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| Home | **Topics** | Index | Authors | Journals | Conferences | Organizations | News | | Reviewers | Editors | About us | Contact |

Overview › Pedagogy › Communication › **Moderating**

Salmon, Gilly (2002)

E-tivities. The Key to Active Online Learning

Taylor & Francis

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Review by: ter Horst, Sandra (2005-09-26)

In E-tivities, Gilly Salmon describes activities for motivating and activating online education. It was published more than a year ago and Salmon has been a speaker at various congresses over the past year. She is a professor at the Open University in the United Kingdom and at Glasgow Caledonian Business School. The book is concerned with the content of online learning, rather than the technology. She pitches her book beyond the hype of e-learning, a reason for me to want to analyse it in greater detail. I finish with a few comments on the applicability of Salmon's ideas for higher education.

The book has two parts. Part I describes how to design and implement e-tivities. Part II provides practical resources and examples of e-tivities. A more detailed description of part I is provided below.

Chapter 1: E-tivities for active learning
In this chapter, Salmon describes e-tivities as a framework for actively encouraging online learning and, as such, presents an all-encompassing concept with the following characteristics:

- A small amount of information, an invitation or a challenge
- An invitation to make an online contribution
- An interactive element, such as responding to other contributions
- All the instructions are contained in a single online message, including details of the purpose, the tasks and how to respond.

Salmon underscores the importance of teaching staff having plenty of motivation, perseverance and especially enthusiasm as preconditions for successfully using e-tivities.

Chapter 2: the five-stage model

This chapter is on the five-stage model, a model that Salmon introduced in her previous book (E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online). The model distinguishes between five stages of online learning, in which specific attention is paid to the moderator's role. Stage 1 – Access & Motivation. The main focus of this stage is on exploring the technology and access to it. Winning the learner's trust is the main goal. Time is also spent on motivating participants; e-tivities are organised around this. Stage 2 – Socialisation. Building on the first stage, this stage focuses on social processes and 'community building'. Stage 3 – Information Exchange. This stage revolves around exchanging information and performing tasks. Interaction takes place at two levels, namely with the course content and with other participants and the moderator.Stage 4 – Knowledge Construction. Knowledge development is central to this stage. Discussion activities and group dynamics play a major role too.Stage 5 – Development. This stage is characterised by reflection and group learning.

Chapter 3: E-tivities in action
In this chapter, Salmon provides an example of a course (on e-moderation) with e-tivities at various stages of the model. Besides attention, there is evaluation, which is mainly characterised in the examples by writing self-evaluation and self-reflection reports. Participants look back on the personal learning goals they defined at the start.

Chapter 4: Creating e-tivities
This chapter discusses various techniques and tips for creating e-tivities. It covers some basic principles that actually apply to any educational design: determine the goals; ensure that your assessment is in line with your goals; carefully time activities, and so forth. Salmon also mentions 'invitational messages' in connection with issuing instructions. Participants are invited to take part, rather than told what to do. Salmon emphasises the importance of making specific references to the activities that will be carried out. Reflection has an important place. Salmon distinguishes between 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in action'. Sparks are another feature. It is important in each e-tivity to work out which information the learner is starting with. This forms the spark, which serves as an invitation to link existing knowledge to new knowledge. Sparks may be models, theories, pieces of writing, illustrations, etc. It is important for them to be brief and it must be possible to incorporate them in invitational messages. It is especially important not to present too much information at once but instead to design several e-tivities, if necessary.The chapter presents many more guidelines for creating e-tivities, but mentioning them all is beyond the scope of this review. Salmon mentions an important conclusion at the end of the book: it's all about achieving the right combination of information, interaction and participation. This enables online learning to also become active online learning.

Part II includes 35 resources; these are handy and practical tips and examples, some of which are shown on site at the Resources of E-tivities.

...some closing comments on the book.
The five-stage model offers a useful framework for structuring and organising online activities. Thinking about when something can be deployed and at what stage is particularly important in online education. The model presented in the book is not new but its expansion with e-tivities is an enhancement. Salmon provides a fresh look at online education and stresses the personal character of learning. This view is not groundbreaking but, in

the context of online education, it is certainly an important point. E-tivities are personally tinted and the outcomes are not predetermined. The important points are that the learner is central and that online learning is a social process. The book contains numerous examples (from an e-moderating course), which are closely related to the actual subject matter. However, the question is how readily these examples can be applied to regular education. It is a pity that the book provides no pointers for gearing face-to-face and online activities, which is a major requirement. The books focus is very much on working online. This seems to make interpreting it for use in standard education less easy.

The highly informative Web site http://www.e-tivities.com/ on the book by no means makes the book redundant.

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