edX®

Translating online learning to real-world results

How to put your online coursework to work on your resume and beyond

The value of online learning doesn't end when class is dismissed.

In this guide, we asked experts to weigh in on how to reap the rewards of online learning. Keep reading to learn more about the tangible and intangible value of your online learning experience and how you can put your coursework to work on your resume and beyond.

"The work environment is changing dramatically," said edX learner Mike Jefferson after completing his coursework and landing a role with a multi-billion dollar firm.

"The previous culture of completing your education directly after school and then not stepping into a classroom again for the remainder of your career, is fast becoming obsolete… for those of you that are actively looking for a new job or a career change, online learning has to be your most powerful weapon! Not only does it allow you to get impressive certificates from big name universities on your CV, but it also allows you to test the waters in other fields of interest."
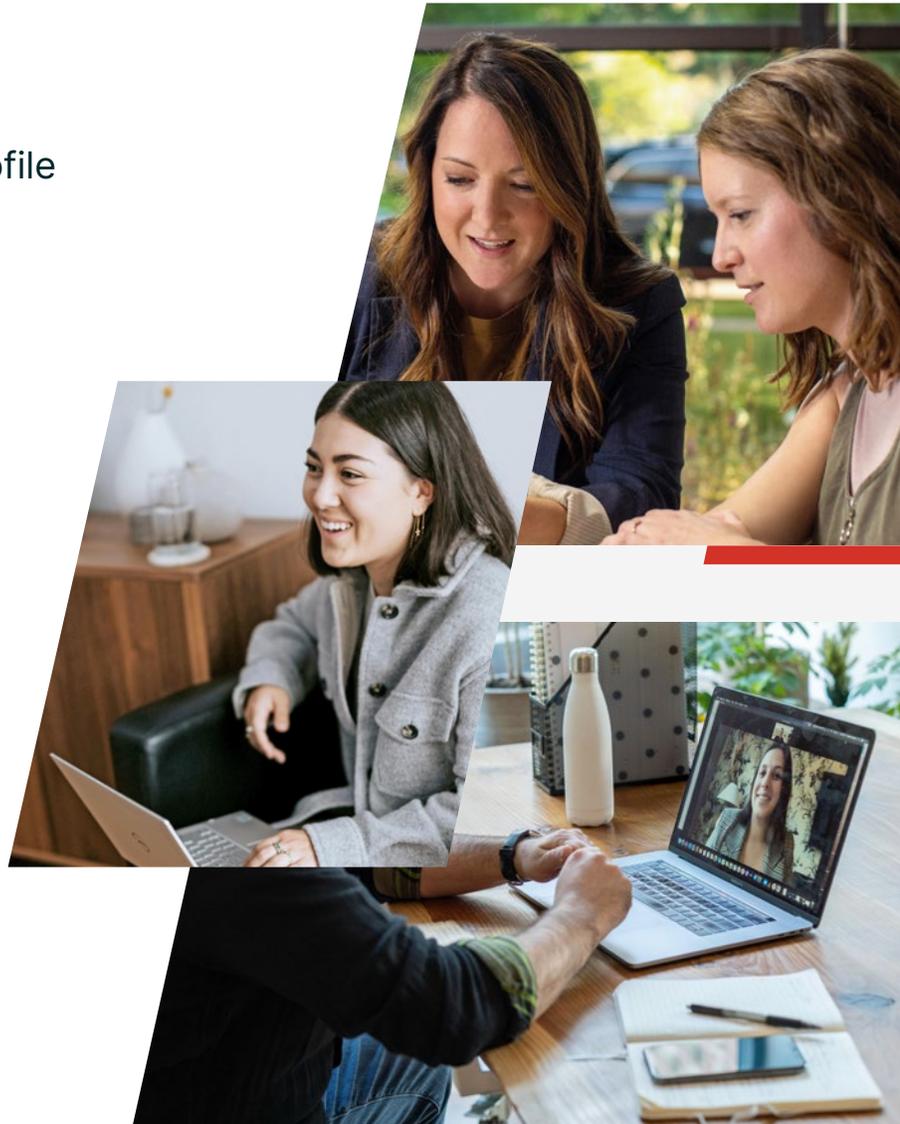
Content

What your coursework says about you (things employers love).

Whether you're just starting your career, angling for a promotion, or switching fields, investing in yourself through online coursework has already set you up to take on the world. It's not just about the concrete knowledge or skills you've gained—taking on this challenge also speaks volumes about your character and alludes to important soft skills that potential employers love to see, no matter how far along you are in your career.

You add demonstrable value

When a potential employer sees recent coursework on your resume, they know your skills are fresh and relevant. When a current manager sees that you've invested in leveling up your skills, they know you're serious about bringing new capabilities to the table and about adding value to the company.

So, when it's time for that job interview or promotion talk with your boss, carry that knowledge with you! You are an asset. You add value.

Pro tip

Speaking confidently about a skillset you've developed can help guide interviewers toward more tailored and valuable questions: Why did you choose to take these specific courses? What are your short- and long-term goals? What can you do now that you couldn't do before?

You're more than your core competencies

As more and more jobs become hybridized, technical and soft skills will become even more valuable in addition to candidate's core competencies. For example, a marketing professional who learns data analysis will be a more compelling hire due to the additional value they can bring to the company—and vice versa, technical roles often require collaborative skills.

Even learners who are not making a full career pivot can enrich their resume by demonstrating unique and hybrid skill sets. A study by Burning Glass Technologies s hows that adding a single hybrid skill to your resume can increase salary up to 40%. The study highlights data/computer science as a top hybrid skill to learn, while also noting: "Technology is an important part of the trend, but not the only driving force. Often it is the need to apply soft skills, analysis, or management to technical disciplines that creates a hybrid role."

Best hybrid skills to add to your resume

Erin Swenson, edX MicroBachelors® Programs Coach, and Branden Smith, edX Talent Acquisition Manager, weigh in on supplementary skills that can add value to any resume.

Branden Smith
edX Talent Acquisition Manager

☑ **Leadership.** It's not just for management roles! If you have 'senior' in your title as an individual team member, you'll end up mentoring junior and new team members.

☑ **Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** or any kind of bias training is good, especially as a component of leadership to help managers understand their own biases.

☑ **New-to-market tools.** For example, Salesforce was considered cutting-edge a few years ago, and now it's an industry standard.

☑ **Communication skills** are great for any role at any level. Communication with colleagues and clients is the most important thing you'll do.

Erin Swenson
edX MicroBachelors Programs Coach

☑ **Analytics and digital skills** (these almost go without saying in the modern workplace).

☑ **Design thinking** is sought after in any role. Candidates with this skill can ideate, innovate, and empathize. They take a human-centric approach to solutions, always asking how a product or experience impacts the customer. This is key, since most end products will wind up in the hands of customers!

☑ **Change management.** Did you know that change in organizations follows a set process? Management must support the human side of change by building awareness and supporting individuals through the transition. Poor change management can lead to resistance and failure to adopt new ways.

Ultimately, said Swenson, any skill or certification you pick up is another advantage when you're competing for that dream job. "You're competing with many generations, a lot of talent, and a lot of experience. Prepare for hybrid roles. You will stand out because you're demonstrating an array of certifications, degrees, technical skills, collaborative skills, teamwork, project management... you're staying one step ahead."

Meet Erin

Verified learners enrolled in edX's MicroBachelors Programs® receive professional coaching from Erin to ensure they stay on track to complete and make the most of their credentials.

Watch Erin's video interview

You're a lifelong learner who gets things done

Furthering your education shows character, regardless of which field or type of skill you may have studied. It shows that you Get Stuff Done, which is one of the core competencies of edX Career Pathways, a tool that helps edX employees and their managers chart a path to success.

Getting Stuff Done is not about specific skills or proficiencies. It's a mindset: Not just the work you get done, but how you do it, especially when it comes time to push through obstacles and get a project across the finish line. Drive and discipline, intellectual maturity, curiosity, passion, willingness to learn, and going the extra mile: These are qualities every employer seeks, yet they are nearly impossible to quantify.

"As I was building out my resume, I started to realize what ultimately was the transferable skill was myself and the person I was," said edX learner Maggie, who learned Lean Six Sigma to power up her career at Amazon.

"The start of things is very exciting, but what's more exciting is to finish and truly be able to put it on your resume. It says 'I chose to do something challenging and I finished.' That is what sets people apart. It really speaks volumes."

Great news

If you're reading this because you just completed an online course with edX, or because you're on your way there, then you've demonstrated all of these skills! In the next section, we'll outline how to show them off.

Where and how to showcase your new skills.

Whether you've just finished a course with edX or are looking ahead from the beginning or middle of your journey, it's important to consider how you'll frame your new skills in a professional context. You invested your time and energy into something important— don't let the value end just because the course is over!

As anyone who's ever written a cover letter knows, however, bragging about yourself isn't always easy. We asked our edX experts where are the best places to highlight online learning experiences and how to do it right, whether you're working on your resume, updating your LinkedIn profile, preparing for an interview, or gearing up for promotion and salary negotiations.

First things first—update your resume

It almost goes without saying, but yes: you should include coursework on your resume or CV. The question is where and how it will reflect your new skills most powerfully. Here are some ways to optimize how you present your coursework on a resume.

What to do (and not do) on your resume

Do:

- Highlight courses that are relevant to the position you're applying for.

- Link to course profiles if submitting your resume electronically.

- Consider including recent coursework under the existing "Education" section of your resume, with the name of each course and a couple bullet points about what you learned.

- Consider a resume section dedicated to ongoing learning. Use a section header like "Skills and Objectives," "Personal Advancement," or "Professional Development."

Don't:

- Wait until you're 100% finished with courses to add them to your resume. If you're committed to completing the course, add it! Employers will like the initiative. Be sure to include your predicted completion date.

- Include every online course you've taken—focus on ones that are relevant to the position you're applying for, even if it means tweaking your resume for each application.

Pro tip

If you want to highlight skills and learning you're passionate about, but they're not relevant to every position, consider adding an "interests" section to your resume… employers also look for personality!

Leveraging LinkedIn as more than a digital resume

A strong LinkedIn profile starts with the same basics that are on a candidate's resume: Work history, skills, education. But if you treat your professional profile as nothing more than a digital resume, you're missing out on some of what this networking platform has to offer. As with search engine results, a LinkedIn profile can be optimized so the right employers see it when it counts... and so it makes the very best impression when they do.

According to Swenson, recruiters and employers heavily use LinkedIn, so there is no excuse for job-seekers not to be on there—and, there is significant value in highlighting recent coursework on your profile. Employers and recruiters use keywords to find candidates with the skills they're looking for, so start by adding new skills to your profile.

For example, if you took a programming course, leveraging keywords like Python, CSS, and JavaScript can help the right people find your profile. Don't forget to include any certifications you may have earned in addition to listing course names and descriptions.

Swenson recommends highlighting online coursework in your summary, education section, or both. The education section tends to be more formal, which makes it a good place to include specifics: A bulleted list of what you learned in a course, an example or project to add credibility.

"Any education should always be added to your LinkedIn profile," said Branden Smith, edX Talent Acquisition Manager. "It gives the whole picture. If you have a resume gap, recruiters want to see that you did something to stay sharp. Even if you just audit courses for free with edX, education will always be looked at as a plus."

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Swenson adds that you don't have to stop at concrete skills. Online coursework hones and demonstrates soft skills, too—and unlike a traditional resume, LinkedIn offers plenty of space to highlight them. For example, online learners strengthen their communication and collaboration skills, no matter what subject they studied. They also demonstrate character strengths such as taking initiative, commitment to learning, and curiosity: all desirable qualities to employers.

How to talk about new skills and online coursework in an interview

Before the interview

The best way to nail an interview is to do your homework ahead of time. Study the company and the job description to see what skill sets and experience the employer is looking for. Review common interview questions ahead of time to see what opportunities may come up. Then, strategize about how to present your coursework or certifications.

"Draw a line back to what you learned and how that can benefit the future employer, so they can see the relevance," said Smith. For example, "Python is an easy one to explain because it's apples to apples. If it's not apples to apples, think ahead of time about how to articulate the course adding value to the position. And even if it is apples to apples, even if it seems obvious to you, they want to know the story behind why you think it's relevant."

Swenson advised that online learners make a point of practicing soft skills during their online studies. For example, take advantage of the discussion forums as much as possible to strengthen teamwork and collaboration skills. Make the certificate valuable for more than just a skill—and then be sure to discuss how you did so when talking to an interviewer.

Finally, remember that your online coursework is more than just a resume builder, but an opportunity to reflect on yourself and your goals. As edX learner Maggie put it:

"I'm excited that my future employer gets to meet this version of me. I'm more mentally resilient, and part of it is because of taking this course." Now that's the kind of energy you want to bring to an interview!

During the interview

Listen. That's Swenson's number-one tip. Many common interview questions provide a natural opening for candidates to discuss recent coursework. Look for questions like:

- What are your strengths?

- What are your weaknesses or gaps?

- What value can you bring?

- Tell us about yourself.

- Tell us about responsibilities you've handled that you felt confident about.

- Tell us about an achievement or challenge you navigated.

"Listen deeply in the interview and look for opportunities to present your certificate," Swenson said. "Your completion of certificates demonstrates your interest in learning and gaining skills, so questions like 'Tell us about yourself' and 'What are your strengths, weaknesses or gaps?'—those are a chance to say, 'I was weak in this area and developed myself by taking this course.' If they ask about an achievement or challenge that you navigated, a rigorous course is an example. You're doing it on your own time, so that shows discipline and time management."

"Context is important," Smith agreed. "It shows grit if you did coursework around your life."

Finally, remember that an interview is not just a chance for the company to get to know you... it's also your chance to get to know the company! You have just as much to invest as the employer. What questions should you ask a prospective employer to help determine whether the company is a good fit for you? Here are a few ideas from Swenson.

Best questions to ask in an interview

- ☑ What training opportunities are offered to employees, internally and externally?

- ☑ How do you evaluate performance?

- ☑ What does growth look like?

- ☑ What are the challenges of this role?

- ☑ What are the 3-year to 5-year goals for the company?

By asking pertinent questions like these, you can assess your own fit and ability to advance if hired. Even better, asking good questions can only supplement the positive impression you've made on the interviewer, and shows them you really care about the opportunity.

How to talk to your manager about online learning

Whether you want to level up your skills in a current role or learn something new to grow in your career, it's advantageous to talk to your manager before getting started. Not only does that communication show that you're proactive, it also creates transparency around your desire to be promoted or change roles. Depending on your relationship, your boss may not be aware of your goals and career trajectory. Having this conversation before you start your online studies demonstrates your desire to learn, contribute, and add value, and can give you important insight into which roles are available and what you'll have to do to be considered for them.

If you already have ongoing communication with your boss about these topics, you can start the conversation by asking, "What strengths do I have now that are valuable toward my goals? What skills should I gain to become more valuable?"

Ultimately, however, online learning isn't just about gaining skills to make your boss happy. Smith reminds learners to think critically about their interests, goals, and desires.

"Talking to your boss can help you figure out what to pick up," Smith said. "Will it help the team now? Help the team later? What should you do if you're aiming for a promotion? But you should learn because you want to learn. At the end of the day, you'll only commit the extra time if you feel strongly about it."

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