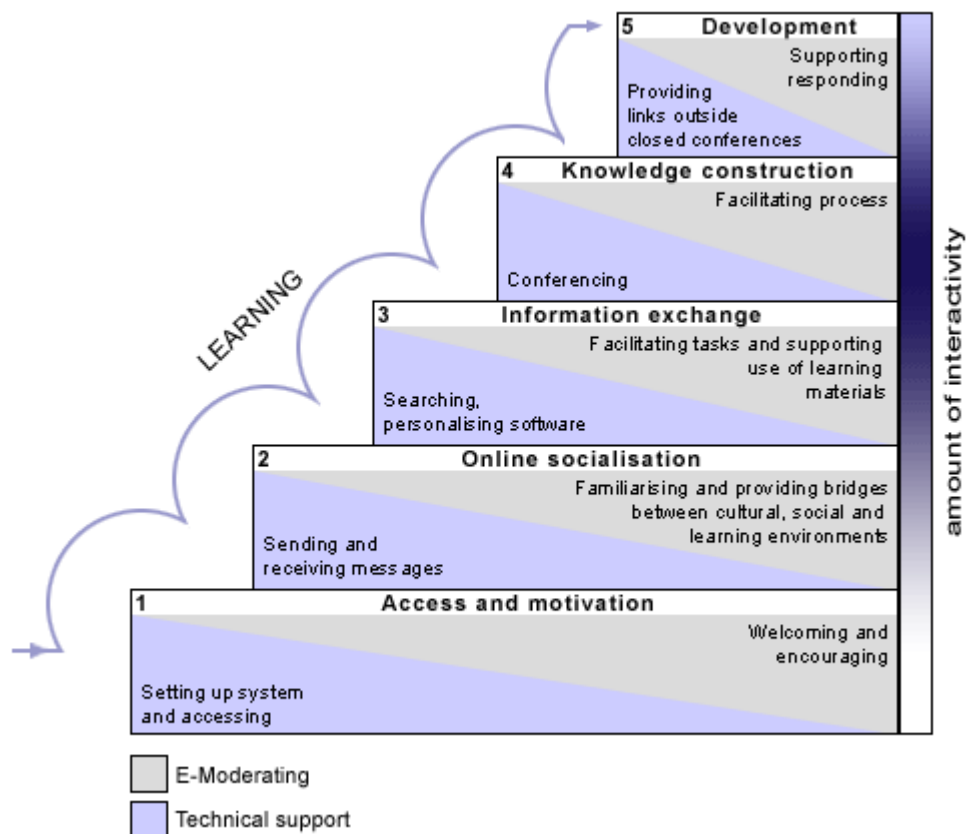


eModerating

E-moderating is a process of engaging learners in a discussion, initially facilitating the discussion and then taking a step back to allow students to drive the ongoing discussion and construct new knowledge. An important element of e-moderating is the role of the online facilitator who is known as an e-moderator. The role of the e-moderator is an important one as it can impact on the quality of learning achieved by students and is pivotal for effective online discussions. Gilly Salmon (2000, p.25-26), developed a five step model which outlines the steps or learning platforms required to effectively foster online student engagement and learning in the realms of communication and collaboration through the use of Discussion Boards. Each stage builds upon the other, where stages three – five are the most productive and constructive for learning and teaching. The steps are outlined and briefly explained below.



- Step 1: Access and motivation -students require individual access and the skills to use the communication tools.
- Step 2: Online socialisation - students create an identity online and finding others with whom to interact.

- Step 3: Information exchange - students give information relevant to the course to each other. Up to and including stage three, a form of co-operation occurs, that is, support for each other's goals.
- Step 4: Knowledge construction - course related group discussion takes place and interaction becomes more collaborative. Communication is dependent upon common understandings.
- Step 5: Development - students look for benefits from the system that will help them achieve their goals and explore how to integrate their online discussions into other forms of learning and reflect on their learning processes.

Each stage requires students to master certain technical skills (shown in the bottom left of each step). Each stage calls for different e-moderating skills (shown on the right top of each step). The "interactivity bar" running along the right of the flight of steps suggests the intensity of interactivity that you can expect between the students at each stage. At first, at stage one, they interact only with one or two others. After stage two, the numbers of others with whom they interact, and the frequency, gradually increases, although stage five often results in a return to more individual pursuits.

Learning styles and approaches

Diversity of teaching styles can add an extra dimension to e-moderating as it allows e-moderators to develop a rich variety of computer mediated communication techniques in line with their own strengths, beliefs and context requirements. In conjunction with Salmon's 5 step model, other learning style considerations and approaches are outlined below to assist e-moderators in achieving higher student participation rates, along with elevated student satisfaction.

Why Share?

There are two motives for groups of people to work together. One is self-interest and the other common interest. The first can be promoted through extrinsic factors, such as incentives, but the second needs trust and mutual respect. So from the start e-moderators should seek a climate of strong enhancement of the well-being of the online group, based on respect and support for each other rather than corner cutting in the service of instrumental personal goals. In this way, intrinsic motivators will gradually emerge and learning be promoted.

Some e-moderators assume that varying cultural backgrounds and experiences from students result in very different approaches to learning and try to adapt their e-moderating accordingly. But it is extremely difficult to get to know and understand someone else's culture and attempts to do this can result in unhelpful stereotypical views. Instead it's best to promote interest and respect for the backgrounds of all students. The nature and support

of the learning environment is just as important as students' cultural backgrounds. Avoid simplistic views of cultural influence in online learning as students are very adaptable and able to respond to challenges as they draw upon their cultural experiences and perspectives.

Research supports exploring feelings along with reflection (Taylor 2001). Transformations happen through reflection but also through experiencing and feelings, thoughts and actions. In other words e-moderators should try and promote emotional literacy as much as information technology literacy! (Taylor 2001).

Managing Time

The use and experience of time is a major aspect of successful e-tivities. Time takes on a new dimension online. Working asynchronously involves a radical rethink - not only of learning or teaching time, but also of other aspects of life.

How often are you going to log in and check your student's discussion messages? This would be relevant for students as well as the e-moderator. Guidelines to students could be the answer so students know how often you will be in the discussion and you can also advise students how often you expect them to be in.

If you have weekly discussion topics you could set them up with regular tasks to be done, e.g. by Wednesday each week you must have posted what you currently know about the topic, by Friday of the same week you must summarise what information has been shared.

And remember once again that 'overfilling' an e-tivity is the enemy of active engagement online. If you provide lots and lots of resources, your students will use them and have little time for each other.

Using clear start and finish times by the calendar enables synchronisation and co-ordination of group activities. Such pacing needs to appear in the e-tivities because students will not meet often 'by chance' online to co-ordinate for themselves.

Students and their e-moderators will experience time in all sorts of ways when working online. One key aspect is the complexity associated with asynchronicity. For example, students log on from around the globe and the site is always open. Students take part according to their individual work patterns and locations.

A well structured exchange (shows subject titles only)

Here is an example of an easy to read series of threads which facilitate navigation and access to content.

- **How to collaborate online - Econvenor**
 - **Re: How to collaborate online - Angie**
 - **Re: How to Collaborate online - Aktar**
 - **Re: How to collaborate online - Naim**
- **Is it like collaborating face-to-face? - Angie**
 - **Re: Is it like collaborating face-to-face? - Samantha**
 - **Re: Is it like collaborating face-to-face? - Aktar**
 - **Re: Is it like collaborating face-to-face? Jeanette**
 - **Re: Is it like collaborating face-to-face? - Aktar**
 - **Summary Is it like collaborating face-to-face? - Angie**
- **What about this model? - Rick**
 - **Re: What about this model? - Aktar**
 - **Re: What about this model? - Naim**
 - **Re: What about this model? - Angie**
 - **Re: What about this model? - Rick**
 - **Summary What about this model? - Rick**

Here is an example of a series of threads which doesn't facilitate navigation.

- **E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous Working**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchr...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchr...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchronous ...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchrono...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asynchr...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asyn...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - A...**
 - **Re: E-tivity 2.2 - Asyn...**

Being explicit

When we interact with other people through oral communication (face to face or by telephone) we use much more than words. We use gestures, breaks, intonation and body 'language', all of which we are skilled in 'reading'. Online, this kind of communication must be made more explicit through the medium itself. For example, you might shrug your shoulders in answer to a question from someone who is standing in front of you (Mathiasen and Rattleff 2002). Online you would need to type, 'don't know' or 'I don't care!'. If you failed to reply at all, the questioner would not know if you had left the computer or were outraged at the question. However, the benefits of writing are huge for the development of thinking skills, especially if written messages are exposed to the responses of others and to feedback (Tsui 2002).

Diverse and inclusive

Brooke Broadbent (2002) offers us advice on working online based on Kolb's learning styles. These include the 'convergers' who like to think rationally and will appreciate good online documentation to the 'divergers' who like creative approaches such as role play. 'Assimilators' will be those willing to undertake Web searches on behalf of the group and explore and explain differing perspectives. 'Accommodators' will promote the relationships and community and engage others (Broadbent 2002). Aspects of Kolb's cycle found missing from many online courses are those of the opportunity to reflect and evaluate individual learning experiences and opportunities to work with others, especially a tutor (Friedman, Watts, et al 2002).

Howard Hill's research (2003) uses the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a personality model. According to Hill's research, 45% of the e-learning population seek direct praise for their learning efforts. 52% enjoy discussing ideas, of which 18% want strong debate, and 33% want to take the lead, 23% want to develop others, whilst 45% want harmony. 26% need role models.

Participation not portals

Knowledge involves thinking with information. Students do not start completely 'cold' but start with some information or knowledge. So for e-tivities, you need to decide what information will be provided as a starting point- the spark to begin the process of group learning and knowledge construction. The e-moderator presents an issue, a dilemma, problem, challenge or model. Use different kinds of data and information, but keep spark paragraphs and links short. If appropriate, you may well wish to provide references, further reading or illustrative links, but try to avoid any of these being necessary for active engagement in the online task.

There are many types of sparks. The main types are providing a small piece of information, a model, concept or example to which students can react or by asking for views, information or experiences. You might also find a trigger from what students bring to the e-tivity. Consider what they bring, what might their interests be, what kind of content will interest them, what kind of activities they will want to be engaged in.

Avoid filling the instructional message with a whole variety of different spark materials, references or links. If you want to provide sparks with more difficulty, depth or breadth, build them into separate e-tivities. Concentrate instead on online actions and state what behaviour is expected of students during the e-tivity. Be very specific about what you need your students to actually do. As a suggestion, use verbs as instructions for the task - particularly use the active online verbs 'post' and 'respond to' but there are many others. However, students' responses may be unpredictable.

Summarising - a key skill

This is a powerful technique and is possibly the most important of all the e-moderating skills. The following information might be helpful to your students in an e-tivity.

Summarising:

- provides the opportunity to acknowledge and quote others' contributions
- draws the various contributions into a single message which can help latecomers to catch up
- signals the end of a discussion or e-tivity and opens up the opportunity to start a new dialogue
- can help those that have been pushed for time to look again at the discussion and reflect further

Here are some tips:

- pick out the really key points - aim to be brief and try to avoid lists
- be encouraging by making a comment about the quality of all the contributions
- select a title that will stand out
- unless you aim to close off the topic, end with a question that moves the topic on and back to the students

And here is a process for creating summaries:

- copy and paste all messages to be summarised into a single word document
- look through it to identify the most commonly occurring theme and copy one entry that captures this best to the top of the page
- delete all references to that theme from the copied messages

- repeat the process until all the common themes have been captured
- decide whether to incorporate any other material or not. If so add it in
- edit the emerging summary and add any points that seem appropriate
- sign it and send it to the Forum you are summarising

Weaving

This term describes the process of pulling discussions or contributions together - like weaving a cloth.

Weaving is a key way in which e-moderators add focus and value to a discussion. For instance, you might spot an opportunity to highlight and reflect back an important theme that is emerging in messages.

By collecting together some relevant statements you can not only acknowledge contributions, but also point out their significance and encourage a further iteration by ending with an open question/invitation/challenge to respond.

Weaving is probably the e-moderating skill that needs practising the most.

The difference between summarising and weaving:

- *Summarising* is rather like reproducing the material in shortened form, picking out the main points. The original meanings are not removed.
- *Weaving* is a more creative task that selects themes and rearranges them into a new statement making connections that may not have been intended by the writers.

Planning tools

Use the following guides, tables and activities to assist in planning an e-tivity.

Discussion guide

1. Opening a new topic

The start of a new topic provides the best opportunity to set the scene and encourage students to join in the purpose for your conference or e-tivity. Try to focus on the outcome you seek.

When you set out your purpose (or objective) it can be helpful to test its quality by applying the acronym 'SMART':

Specific - be really clear. Woolly or general purposes can result in unfocussed discussions

Measurable - so that you know when you have achieved your purpose

Achievable - by the students with your help

Relevant - to the main purpose of your sessions

Time bounded - within a reasonable timescale

2. Giving and seeking information

This step enables all students to attain a similar level of key information about the topic so that all can participate. Aim to share the key points first, almost in list form, about what you know now. If details are needed or it is important to share additional background, tell students about references your current level of knowledge (eg websites) and where to find more information if they want to.

3. Knowledge construction

We help to build knowledge by asking questions, relating the information to other things we know, floating ideas, and by searching for new information from the Internet.

A reminder of the e-moderator's knowledge construction role:

1. The student needs to be acknowledged so they know they have been heard. The e-moderator avoids the temptation to discount the experience in any way or to counter it and enter into argument.
2. The contribution is available for others to read and so forms a much larger inventory of information than was previously known to any single student. This whole inventory can be used by others in later stages of the discussion.
3. The e-moderator may comment on the sufficiency of the information, the views being presented and on the quality of argument surrounding them (if no other student does this).

Such an approach by the e-moderator ensures that the experiences, whilst valued, are not necessarily considered complete in themselves. In effect, the e-moderator models ways of exploring and developing arguments.

By the end of the e-tivity all will have learnt something - if not about the topic, then at least about other students and their reactions to the topic.

4. Closing down a topic

When, as e-moderator, you are satisfied that the discussion has run its course, don't leave it in an unfinished state. It is rather like ending a conversation by walking off in mid-sentence.

Use the **E-tivities table** to assist in structuring your task.

Note: time commitment is set out before the actions since the time available will limit what can be achieved.

Name of e-tivity	
Purpose of the e-tivity (objective)	
Level (of the 5 step model) aimed at	
Number of participants	
Forum structure – threads (give titles) to be used	
E-lapsed time needed for the whole e-tivity (in days)	
E-moderator's time commitment	
E-moderator actions	
Student time needed	
Student actions expected	
Interaction – how is it created?	
Evaluation – how is it achieved?	

Want to know more?

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