

Course Club Facilitation Guide

Build **Skills, Learning Culture, Community,**
and **Belonging** with Minimal Effort



About the Author

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What is a **Course Club**?

Continuous learning is an integral part of being a software practitioner, and many companies invest in the professional development of their engineers through providing access to course catalogs like Pluralsight's. Yet in reality, we find that there are a variety of factors that discourage focused learning at work, including:

- **Lack of visibility:** Because learning work of all sorts, including planned and focused upskilling, is less visible than other kinds of work, there are fewer incentives for software practitioners and their leaders to make time for it.
- **Course overload:** Robust learning catalogs can overwhelm some learners and lead to a sort of paralysis, where they search and bookmark courses endlessly, but don't actually watch any.
- **Lack of community:** Learning is a social endeavor, but too often software professionals are given access to a catalog of learning resources with the message "Go forth and learn, but alone."
- **Lack of facilitation resources:** For those who do understand that learning initiatives promoting social learning and community are most effective, finding the time and resources to plan such initiatives is a huge challenge.

A **Course Club** – analogous to a book club – offers a lightweight, visible, scalable method for upskilling groups of software practitioners utilizing the Pluralsight course catalog. **Course Clubs** enable learning and development professionals to combat the aforementioned forces that impede on-the-job upskilling, enabling participants to acquire knowledge and skills crucial to

their roles outside of their regular work routines, but still during their regular working hours.

Course Clubs make learning visible for engineers, as well as help them focus and narrow in on courses that are chosen collectively using criteria defined by a group of leaders, learners, or both. They bolster learning cultures, community, and software practitioners' sense of belonging through encouraging interaction and collaboration with a built-in learning community of colleagues and peers.

Finally, because they are formulaic in both the preparation and the implementation, **Course Clubs** are relatively easy for facilitators – whether they be L&D professionals, engineering leaders, or software engineers themselves – to plan and run.

At Pluralsight, we've run many **Course Clubs** using our own course catalog. Here's just a smidgen of the positive feedback we've received about these events:

"I would love to do more of this in the future. Watching the course was helpful, but participating in the live discussion solidified what I learned and made me feel connected to other participants!"

"I'm so glad that this course and discussion was suggested. I love to learn how to be a better human and leader, and it's always helpful to discuss a course after. Please do more of this!"

"Love engaging with my peers and learning something new for these course clubs!"

Facilitation Tasks

Facilitating a **Course Club** entails a few lightweight tasks spread out over the course of four to six weeks. We've listed these in checkbox form for your convenience in planning your **Course Club**.

Four to six weeks before the **Course Club**:

- Specify the **Course Club's** intended audience.
- Choose a course from the Pluralsight catalog that is useful and interesting to this audience. We recommend choosing a course in the 60-120 minute range to ensure that the commitment for both participants and facilitators remains minimal.



You might also choose to start with the **course**, rather than the **intended audience**. One thing we've tried is asking folks to suggest which courses they'd like to club together!

- Decide on **Course Club** discussion dates. Be sure to check relevant calendars to ensure you're scheduling during times that the intended audience doesn't have other commitments.
- Identify and reach out to **Subject Matter Experts (SME)** who might be willing to hang out in the Slack channel and answer questions, or come to the discussions to engage with learners. This isn't necessary, but we've found that it enhances the experience for learners, and provides SMEs with valuable mentoring experience.



Make it clear to SMEs **what participation looks like** for them, and find ways to make it easy for them to say "yes" to this opp!

- ❑ Decide if and how you want to gamify the **Course Club** for participants. In our experience, creatively incorporating rewards like gift cards increases motivation, collaboration and camaraderie in these sorts of events.
- ❑ Create a way for participants to sign up. We use a simple Google Form where participants can choose the discussion date and time they'd like to attend.
- ❑ Create calendar events for each of the discussions. Coordinate with SMEs as necessary to staff these.
- ❑ Create a dedicated Slack channel for the **Course Club**. Add SMEs, and a welcome message.
- ❑ Announce the **Course Club** in Slack channels that ensure the intended audience is sure to see it. We also recommend reaching out to leaders to announce it to their teams, or during organization-wide meetings like Tech Standups.



Kristen Foster-Marks 3:15 AM

🤓 Oh hey, learners! 🤓

The Technology Center of Excellence is 🐼 excited to announce the next PS Course Club! This month, we'll discuss the course [Technical Communication for Non-Technical Audiences](#) by Amber Vanderburg.

Here are the details:

We'll hold **2** discussions on **November 16th & 17th** at the following times:

- @ 🇺🇸 8 a.m. Salt Lake City – 🇮🇪 4 p.m. Dublin – 🇮🇳 8:30 p.m. Bengaluru
- @ 🇺🇸 3 p.m. Salt Lake City – 🇦🇺 9 a.m. Sydney (on the 17th)

📅 Please fill out the Course Club [Enrollment Form](#) and select a session. Shortly after, you'll receive a calendar invite from me for that session.

🕒 This course is **54 minutes** long — feel free to watch at any time in these days leading up to the discussion!

💬 Hop into [#ps-course-club-tech-communication-non-tech-audiences](#) and feel free to post thoughts, reactions, & proposed discussion questions before the discussion. Let's not limit our interactions to the actual live sessions!

If you have any 🤔 questions, please don't hesitate to ask!

- As folks sign up, add them to the calendar event they signed up for, as well as they Slack channel if they're not there already.



One to four weeks before the **Course Club**:

- Announce the **Course Club** again in public channels so that those who missed the initial announcement can still participate.
- Drive engagement and community-building in the **Course Club** Slack channel by periodically posting discussion questions based on specific course clips.



Kristen Foster-Marks 9:22 AM

👋 Hi, fellow learners! 🙌 Excited to get to learn with and FROM you all as we move through this course together!

I just watched the [Introduction clip](#), where Amber tells us what she wants us to walk away from this course with. She says we'll learn:

- how to **utilize technical communication** in your conversations **with a nontechnical audience**
- tools to **better adapt, adjust, and accommodate your message** to your audience
- communication approaches in your delivery to better **navigate urgent and emotional situations**
- how to quickly and effectively **assess your audiences' technical knowledge and skill**
- how to **communicate technical relevance and relatability** to a nontechnical audience

📄 **Vulnerable question (which is my favorite kind of question):** Which of these objectives do you feel **you personally** need to work on the most? Do you have any examples to illustrate? Throw your answers in the [thread](#)!



9 replies Last reply 4 days ago



The week of the **Course Club**:

- Remind folks that the discussion is happening this week, and make participation expectations clear. Should they show up with their own discussion questions? Will the facilitator come prepared with all discussion questions? At Pluralsight, we've used a variety of methods,

including creating a Slack thread for each session for participants to add and upvote discussion questions:



Kristen Foster-Marks 11:17 AM

👋 Hi, learners! 🙌

Just a few days before we club *Machine Learning for Absolute Beginners!* 🐶 📺

Above, I've started a **discussion question thread** for each of our three course club sessions. Two requests:

- ➕ Add discussion questions to the thread for the session you're attending! I would love for each session to be guided by your thoughts, insights and interests.
- 👍 Upvote discussion questions for the session you're attending. We'll start each discussion with the questions that have gotten the most upvotes.

📺 Thanks, and see ya later this week!



Consider using a (secure!) **Gen-AI to create discussion questions**. We also recommend utilizing **Bloom's Taxonomy** to create discussion questions at varying levels of sophistication.

- Prepare the discussion session's opening comments, and optionally, prepare a slidedeck that summarizes the purpose, main ideas, and interesting insights from the course.
- Design the discussion session's format. We've done everything from large-group discussion driven by participant questions and comments (the lowest commitment to plan) to breakout rooms discussions, to quiz-based discussions, to hands-on activity hours. The format of the actual discussion session will likely vary based on the course topic and content.
- Prepare the discussion session's closing statements. We recommend encouraging participants to think about "next steps" and action items they can take away from the course and discussion.
- Prepare a post-club survey to distribute to participants at the end of the discussion session. We ask the following questions, but encourage you to

consider what kind of program-effectiveness reporting you'll be asked to do, and plan your survey accordingly.

- What primarily motivated you to participate in the course club?
- Which elements of the course club did you find engaging?
- How effective did you find the live discussion in solidifying concepts from the course?
- What impacts did the course have on you in relation to your role here at Pluralsight?
- By the end of the live discussion, did you feel ready to use new skills or knowledge gained through this course club?
- What could have made this course club better?



During the Course Club:

- Have fun, because most of the work is done! 🙌



After the Course Club:

- Remind participants to take the post-club survey.
- Analyze post-club survey results and consider how to best modify the event the next time you run it. Again, some data points you may want are: factors that promoted participant engagement, blockers to engagement and success, and how participants will use the skills and knowledge gained in their future work.