

How to Continue Your Education in Retirement (Without Spending a Fortune)

Imagine you're a singer back in 1963. Paul McCartney offers you a song to record called "Yesterday." You think about it, but turn it down because you just don't think it's right for you. That's what Billy Kramer did. He thought it was okay, but he was looking for more of a rock 'n' roll song, so he turned it down. Paul later recorded "Yesterday" himself and later it was voted one of the best songs of the 20th century. Billy Kramer must've kicked himself for passing up such an opportunity.

Similarly, we can pass up opportunities for learning in retirement. Top colleges, such as MIT, Harvard, Stanford, and others, offer online versions of their courses—for free! Unfortunately, many retirees pass on the thought of taking a college course. Perhaps they think they're too old or that college just isn't right for them. They may miss out on opportunities to keep learning in retirement.

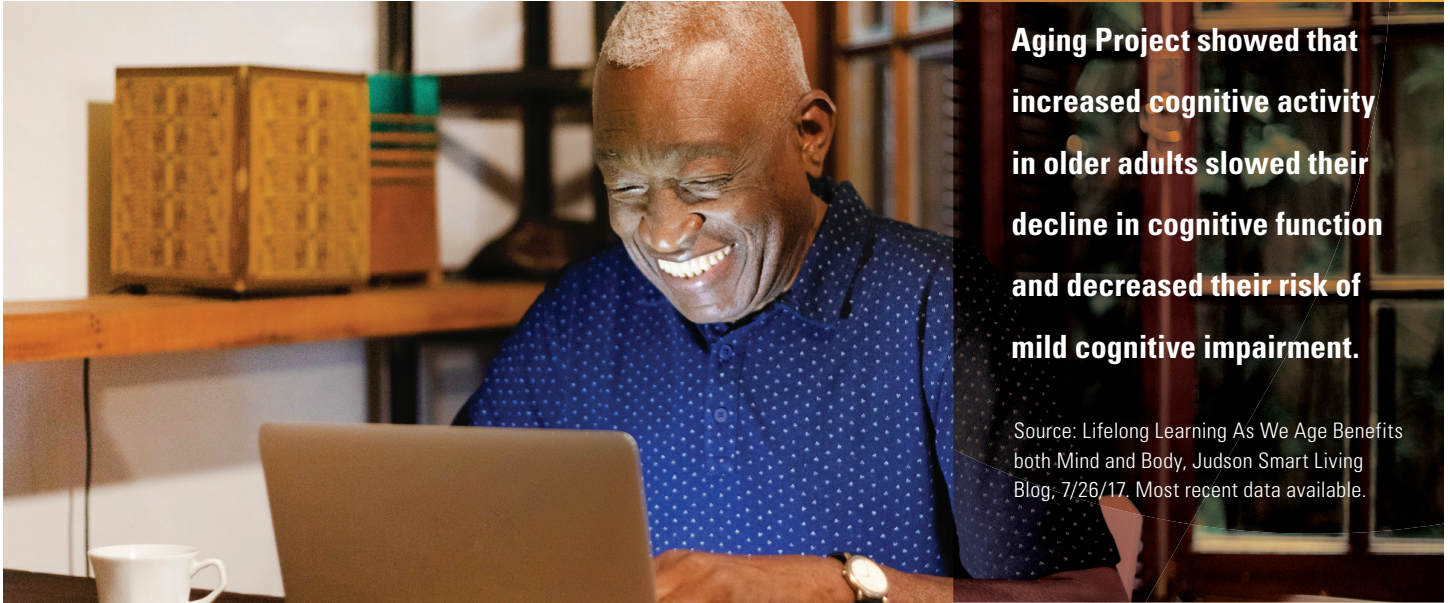
What We'll Cover:

- Yes, college is for 65+
- What are Massive Open Online Courses?
- Learning can be good for your retirement



"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."

—Henry Ford



The Rush Memory and Aging Project showed that increased cognitive activity in older adults slowed their decline in cognitive function and decreased their risk of mild cognitive impairment.

Source: Lifelong Learning As We Age Benefits both Mind and Body, Judson Smart Living Blog, 7/26/17. Most recent data available.

First, College Is for 65+

Even though 62% of people over 65 consider themselves lifelong learners,¹ the thought of spending hundreds—or even thousands—of dollars for a course, driving to a campus, and walking into a classroom of 18-22 year olds is discouraging.

So what are other options if you want to enhance your skills for work or just learn more about something you're interested in?

Now you can join a course where age is irrelevant. No one can see you, and you can take classes in your pajamas if you want to. You can take the course anywhere with a mobile phone, tablet, or computer. You can join the classes when it's convenient for you, whether that's 5:30 a.m. or midnight. And it's free.

Second, What Are Massive Open Online Courses?

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are online courses aimed at unlimited participation and are available to anyone via the web. The courses include lecture videos, reading material, assignments and tests.

Two of the Biggest, Most Popular MOOCs Are edX and Coursera

You can browse available courses or search for a topic you're interested in. When you find a course you want to take, you'll need to register online. Most courses last 6-8 weeks. You'll have weekly assignments with quizzes and tests so you can see your progress. There will be online forums, so you can ask questions, provide feedback, and get help if you need it. But will you find courses you're interested in?

Both edX and Coursera offer over 1,000 free online courses. You'll find a wide variety of courses on topics such as 19th Century Opera, Pyramids of Giza, and The Science of Happiness. The courses are offered by top colleges, but do you get college credits?

Most of the MOOCs don't offer college credits. However, you can get an optional certificate of completion, for \$49 on Coursera and between \$50 and \$300 on edX. These accessible courses were designed with individual enrichment and enjoyment in mind, rather than credit accumulation.

Third, Learning Can Be Good for Your Retirement

Many people enter retirement looking forward to a life of leisure. But many retirees experience a spike in well-being and life satisfaction directly after retiring, followed by a sharp decline in happiness a few years later.² It's possible that a life of leisure doesn't provide the sense of purpose and feelings of accomplishment people experienced during their working years. If you're feeling that retirement letdown, or you'd like to avoid it, taking an online course could help you find a new, exciting purpose in retirement. Plus, learning may help keep your mind sharp as you age.

A 2012 study found that people who learned a mentally demanding skill, like photography, showed improvements in memory compared to those who were only engaged in social activities or non-demanding mental activities. Learning something that was unfamiliar and mentally challenging is key to improvement.³

What to Do if You Like the Idea of Taking Classes In-Person Instead

Despite the accessibility and low-cost of MOOCs, there are definitely benefits of taking courses in-person, too. You'll probably get more social interaction with other students and

professors, and you're able to get more immediate answers to questions. But in-person college courses come with higher cost and commitment. If you pay \$500 for a community college course, you'll feel obligated to attend every class, whether you like it or not. If you take a MOOC course and you're not enjoying it, you can just stop and try something different.

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Cognitive Health and Older Adults, National Institute on Aging, 10/10/20.

Popular Sites that Offer Free or Low-Cost Learning Opportunities

MOOCs aren't just comprised of college text books loaded up on a computer. These courses are built for online learning. Many include video lectures, interactive quizzes, and opportunities to interact online with other students and teachers. And, the courses are typically free or very low cost.

Here are some popular MOOCs:

- [Coursera](#)
- [edX](#)
- [FutureLearn](#)
- [iversity](#)
- [Khan Academy](#)
- [Udacity](#)



Remember These Things If You Want to Keep Learning in Retirement

First, recognize that you can take courses online now without the hassle of going to class in-person or paying a lot. You can learn right in your living room using your phone, laptop, or tablet. Second, MOOCs offer a wide variety of course subjects and topics you can learn about, and most of the classes are free. If you brainstorm topics you'd like to learn about, chances are you can find a MOOC course available. Third, learning can be good for your retirement and your health.

What if Bill Kramer Would Have Recorded "Yesterday"?

Because he passed up a great opportunity, we'll never know how popular he would have become. Don't pass up opportunities to keep learning. In retirement, you've got the time to learn new things—and without incurring a huge cost. MOOC courses offer plenty of adventures for you to explore. Here's how to get started.

Next step

Visit edX and Coursera websites. Browse available courses or search for a topic you're interested in. Then sign up for your first course.

Sources:

¹ *The joy—and urgency—of learning*, Pew Research Center, 3/22/16. Most recent data available.

² *Retiring minds want to know*, American Psychological Association, 1/14. Most recent data available.

³ *Cognitive Health and Older Adults*, National Institute on Aging, 10/10/20. Most recent data available.

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