

## Resources for practitioners 9

# **E-moderating skills: e-moderating with synchronous conferencing**

In synchronous environments, as in asynchronous ones, the e-moderator is a manager and facilitator of the learning, more than a teacher. In the same way that the role of the e-moderator differs from that of the traditional teacher, there also appear to be a number of other special critical success factors for synchronous conferencing.

- Ensure that a technical helpdesk is provided within the platform during the time you are working online. This means that if participants, or e-moderators, experience problems during an online event, they can receive help and support without interrupting others.
- Manage participants' expectations so that they understand they may occasionally experience connection problems such as unexpected disconnections, 'choppy sound' or a slow screen refresh rate.
- Start with stage one- and two-type e-tivities as a 'warm-up'.
- Use carefully structured e-tivities and publish these on a Web site before the synchronous event.
- Provide ways of students working together in small work teams in different 'rooms'. The e-moderator can 'visit' them and help during this period if necessary.

- Run 'plenaries' with structured reporting from the smaller groups, and follow this up by a discussion. E-moderate these well, ensuring careful turn-taking where appropriate.
- After the structured e-tivities are completed, encourage people to speak if they wish.
- The e-moderator should finish by offering feedback to the group. This may include anonymous feedback where common errors are corrected but not attributed, a summary and teaching comments.
- Encourage continuing work on the topic.
- Provide a summary and teaching comments after the event is over, if appropriate.
- Provide a related Web site with not only details of the activities but also other items such as course news, a course schedule, assessment material, links to additional resources and other relevant information and, of course, if this is appropriate to your learning outcomes, an asynchronous conferencing environment where participants can post in-depth, reflective comments, exchange longer pieces of written work and reflect on the learning/teaching experience as a whole.
- Participants need a way of signalling their desire to speak. Most software provides for this, but protocols may need to be developed if not.
- Provide an alternative channel such as text chat as a 'back channel' that allows participants to communicate whilst not actually speaking.
- Encourage the use of graphic or text-based emoticons.
- Use a platform that allows private conversations between participants, thus permitting e-moderators to offer immediate support or error correction to individuals without drawing the attention of the group to this.
- Let participants know that silences are natural in this environment. In the physical environment it is possible to see when learners are thinking or working silently. In the virtual environment, this is not possible and a period of silence can seem much longer than it really is. As their experience grows, e-moderators become more confident and are able to judge at what point they should moderate the silence and encourage learners to participate actively in the conference.
- No response may mean that a participant has lost the connection or been interrupted, and left the computer. Ask participants to let others know if they need to leave the computer for a short while or for the rest of the session. Preferably use an application that allows an 'away from the keyboard' indication.

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