

# What Reviews Divulge About Online Education



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## CONTENTS

ABOUT COURSETALK.....	3
ABOUT THE STUDY .....	3
WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING .....	4
Recurring refrains from reviews .....	4
OTHER FINDINGS.....	5
CourseTalk reviews are predominantly positive.....	5
CourseTalk reviewers complete courses .....	5
CourseTalk reviewers who drop courses still give nearly 4 stars .....	5
CourseTalk users are willing to pay for good courses .....	6
CourseTalk classes with more reviews receive higher ratings.....	6
CourseTalk ratings are not affected by course workload .....	7
A majority of CourseTalk users have experience in the subject they’re studying .....	7
COURSETALK’S TOP PROVIDERS .....	8
CONCLUSIONS .....	9
AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY .....	10
FOR MORE INFORMATION .....	11

## ABOUT COURSETALK

CourseTalk is the world's largest source for student reviews of online courses and MOOCs. With more than 35,000 classes and 70,000 reviews, CourseTalk supplies online learners with all the tools they need to design their educational path. CourseTalk is powered by [AcademixDirect](#).

## ABOUT THE STUDY

CourseTalk undertook an analysis of all reviewed courses in its catalog to uncover characteristics shared by top-rated courses, characteristics shared by low-rated courses, and other insights into online learning.

- **7,526 courses**
- **74,297 reviews**
- **46 providers:**

+Acumen	FX Academy	Oxford Royale Academy Prep
Alison	GoSkills	Pluralsight
Art Institutes	IAI Academy	Sally Ride Science
Canvas Network	inQuisitive Learning	SchoolKeep
CareerFoundry	Institute for Personal Leadership	Skillshare
Code School	International Writing Program	Sophia
Codecademy	Iversity	Stanford Online
Coursera	Khan Academy	StraighterLine
CourseTalk	Lynda	Textile Learning
Craftsy	MIT	The Great Courses
DataCamp	MRUniversity	Treehouse
EdCast	NovoEd	tuts+
edX	One Million by One Million	Udacity
Filtered	Open2Study	Udemy
First Business MOOC	openHPI	
FutureLearn	OpenLearning	

The analysis was conducted by Vision Design Studio in May 2015.

\*Please note that all ratings are out of five stars.

## WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

### Recurring refrains from reviews

	Low-Rated Courses (1-3 Stars)	Top-Rated Courses (4-5 Stars)
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusing</li> <li>• Boring or disengaging</li> <li>• Incorrect or outdated information</li> <li>• Overrepresented by free courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to navigate &amp; digest</li> <li>• Fun &amp; interactive</li> <li>• Flexible scheduling</li> <li>• Moderate cost</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boring or disengaging</li> <li>• Poorly presented or difficult to understand</li> <li>• Confusing, incorrect or outdated information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to navigate &amp; digest</li> <li>• Fun &amp; interactive</li> <li>• Useful subject matter</li> </ul>
Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monotone voice or strong accent</li> <li>• Rushed delivery</li> <li>• Unresponsive to questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humorous &amp; personable</li> <li>• Clear delivery</li> <li>• Supportive &amp; responsive</li> </ul>
Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical problems</li> <li>• Not worth the money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ample support materials</li> <li>• Active student forums</li> </ul>

## OTHER FINDINGS

### CourseTalk reviews are predominantly positive

- 80% of courses get 4-5 stars. (Average course has 4.18 stars.)
- Reviews submitted on CourseTalk average ½ star higher than those submitted on course provider sites.

Students using third-party review platforms like CourseTalk seem more satisfied with their learning experiences.

**Hypothesis:** A vast, cross-provider catalog helps students find the right courses for their needs.

### CourseTalk reviewers complete courses

- 92% of reviews were submitted by students who had completed the course (self-reported).

**Hypothesis:** Third-party review sites attract highly-engaged students who see reviews as a way to validate their completion of a course.

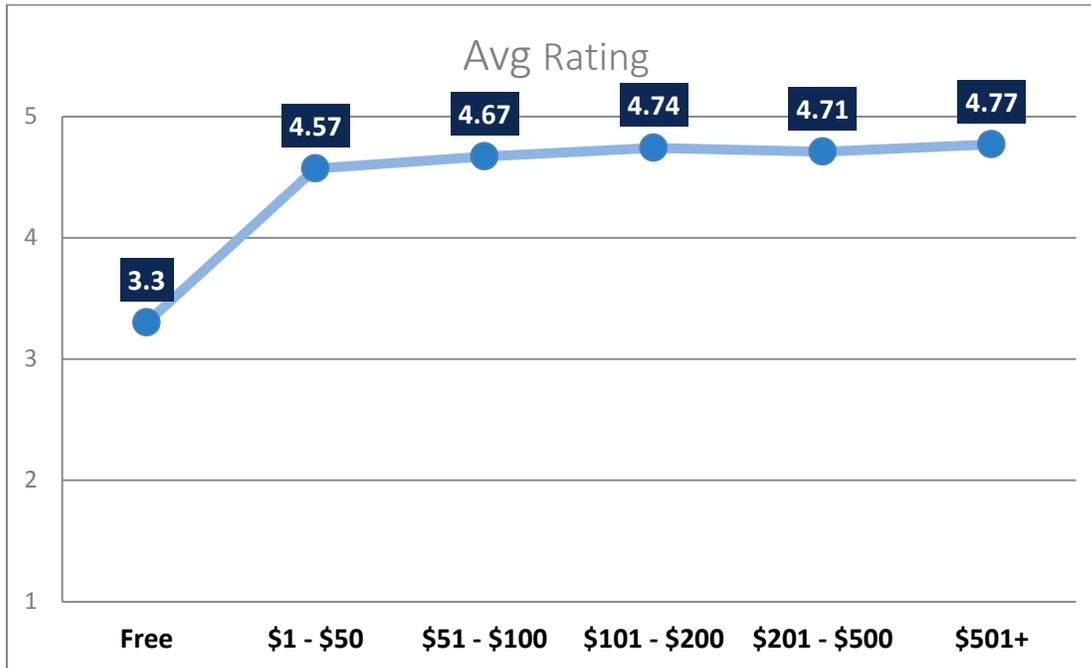
### CourseTalk reviewers who drop courses still give nearly 4 stars

- Students currently taking the course gave the highest rating.

Progress in Course	Avg Course Rating (out of 5)
Completed	4.26
Taking Now	4.31
Dropped	3.86
No response	4.29

## CourseTalk users are willing to pay for good courses

- Paid courses were rated on average 1.4 stars higher than free courses.
- The relationship between cost and rating is positive; average ratings generally go up as cost increases.



## CourseTalk classes with more reviews receive higher ratings

# Reviews	Avg Rating
<10	4.12
10-49	4.26
50+	4.60

**Hypothesis:** As a course receives more feedback, future enrollees are better equipped to judge if the course is a good fit.

### CourseTalk ratings are not affected by course workload

- No direct link was found between the hours of study expected of students and user ratings.

### A majority of CourseTalk users have experience in the subject they're studying

- 78% of users reported having experience with a subject before enrollment, from informal exposure to professional experience.

Reviews by Experience Levels	
No Experience	22%
Informal Experience	37%
Studied in School	20%
Taught the Subject	3%
Worked in Professionally	18%

# COURSE TALK'S TOP PROVIDERS

Rank	Provider	Avg Course Rating
1	Treehouse	4.89
2	Stanford Online	4.59
3	Coursera	4.53
4	edX	4.42
5	Code School	4.31
6	Udacity	4.13
7	EdCast	4.04
8	OpenLearning	4.04
9	Codecademy	3.86
10	Udemy	3.83

The above includes providers with 10 reviews or more.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Providers should embrace reviews from unbiased, third-party sites as a way of promoting improved course selection and engagement.
2. They should not be afraid to charge for quality content.
3. Providers should make courses experiences clear, easy to navigate, fun, interactive, supportive and flexible.
4. They should focus on short course modules, but not hesitate to challenge students with heavier workloads where appropriate.

## AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Further validate initial findings with provider input.
- Assess ratings by subject, user profile, geography.
- Investigate factors affecting completion.
- Connect the dots to key outcomes, including: career, personal enrichment and further education.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For further details, please contact:

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