProStream Webcam**

In many course creation resource guides, you'll hear folks stating that a sub-\$100 webcam is more than enough for creating video content for online courses. I'm not *completely* sold on this. I don't think any webcam on the market is a serious substitute for investing in a high-quality camera.

But if any of them come close, the <u>Logitech 1080P ProStream Webcam</u> does. I use this webcam daily for internal team meetings and often for recording short videos which we use within our business. If you don't have the money to initially invest in a more expensive dedicated video camera, it's a solid choice.

And having used many different webcams over the years, it produces surprisingly good audio results. For straight voiceovers on your screen recordings or presentation slides, I would still recommend using a dedicated USB microphone, but the audio quality on this Logitech model is good enough that you won't need to run both the camera and a microphone to your computer for capturing talking head videos.



## **Microphones**

#### **Blue Yeti Pro**

The <u>Blue Yeti Pro</u> has been my go-to microphone for years. I use it for software tutorial videos, podcasts, course creation, and have even captured some pitiful attempts at recording music with it.

The Yeti Pro is a multi-pattern USB condenser microphone. This means that not only can you plug it straight into your computer without any adapters or a mixing board, but you can change the direction in which it picks up sound. If you're recording an interview with a subject matter expert, you can place it on a table and select the *omnidirectional* setting to capture both voices. For screen recordings where you want to be able to speak straight into the mic without picking up background noises, you can choose the *cardioid* mode.



#### Audio-Technica ATR-2500USB

For those on a budget who still want their course to include a high-quality audio experience, the <u>Audio-Technica ATR-2500USB</u> is a great option. Again, this condenser microphone includes the ability to plug straight into your computer via USB, which makes it simple to quickly capture recordings which you can file away in the folder structure you've set up.

It only offers a single *cardioid* recording mode, but for creating course audio this is fine in almost all circumstances.



### **Lapel Microphone**

As previously mentioned, I like to do some of my video shoots in my workspace or in other spots around my house. When I do this I also like to use a long depth of field with my camera to produce that cinematic effect that everyone loves...the sharp subject and blurred background. Since this involves creating a lot of distance between the camera and my body, as well as my body and the background, I'm frequently speaking a good distance from the camera which reduces the audio quality.

When this is the case, I use a small wireless lapel microphone and then connect the receiver into the jack on the camera. It's almost invisible if you position it just right on your clothing, and some <u>wireless lapel microphones</u> are in the \$30 range offer great audio quality.

Another cool feature is that most of them can also be plugged into your phone or tablet for on the go audio recording if needed.



#### Other Audio Accessories

For most online courses, students hear the instructor much more than they see them. If you truly want to record high-quality audio for your course, you need to do three more things... eliminate all vibration to your microphone, prevent air from your speech from reaching the microphone, and eliminate sound reverberation.

We recommend using a few extra tools to accomplish this:

- **Pop filter**: This is simply a <u>windscreen</u> mounted at the front of your microphone to reduce the incredibly annoying popping sound which results from speaking sharp consonants such as *p*'s and *t*'s.
- **Boom stand**: Boom stands allow you to mount your microphone away from your desk and extend it toward your mouth without it touching anything but the floor. Nothing is more distracting than hearing an instructor loudly pecking away on their keyboard or mouse during a demonstration. We recommend spending a little more on a boom as there are many cheap options out there that aren't very durable.

- **Shock mount**: A <u>shock mount</u> is another tool for reducing mechanically-transmitted noise. It uses an elastic suspension system which allows your mic to float independently of the mic stand. They're available for most USB microphones for under \$10 or if you're really on a budget, check YouTube for how to make one using things you can find around the house.
- Sound panels: This is a little over the top for most of us, but <u>sound panels</u> can be used around your workspace to create radio-quality voice recordings by preventing your voice from reflecting off hard surfaces like walls or hardwood floors. They can get pretty expensive, but if you're serious about your recordings they work great. With my first podcast several years ago, I actually created a sound booth with two twin-size mattresses that were collecting dust in our basement.



## **Lighting and Backdrops**

While not completely necessary, video lighting and backdrop kits are a nice touch to help you create professional-looking video for your course. I generally prefer to use a white backdrop for creating talking head videos so that I can place them on a slide template so that I actually appear to be in the slide. Dedicated lighting also helps to eliminate any shadows that make it difficult to blend you and your white backdrop into a white slide template.

For the courses we've created, I like to shoot some of the video in my workspace or in other places around my home to create an intimate and authentic situation when I'm speaking to our students. Inexpensive and lightweight lighting stands are very simple to fold up and carry wherever you want to record your next lesson. Even when I'm recoding near a window which offers natural light, I still often use one lighting stand with a translucent umbrella to eliminate shadows created by my facial features and clothing.

While there are a number of options available, the most recent package I've started using is from a company called Emart and is <u>available on Amazon for under \$90</u>. It comes with two lighting stands, a translucent and reflective umbrella for each stand, a 10-foot adjustable

crossbar for backdrops, two backdrop clamps, one basic backdrop, and a carrying case. It doesn't include a green screen backdrop for digitally manipulating your background, but those can be order separately for around \$30.



#### **Video & Audio Production Software**

One of the final course creation resources that we encourage you to become familiar with prior to embarking on your course creation journey is one that you will spend hours and hours using...

# Video and audio editing software.

This will become the tool that you use day in and day out to produce your final product... your course lessons.

All of our courses have been created using <u>Screenflow</u>. It's a very powerful, yet easy to use software package that can be utilized to edit, splice, and export your finished video and audio. Best of all, at \$129 it's less expensive than all of the high-profile video production packages out there which will all end up being overkill for creating a course.

The only catch is that it's currently only available for Mac OS.

If you're running a Windows machine, there's a very similar software called <u>Camtasia</u>. It's a bit more expensive at \$199, but again this is going to be the critical piece of software that your course is built with.

If you are looking for a budget friendly option, checkout ScreenPal. <u>ScreenPal</u> was formerly known as Screencast-O-Matic and gives you a lot of bang for your buck.

It's beyond the scope of this guide to go into the use of either of these software packages, but I would highly recommend that you begin experimenting with one of them so that when you begin creating your course content you will be able to work efficiently. There are a number of free tutorials for these options on YouTube which you can find with a quick search.



#### And There You Have It!

While this list of tools and course creation resources may seem a bit overwhelming, you don't need all of it at once. The most important thing is to find the tools that allow you to produce the best quality course content possible for your budget and to find a process that creates the most efficient workflow.

As always, if you have any questions about any of our recommendations we hope that you'll feel free to reach out to us. We're always here to help if you need us!