

E-Moderating

Gilly Salmon

University of Leicester, UK

INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE TEACHING

In this article, the term “e-moderating” is used to capture the wide variety of roles and skills that the online teacher, lecturer, or trainer needs to acquire (Salmon, 2004). Online human supporters have a wider range of expertise compared to working with face-to-face learning groups. The role of the lecturer or teacher in all educational contexts needs to change to include e-moderating to realize the development and potential of new online environments, and to create e-learning rather than e-publishing of materials.

Successful and productive e-moderating is a key feature of positive, scalable, and affordable e-learning projects and processes. Regardless of the sophistication of the technology, online learners do *not* wish to do without their human supporters. Most learners also mention the fun and companionship of working and learning together.

Many lecturers naturally believe that learning to e-moderate has to do mostly with learning new software or computing skills (Barker, 2002; Bennett & Marsh, 2002). This is not the case. The revision of their roles needs to happen regardless of changes in technological applications. A critically important role for the e-moderator is promoting the surfacing and sharing of understanding and knowledge through online writing and dialogue (Byholm, 2002).

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS FOR E-MODERATORS

The qualities and characteristics of successful e-moderators—the competencies they should acquire through training and experience—have been analyzed by the author (Salmon, 2002), and are presented in Figure 1.

RECRUITING YOUR E-MODERATORS

If possible, e-moderators with the qualities from Columns I and II of Figure 1 should be recruited. Teachers who have something of a vision of the importance of online learning in the future and how to prepare themselves to operate successfully and happy within such an environment are those to be spotted and supported (Waeytens, Lens, & Vandenberghe, 2002). The author tends to select applicants who show empathy and flexibility in working online, plus willingness to be trained as e-moderators. Before asking candidates to work online, they should be trained in the competencies described in Columns III and IV in Figure 1. After working online with their participants for about one year, e-moderators should have developed the skills in Columns V and VI of Figure 1.

If lecturers are used to being considered an “expert” in their subject, the levelling effect and informality of online networking can be very challenging for them. As e-moderators they will probably have to work a little harder to establish their credentials as experienced professionals in the online environment as opposed to in a face-to-face group. Even those recruits who are used to developing distance learning materials need to explore how online materials can underpin and extend their teaching. It follows that e-moderators will also need to develop good working relationships with librarians, who are rapidly transforming themselves into Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resource providers.

It is most important to look at the potential as well as at the existing skills of recruits. E-moderators will need to know about online communication rather than only learn the software. They will need to have the ability to provide support and counselling through e-mail as well as the creativity and flexibility to design and adapt collaborative opportunities for differing purposes, individual and organisational missions, and needs. They must be able to work cross culturally and

Figure 1. Table of e-moderator competencies

Quality/ Characteristic	I CONFIDENT	II CONSTRUCTIVE	III DEVELOPMENTAL	IV FACILITATING	V KNOWLEDGE SHARING	VI CREATIVE
Understanding of online process A	Has personal experience as an online learner, flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning. Empathy with the challenges of becoming an online learner.	Is able to build online trust and purpose for others. Understands the potential of online learning and groups.	Has ability to develop and enable others, act as a catalyst, foster discussion, summarize, restate, challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding, take feedback.	Knows when to control groups, when to let go, how to bring in non-participants, knows how to pace discussion and use time online, understand the five-stage scaffolding process and how to use it.	Can explore ideas, develop arguments, promote valuable threads, close off unproductive threads, choose when to archive.	Is able to use a range of approaches from structured activities (e-tivities) to free wheeling discussions, and to evaluate and judge their success.
Technical skills B	Has operational understanding of software in use reasonable keyboard skills; is able to read fairly comfortably on screen; good, regular, mobile access to the Internet.	Is able to appreciate the basic structures of CMC, and the WWW and Internet's potential for learning.	Knows how to use special features of software for e-moderators, e.g., controlling, weaving, archiving. Knows how to "scale up" without consuming inordinate amounts of personal time, by using the software productively.	Is able to use special features of software to explore learner's use, e.g., message history.	Creates links between CMC and other features of learning programmes.	Is able to use software facilities to create & manipulate conferences & to generate an online learning environment, able to use alternative software & platforms.
Online communication skills C	Provides courteous and respectful online (written) communication, able to pace and use time appropriately	Is able to write concise, energizing, personable online messages.	Is able to engage with people online (not the machine or the software), responds to messages appropriately, is appropriately "visible" online, can elicit and manage students' expectations.	Is able to interact through e mail and conferencing and achieve interaction between others, is a role model. Is able to gradually increase the number of learners dealt with successfully online, without huge amounts of extra personal time	Is able to value diversity with cultural sensitivity, explore differences and meanings.	Is able to communicate comfortably without visual cues; is able to diagnose and solve problems and opportunities online, use humour online, use and work with emotion online, and handle conflict constructively.
Content expertise D	Has knowledge and experience to share, willingness to add own contributions.	Is able to encourage sound contributions from others, knows useful online resources for their topic.	Is able to trigger debates by posing intriguing questions.	Carries authority by awarding marks fairly to students for their participation and contributions.	Knows about valuable resources (e.g., on the WWW) and refers participants to them.	Is able to enliven conferences through use of multi media and electronic resources; is able to give creative feedback and build on participants' ideas.
Personal Characteristics E	Has determination and motivation to become an e-moderator.	Is able to establish an online identity as e-moderator.	Is able to adapt to new teaching contexts, methods, audiences and roles.	Shows sensitivity to online relationships and communication.	Shows a positive attitude, commitment and enthusiasm for online learning.	Knows how to create and sustain a useful, relevant online learning community.



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