

The Course Retention Design Checklist

Build courses students actually finish.
12 design decisions that drive completion.

WHAT YOU'LL DISCOVER INSIDE:

- ✓ The Early-Win Module formula - usable result in 20 minutes.
- ✓ Progress marker language that creates momentum.
- ✓ The commitment anchor exercise for Module 2.
- ✓ 12-point design checklist to audit any course.

Before You Design Module 1, Read This

The real reason students abandon courses by Module 3

It's not because the content is bad. It's not because students are lazy. It's because the course was designed for completeness, not momentum.

The average self-paced course has a 3–15% completion rate. Therapist-built courses tend to sit at the low end of that range - packed with dense modules that overwhelm rather than advance students.

This checklist gives you the 12 design decisions that separate high-completion courses from abandoned folders on students' desktops.

- Apply the Early-Win Module principle before you record anything
- Add progress markers that create psychological momentum
- Use the Commitment Anchor exercise to triple completion rates
- Audit your existing course against all 12 checkpoints

“A course nobody finishes is a course nobody recommends.

Completion rate is your marketing strategy

— Therapist Growth Partner

The Retention Framework

1 Does your first module deliver a usable result in under 20 minutes?

Not a framework overview. Not a welcome video. One skill the student can use the same day.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

The first module creates or destroys the habit of completing. Students who use something from Module 1 the same day they watch it are 4x more likely to finish the course. A 20-minute win beats a 90-minute introduction every time.

YOUR ANSWER:

My Module 1 quick win: describe it in one sentence.

My Module 1 skill/exercise: _____

Time to complete: _____ Can students use it today? _____

What will students do differently after Module 1: _____

REAL EXAMPLES FROM HIGH-COMPLETION COURSES:

- “Module 1: Write your boundary statement. Students complete and send it within 24 hours.”
- “Module 1: The 3-breath reset. Practice it between this video and the next.”
- “Module 1: Name your #1 sleep thief. Just one. Write it on the worksheet.”

If your Module 1 delivers a concept rather than a skill, restructure. Move the concept to Module 2 where students have already experienced proof that the approach works.

The Retention Framework (continued)

2

Does every module end with a progress marker?

A progress marker is a one-sentence completion statement that gives students a sense of forward movement.

THE PROGRESS MARKER FORMULA:

End every module with this prompt: 'I now know how to _____!' Then add one practice instruction. This two-part ending gives students a cognitive anchor and a clear next action. Both reduce dropout at module boundaries.

YOUR ANSWER:

Complete progress markers for your first 3 modules.

Module 1: I now know how to _____

Module 2: I now know how to _____

Module 3: I now know how to _____

REAL EXAMPLES FROM HIGH-COMPLETION COURSES:

- "I now know how to identify my top 3 nervous system triggers in daily life."
- "I now know how to use the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique independently."
- "I now know how to write a values-aligned boundary statement."

If your Module 1 delivers a concept rather than a skill, restructure. Move the concept to Module 2 where students have already experienced proof that the approach works.

The Retention Framework (continued)

3 Does your course have a Commitment Anchor in Module 2?

Students who write down their 'reason why' in Module 2 have 3x the completion rate of those who don't.

- Check 1** Module 1 delivers a usable skill in under 20 minutes
- Check 2** Every module has a clear progress marker statement
- Check 3** Module 2 includes a written commitment anchor exercise
- Check 4** No single module exceeds 25 minutes of video

My plan passes the reality test:

- My course passes all 4 checks.
- Needs one or more structural changes - I'll fix before launch.

YOUR COMMITMENT STATEMENT:

“My course gives students a usable result in Module 1, a commitment anchor in Module 2, and a clear progress marker at the end of every module.”

If any check fails, fix that module before launch. One structural change here will raise completion rates more than any amount of extra content.

What Happens Next

1 Apply one insight today

Pick the single most actionable item from this resource. Do it before your next client session.

2 Share with one colleague

Forward this to another therapist who is thinking about building a course. Teaching reinforces learning.

3 Build your Minimum Viable Course

Record 4–6 modules across 2–3 focused sessions. One worksheet per module. Done in a weekend.

4 Launch to your first 10 students

Price \$97–\$297. Beta discount. 3 launch emails. First sales create proof. Proof creates momentum.

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