

# 5 Simple Tools

## to Create Your First Online Course

**Hoot!** I'm Nata, the Chief Executive Owl of [www.owltoolbox.com](http://www.owltoolbox.com).  
Nice to meet you, fellow Wise Owl!

Creating an online course doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. The quality of your content and your infectious enthusiasm for your topic matters much more to your students than all the fancy video effects.

That's why I created this simple guide: **a surprisingly short list of tools you need to create your first online course.**

Best part? Many of them are FREE! So let's dive in!



# Videos: The King of Online Courses



**Videos are, undoubtedly, the most popular type of content** and also a huge stumbling block for many aspiring course creators.

When we think about recording videos, we might be imagining expensive cameras, studio-quality lighting, green-screen backdrops and sophisticated video editing software to pull it all together.

**After all, we all want our courses to be of highest quality and convey our professionalism.**

You may have even thought about renting a studio and hiring a video crew!

While this could be *one way* to create courses, you may be relieved to know that **there is a much better – easier, more affordable and just as professional – way to record your videos.** Read on...



# Narrated Slideshows

The good news is that videos don't have to be as difficult and expensive to create as you may think.

**Did you know that most instructional videos are actually voice-over-slides?**

**Narrated Slideshows** are the most common type of lessons, used in a majority of online courses. They are also the easiest and most affordable way to create instructional videos.

**But simple and affordable does NOT mean amateurish or cheap-looking!**

Done well, they can look absolutely incredible.

I have seen, professionally reviewed and worked on *hundreds* of online courses, from quick tutorials selling for \$50 to fancy online programmes priced over \$50K! The vast majority of them use **slides or screencasts narrated by the instructor.**



# Why Slideshows: The Benefits



Here is just a short list of benefits of using **narrated slideshows** as your primary video content:

- **Creating slideshows is very easy and affordable.** No need for expensive equipment, lighting, staging etc.
- Slideshows are actually **much more informative for your students** than your talking head, which improves learning and retention.
- **Slideshows can look stunning and professional.** Instructional designers use narrated slideshows *all the time* to create sophisticated and engaging eLearning.
- **You don't have to be on camera**, which is great news if you're camera shy.
- **Even the highest resolution videos created from slideshows have smaller file size.** This helps you save on video hosting and reduce streaming time for your students, without compromising quality.



# 1: Presentation Software



**Creating slideshow presentations is quite simple. You probably already have the tools you need.**

If you're a Microsoft Office user, **PowerPoint** is your best choice. Have a Mac? Use **Keynote**.

Have neither? No problem! There are FREE alternatives like **Google Slides**, **Apache Impress** or even **Canva**.

If design is not your strength, you may think about hiring a professional designer to create a gorgeous template to match your brand.



**The good news is that it's a one-off expense and design services are quite affordable.**

Once you have a template, you can use it not only for all your courses, but also for some social media graphics, like Pinterest or Facebook posts.

**This will help you maintain consistent branding.**



## 2: Microphone



Possibly the only investment you might need to make to begin with is an **external mic**.

**Having good audio is crucial!** Nothing is more distracting for your students than background noises, echo, static or otherwise poor-quality audio.

**Don't rely on your laptop's built-in mic. The audio will not be clear enough.**

For my first ever course I used Plantronics headset, which I already owned. It wasn't ideal, but did the job. You can get a decent quality headset for under \$50.

I later upgraded to **Blue Yeti**, and it was a great investment that significantly improved the quality of my audio. It is **one of the most popular mics** among course creators and podcasters.

Have a mic that gives you decent sound? You're all set!



# Before we continue...



If you thought creating online courses was going to be challenging or expensive, I've got great news for you.

**If you have either *PowerPoint* or *Keynote* (plus a good mic), you can start recording your course right now!**

**Both of these programmes allow you to record the presentation, add audio narration and convert your slideshows into videos.**

If you're using a different presentation software that doesn't have screen and audio/video recording features, **you will need additional tools**, so read on...



# 3: Screen Recorder



For creating my first ever course I used Google Hangouts (now **YouTube Live**). The videos I recorded had a Google logo on them, but I didn't care about branding then, and my students didn't seem to mind – they loved the course!

Since then I've used many different tools to record my videos. My current favourite is **OBS Studio** – simple, powerful and FREE, works on Windows, Mac and Linux. It can capture anything on the screen, record a mic and even add a webcam, if you want.

There are several alternatives to OBS, either FREE or very affordable:

- **Flashback Express** (Windows only)
- **ScreenCast-O-Matic** (Windows & Mac)
- **Snagit** (Windows & Mac)

There are dozens of others out there, but this list is a good place to start.



# 4: Video Editing Software



If you want to save yourself a TON of time, you will need **video editing software**.

It allows you to cut, crop, rearrange and otherwise edit your video and audio and add various effects. For example, instead of re-recording an entire lesson every time you make a mistake, you can simply cut it out.

If you're looking for a FREE tool, I would recommend **OpenShot**. It's available for both Windows and Mac.

When you're ready to upgrade, **Camtasia** (Windows & Mac) or **Screenflow** (Mac) are excellent and affordable options. **Both have built-in screen recorders, so no need for a separate tool, if you're using one of these.**

There are many other video editors out there, but these are **the most popular choices, especially among online course creators**. They are simpler to use than most professional video editing software, yet very powerful with many great features.



# 5: Regular Video

If you want to shoot regular video, beyond just your screen and a webcam, you will also need:

- A **video camera and a tripod** to hold it. I've got Panasonic and it's great. **Check your smartphone camera first – it may be enough!**
- **A nice place in your house** with minimum distractions in the background or [a professional backdrop](#)
- A room with **good natural light** or [studio lighting](#)
- Depending on your topic, it may also be a good idea to get a [clip-on mic](#), so that you can freely move about, if you need to.

Professional backdrop and lighting **are not even nearly as expensive as you might imagine**, but they will take space!



# Other Types of Course Content



**Although video lessons are extremely popular, it's not the only type of content for online courses.**

Here are a few more ideas of what else you could use:

- Simple text-based articles
- Audio-only files, podcasts
- Downloadable pdf files
- Visuals: Graphics, charts, diagrams, animated gifs
- Done-for-you templates and swipe-files
- Quizzes, worksheets, assignments
- Interactive eLearning modules (mostly used by large businesses and academic institutions)

**The choice of content type depends on your topic.**

If you teach graphic design, you will probably have lots of visuals and screencasts. Some topics like hypnosis or meditation may be more suited for audio.



# Basic Content Creation Tools

## Text and PDF Tools

Text is the simplest type of content and you have many options. Most word processors - **MS Word, Apache OpenOffice Writer, Google Docs** - not only will record your text, but also have basic design features and can easily convert your file into a PDF.



## Audio tools

Most computers already have basic audio recorders built into their standard operating system. Search for **Voice recorder** (previously *Sound recorder*) on Windows or **QuickTime Player** on Mac. You can also use **Audacity** – a FREE and powerful tool to record and edit your audio files.

## Graphic design

For basic graphic design tasks I prefer to use **PowerPoint**. There are also many specialised programmes if you need something more sophisticated – from FREE **IrfanView** and **Inkscape** to powerful (and expensive) **Adobe Photoshop** and **CorelDRAW**.



# Should I use eLearning Software?

I get asked this question a lot, so here is my response.

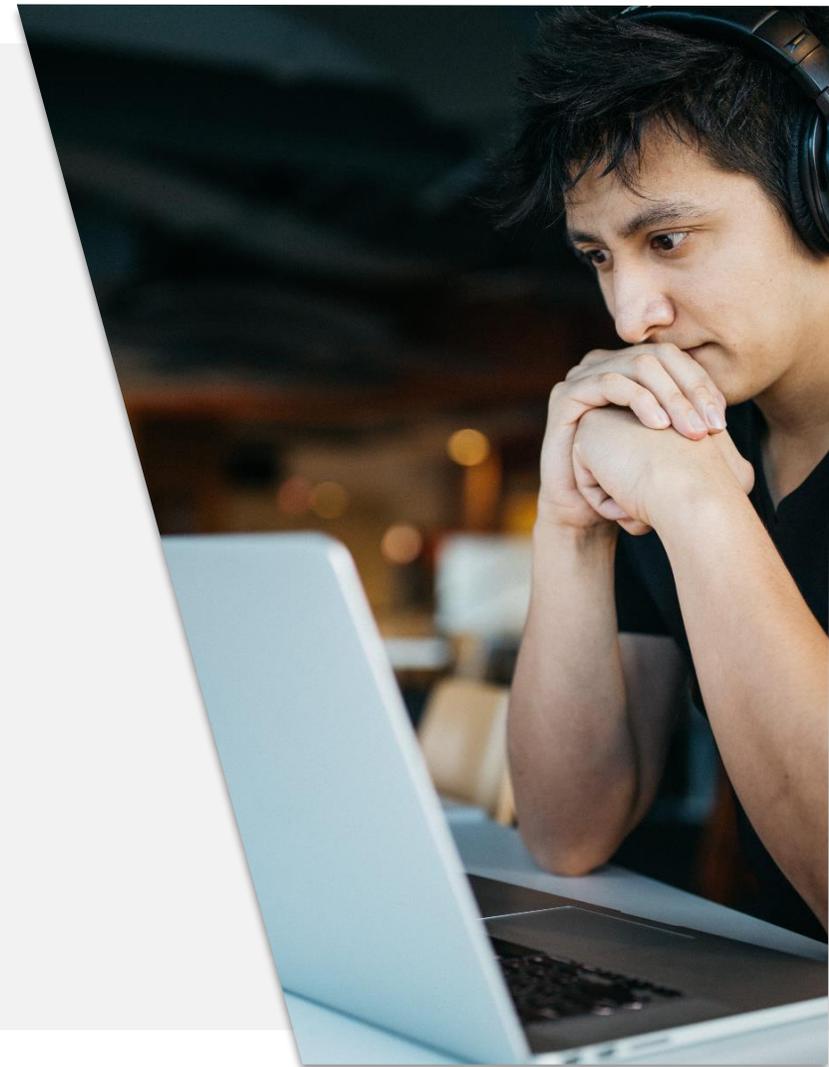
Professional eLearning Software (e.g. **Articulate Storyline, Adobe Captivate, iSpring**) is mostly used by **large corporations and academic institutions**.

If you want to see examples, [\*\*check out this link\*\*](#).

There are several reasons why solo course creators and micro-companies **almost never** use them:

- Most of these tools are prohibitively **expensive**
- They are **very complicated** to use and often require a whole team of professionals
- Many popular **online course platforms (e.g. Udemy, Teachable) cannot host** the files created by these programmes, so your choices for sharing your course materials online would be very limited.

Plainly speaking, if you are a solo creator or a micro-company, these tools are not the best option for you.



# Discover more FREE Tools

I hope you enjoyed this guide. I regularly update it with new information and more great tools and tips. So even if you downloaded it once, you may want to download it again later to see what changed and more up-to-date recommendations.

**For more FREE tools on Coaching, Training and Psychology, check out my website [www.owltoolbox.com](http://www.owltoolbox.com)**



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