

Introduction: Why create personas?

A **persona** is a fictional yet realistic representation of a typical or target student, grounded in real user research. This helps as-yet-unknown students to feel concrete, relatable, and memorable rather than abstract or statistical. It also helps course teams to create learning experiences with a clear understanding of their target students, which in turn contributes to the success of the course. Personas help us to:

- Check our assumptions
- Resist 'designing for everyone', and instead making our courses more focused and aligned with the needs of our target students
- Ensure we have a shared understanding of who the course is for.

What should be included in a persona?

When defining a persona, ensure it captures the full context of the user, not just demographics. Ideally, this should be based on user research. You could conduct this research yourselves or you might have this information from previous course evaluation surveys or student/staff feedback.

If you don't currently have any evidence-informed insights, then think of the outline persona as your hypothesis for who your target students are, and reflect on these throughout course development, and ensure you update the personas alongside these to keep the shared understanding up to date.

You will need a persona for each key student group, for example, if you were focusing on executive education, you might choose a persona per career path. As a minimum, you should include the following details about each student:

- Education
- Lifestyle, e.g. working part-time, family commitments, disposable income, etc.
- Goals - What the person is trying to achieve and why, e.g. '*I want to upskill in AI within Medicine to improve my chance of getting a promotion*', or '*I need to show I have achieved 40 hours of learning for my CPD*'.
- Needs - What does the person need in order to achieve their goals and where are the pain points? E.g. '*I work full time, I have childcare commitments, and I am based in West Coast US. I need a course that is fully remote that I can access and complete flexibly.*'
- Limitations, e.g. '*I can only access the course from my mobile phone.*'

You could add any of the following to add more relevance to your personas:

- Interests
- Values
- Desires

Student needs

Student personas template



- Attitudes
- Patterns of behaviour
- Use quotes to summarise their mindset
- Add a few fictional personal details to make the persona a realistic character
- Give each of your personas a name.

Using the template on the next page, create a one-pager with a description of your persona.

The value comes from bringing the students to life, not just their job title or where they are in their academic career. They should be used in all your discussions around your course to keep them front and centre when making decisions and evaluating the success of your course. They are living documents for you to review and update, as you do with your course.

Student needs

Student personas template



[Persona name]

	<p>Pain points <i>E.g. 'I live in the West Coast of the US. Nothing is available in my time zone!'</i></p>
<p>About [Persona name]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age• Location• Education• Role / work status• Interests• Values• Desires• Attitudes	<p>Course gains <i>E.g. What specific features of your course will allow this person to achieve their goals, meet their needs, and overcome their pain points?</i></p>
<p>Goals <i>E.g. 'I want to upskill in AI within Medicine to improve my chance of getting a promotion', or 'I need to show I have achieved 40 hours of learning for my CPD'.</i></p>	<p>How to reach [Persona name] <i>How would they hear about your course? What is their preferred form of communication? What are their preferred social media outlets?</i></p>
<p>Needs <i>E.g. 'I need to be able to balance my learning alongside my childcare commitments'</i></p>	<p>Unique value proposition <i>A summary of how your course will add value to this person, given their goals and needs, spotlighting on the course features that are particularly relevant to them</i></p>

Student needs

Student personas template



[Persona name]

 A placeholder for a profile picture, showing a stylized male face with a beard and short hair.	<p>Pain points <i>E.g. 'I live in the West Coast of the US. Nothing is available in my time zone!'</i></p>
<p>About [Persona name]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Age</i>• <i>Location</i>• <i>Education</i>• <i>Role / work status</i>• <i>Interests</i>• <i>Values</i>• <i>Desires</i>• <i>Attitudes</i>	<p>Course gains <i>E.g. What specific features of your course will allow this person to achieve their goals, meet their needs, and overcome their pain points?</i></p>
<p>Goals <i>E.g. 'I want to upskill in AI within Medicine to improve my chance of getting a promotion', or 'I need to show I have achieved 40 hours of learning for my CPD'.</i></p>	<p>How to reach [Persona name] <i>How would they hear about your course? What is their preferred form of communication? What are their preferred social media outlets?</i></p>
<p>Needs <i>E.g. 'I need to be able to balance my learning alongside my childcare commitments'</i></p>	<p>Unique value proposition <i>A summary of how your course will add value to this person, given their goals and needs, spotlighting on the course features that are particularly relevant to them</i></p>