

GILLY SALMON

Activities

THE KEY TO ACTIVE ONLINE LEARNING

SECOND EDITION

ROUTLEDGE


E-tivities

The world of learning and teaching is at a watershed; confronted by challenges to previous educational models. One learning future lies in impactful, purposeful, active online activities, or ‘e-tivities’, that keep learners engaged, motivated and participating. Grounded in the author’s action research, *E-tivities, 2nd edition* assuredly illustrates how technologies shape and enhance learning and teaching journeys.

In this highly practical book, Gilly Salmon maintains her exceptional reputation, delivering another powerful guide for academics, teaching professionals, trainers, designers and developers in all disciplines. This popular text has been comprehensively updated; addressing key technological changes since 2002, offering fresh case studies and ‘Carpe Diem’—a unique approach to learning design workshops.

Readers will find *E-tivities, 2nd edition* a wonderful resource on its own or as a companion to the author’s bestselling *E-moderating, 3rd edition*.

Find e-tivities on the Web at e-tivities.com or connect at gillysalmon.com.

Professor Gilly Salmon is Pro Vice-Chancellor of Learning Transformations at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia.

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E-tivities

The Key to Active Online Learning

Second Edition

GILLY SALMON

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For Sophia

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Foreword

I am delighted that Gilly Salmon has decided to update this important book, which, along with its highly successful companion *E-moderating*, has done so much to improve the practice of e-learning and render it enjoyable for both learners and teachers. With forecasts suggesting that 80 per cent of US students will be taking courses online in 2014, along with the rest of the world going down the same track, this new edition is very timely.

Online learning was in its infancy in most institutions when the first edition was published in 2002. The most common model for producing e-learning courses was that individual academics created online versions of their regular classroom offerings—with as much or as little help as their institution saw fit to provide. Tony Bates called this the ‘Lone Ranger’ model and argued that it was unlikely to produce consistent quality at the course level, or coherent programmes.

Since those days online learning has achieved much greater maturity. Realizing the importance of online teaching to their future strategies, institutional leaders are now providing more effective frameworks for course development and student support.

Meanwhile, technology marches on. The first edition of *E-tivities* was published in the same year as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held the forum that coined the term ‘open educational resources’ (OER). The subsequent decade has seen the burgeoning of OER worldwide and the development of increasingly powerful tools for locating OER of relevance to a particular course. Today, creating online

courses is more about finding and adapting good OER than developing original content from scratch.

At the same time, the social media have strongly reinforced the role of inter-activity in online learning—what was called ‘computer-mediated conferencing’ at the time of the first edition.

These changes have combined to lead teachers to take naturally to the ideas of learning design, something that few bothered with a decade back. This new edition of *E-tivities* feeds that trend perfectly. It is easy to say that the Lone Ranger method of course development should give way to a team approach—less easy to show staff how to take that on. Gilly Salmon has spent a decade researching and testing approaches to make this transition both productive and enjoyable.

These results are presented in Chapter 5 in particular, where the Latin term *carpe diem* (seize the day) captures the idea that every moment of the time that teams are being trained together should be spent on designing something that could be put into immediate use with participants. With this technique, developing learning with technology is no longer a ‘solo’ activity but rather a design and ‘ecological’ experience.

The name of Gilly Salmon has become synonymous with effective, exciting and interactive e-learning. I am delighted that she has taken the trouble to share her most recent thinking and experience in this book and I commend it to a wide readership.

Sir John Daniel
28 January 2013

Preface to the second edition

This revision of *E-tivities* comes 10 years after its first publication in 2002. So much has happened in that period: thousands of e-tivities have been planned, executed and experienced by the growing worldwide army of online designers, learning technologists, e-moderators, researchers, commentators—and, of course, online learners.

Today, new learners, young, old and in between, are connected at the speed of light. Every individual is a node on a learning network. We can call them the Quantum Generation: they are making a quantum leap into an increasingly complex digital world. Most importantly, we finally need to acknowledge that *we are not trying to replicate the class or lecture room ‘learning’ experience of old. We can do it better. We’ve been far too coy about this to date.*

In the introduction to her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, Janet Murray (Murray, 1997) made the case that online literature promises us the very things and experiences that are essential to print-based literature, but in more intensified and more accessible ways. For Murray, hypertext, cyberdrama and the ‘literature’ of new technologies are not something radically at odds with print-based texts and culture—but rather an extension. She writes:

I am not among those eager for the death of the book . . . Nor do I fear it as an imminent event. The computer is not the enemy of the book. It

is the child of print culture, a result of the five centuries of organized, collective inquiry and invention that the printing press made possible.

(Murray, 1997, p. 8)

Over the past 10 years, as I've seen the truly enormous struggle to make the very best of new technologies and the transformation in learning that they can bring, I've often thought of this insight. I've had the privilege to watch—and indeed be part of—the yearly growth in commitment to ingenuity in learning among teachers and students fired by the availability of networking computing . . . a great creative wellspring of our special time. The media we now use, adapt and yearn for reflects opportunities for fresh types of expression, innovative forms of contributions and, yes, a revolution in the nature of knowledge itself. Murray pointed out that the personal computer promised to reshape knowledge in ways that sometimes complement and sometimes supersede the work of the book and the lecture hall (pp. 9–10). I like to think that the branches that I call e-tivities are making a positive and successful impact to new genres for learning.

If I have stimulated, cajoled or prompted people to make this quantum leap, or sometimes absolutely insisted that they do so, then I am both proud and extremely pleased. There's been much joy. But I also hold that this growing base of people, activities and experiences has not yet reached critical mass. So I felt compelled to write this second edition. The designers, dispensers and pedlars of online pedagogy have much more impact yet to make, through the principles and practices expressed in this book, if we are to make our full contribution to learning and teaching in the rather extraordinary second decade of the twenty-first century . . . and beyond.

So, no pressure then!

Let me take stock of—and paraphrase—what has happened in the world of learning and teaching in the last 10 years, because they explain why I think e-tivities are the key to the future success of active and interactive online learning.

In 2002, when the first edition of *E-tivities* was published, only around 40 per cent of educational institutions in developed countries had an online learning platform, that is, a learning management system, or virtual learning environment (LMS/VLE in this book). That year, one of today's popular platforms (Moodle) was first released. As I write, the latest version of the Moodle LMS/VLE exists and operates in 70,793 registered or verified sites, serving a staggering 63.2 million users in over 6.7 million courses overseen by in excess of 1.2 million teachers. There are many other popular platforms and products

being extensively put to work as well. Almost every institution around the world has a LMS/VLE and many are on their second or third product. Many are now adding a wide variety of mobile and social media options, too—ones that they are never going to actually own. Another quantum leap! So, an important substrate or technological capability layer on which e-tivities can be delivered and sustained has become ubiquitous during the last 10 years.

In 1994, the world's crude birth rate was determined to be around 21 births per year per 1,000 head of global population (www.index.mundi.com), when the world population was around 6 billion (www.prb.org). About 126 million people might have survived to reach the age of post-school education entry somewhere on the planet by 2012. Let's just consider higher education for a start. Each of the estimated 9,000 universities around the world would have to absorb a 'fresher' intake of around 14,000 students this year, and continue to do that in the coming years, to satisfy this need. Incidentally, more and more people are reaching the end of their compulsory schooling with the qualifications they need for further study. Most institutions in most countries do not have campuses, facilities or estates lying idle. Most colleges and universities typically take between 1,000 and 7,000 new students each year to optimize their capacity and make their learning businesses financially viable.

The world simply cannot provide the traditional campus-based experience to meet such a demand (see, for example, www.col.org/resources/speeches/pages). We can neither afford to build the extra physical facilities needed nor build that capacity fast enough to meet the extra demand. So, a 1,000-year-old model—in which those who wanted education and enlightenment, and could afford to do so, physically travelled to seats or centres of learning to be taught by, and to study under, the best and most knowledgeable academic minds—no longer has the infrastructure, resources and growth investment to meet and satisfy its 21st-century quantum market.

The answer—or part of it, anyway—to this problem lies in different modes of presentation and delivery of teaching and learning opportunities. Digital approaches can turn that 1,000-year-old model on its head: if the student cannot come to the institution, then the institution must reach out to the student. And why not, in doing so, and make education better, too? It can be done with relatively no cost and high value for learning technologies. Digitally enhanced course design, for globally connected and distributed communities of learners, requires e-tivities in paced and scheduled programmes. They are not lectures, they are not massive open online courses (MOOCs), but they are scalable and easy to do. Many small e-tivities add up to a quantum leap in learning and teaching experiences.

Ubiquitous, reliable, robust, capable and consumer-orientated technologies such as laptops, wireless connectivity and smart phones have been adopted and adapted by education. Once that marketplace's potential was recognized, other enabling technology developers and suppliers crowded the space with further products—and then fought a battle of price sensitivity and attractiveness with each other to secure their share of that vast, constantly changing and hugely lucrative market. Choice was never as rich as it is now, and never was capability and the rate of advance of those technology parameters as high as it is right now. This inexorable march of technology and its adoption by a globally connected consumer society has simply rendered less distinctive—and more permeable—the differences between one kind of consumer and the next. Today both undergraduates and CEOs carry a smart phone—both access the vast resources of the Internet in their daily lives and their devices never leave their sides. Extraordinarily rapidly, we have become used to the notion that you can easily and cheaply deliver messages, information, data or learning materials to someone via the connectivity that that person's device enjoys, pretty much wherever they may be at any time. As a result, our social world and the ways we live our lives are transformed.

So, given that these mature and low-cost technologies can return such a bang for each buck, we have a really marvellous and amazing opportunity to embrace and exploit them to the fullest; to advance and expand the degree, extent and reach of our educational provisions and deliver that opportunity to all. Why not engage the middle manager or corporate director in the acquisition of a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) via his smart phone, tablet and/or home and office laptop or iPad whilst he or she continues to realize the strategic goals of the corporation? Why not provide the budding scientist with brilliant new ways of understanding concepts? Why not use technologies to reach new customers for education, new markets for learning on the move, to render borders and boundaries, geographic location and access as irrelevant? And why not do it using and creating quantum knowledge?

The reason 'why not' is that we do not have 1,000 years of tradition to draw on. Our educational institutions are simply not structured for rapid change. There have been many failures of e-learning initiatives to date simply because the only learning design that is truly known and embedded is based on campus approaches. A rethink is required, a recreation of viable and preferred ways. Luckily there are now few constraints that—with technology as our partner and pedagogical ally—we cannot overcome to reach out and offer, like never before, the opportunity of an innovative educational experience that once would have been considered impossible or impracticable.

Since 2002, initiatives and policies aimed at increasing that proportion of the population entitled to go beyond formal school education, whilst simultaneously shifting much of the funding and cost of that experience from the state to individual students (over their working lives), have transformed what students expect.

Our future learners will continue to be those generations born into an ever more technologically and infrastructurally enriched world. Furthermore, the digital world and all its learning benefits cross and embrace all generations and wealth divides. The newer entrants will have known, experienced and become adept at using those technologies almost from birth, and will have unimaginable opportunities for true life-long learning. They will know less about any other older forms of information, knowledge and learning access and acquisition and be less indentured to or inclined to pursue those more antique and improbable ways. They will be more mobile than any generation before them and they will be simultaneously much more connected, available and communicable. The notion of a learning experience that dominates and influences where you live during that experience will not be something that the Quantum Generation holds to be valid.

Consumer expectations will be changed by having a university education that students subsequently pay for over the working life that their degrees have enabled them to have. This will introduce the belief amongst many students that, if they have to pay for it, then they might as well study while they work to pay off the cost of the experience. There will be a growth in part-time and work-located forms of study, both of which require connectivity and delivery to a remote or distant location rather than a campus and which may also require some interesting but not impossible to solve technology discussions with employers, corporations and companies. Investment in more campus-based teaching and learning capacity and buildings is only going to work for those institutions that consistently turn away two or more applicants for every graduate place that they offer whilst still fulfilling their government quotas and standards. There will instead be a huge shift, from using students' previous attainments as proxy for quality, to having to teach much better, and much more appropriately. For every other institution the future lies in delivering learning and teaching to remote and changing consumer locations, defined by where students are currently connected.

How can we solve or respond to this conundrum, no, this challenge? Surely a significant part of the answer lies in a shift towards a quality, achievable digital-first online delivery, new design, online collaborative tasks, online assignments, online student educational experiences—and that's what e-tivities can stimulate, encourage, support and make happen.

Have I begun to convince you of how different the world of learning is about to become, and how valid and valuable your understanding and adoption of the principles embedded in this book are going to be?

Read on—and enjoy! You can read the book in sequence or dip in and out. The book is in two main parts: e-tivities explanations in Part I and more (I hope) inspiration and practical stuff in Part II. Just check out the ‘Invitational’ framework on the next few pages first, please. Don’t forget to explore the e-tivities footprint on the Web through e-tivities.com and gillysalmon.com for community updates. This is how we shape the future. Be part of the Quantum Generation of learning design.

Gilly Salmon
Melbourne
January 2013

Acknowledgements

The research and practice for this second edition of the *E-tivities* book has spanned 10 very happy and productive years, during which time I have worked at two UK and two Australian universities. I was at the Open University Business School until 2004 and at the University of Leicester until 2010. For the past two years at I have worked in Australia: at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba and now at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. Each university in its own special way has not only given me space, resources, people and encouragement to develop and understand e-tivities and the five-stage model but also a cast of thousands, staff and students, who have listened, influenced, practised and contributed to the development of understandings of how to embed the models and frameworks.

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The original e-tivities research was carried out whilst I was working at the Open University Business School in the UK, one of the largest and greatest open pedagogical engines in the world. I was most fortunate to have such an environment in which to learn, teach and research (with study leave) in the 'early days' of online study.

Lots of different people contributed to the development and evolution of the Carpe Diem process, from its very early days and roots in Glasgow to the current branches, diffusion and expansion in many different places. You can read about it in Chapter 5. Especial mention to those at the University of Leicester including Alejandro Armellini, Simon Kear, Gabi Witthaus, Terese Bird and all the Media Zoo project people and partner academics for their commitment and contributions. Thanks especially to Catriona Burke and team at Kemmy Business School, Limerick; Sharmini Thurairasa and team at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne; Shirley Reushle and team

at the University of Southern Queensland and Simon Kear now at Goldsmiths London. You can read their stories and case studies in Chapter 5.

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My support at Swinburne University includes the extraordinary work and contribution from Janet Gregory, who was Swinburne's first official trainee Carpe Diem facilitator and got very successful e-moderating courses off the ground very quickly. She even insists she enjoyed it. Ben Mackenzie has worked tirelessly and effectively to get the concepts of active online learning effectively transferred to Swinburne Online, through a process we call 'Duet'. Derek Whitehead and colleagues from the library at Swinburne are so helpful in exploring the brave new world of digital resources.

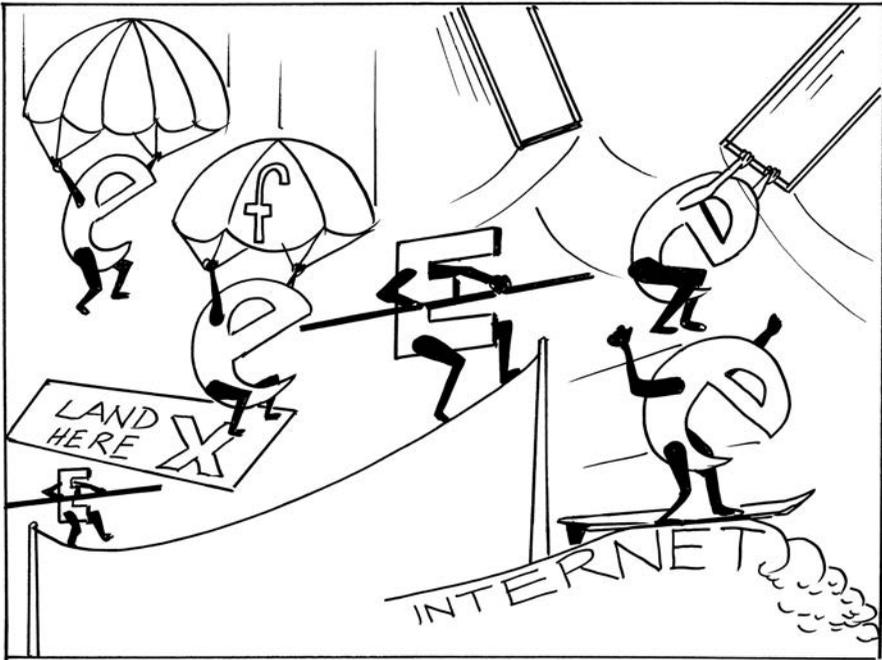
Professor David Hawkrige of the Open University and the University of Leicester has once again patiently and speedily offered his unending wisdom and advice on my maybe over-enthusiastic writing. Phemie Wright has worked with me as researcher and project helper throughout the development of this second edition of *E-tivities*. This book simply would not have happened without her insights and hard work. Thanks to both of these people who in their own quiet ways have hugely impacted on the world of e-tivities.

Rod Angood drew the pictures. You can find them in colour on e-tivities.com and visiondirecting.com.

Throughout the development and writing I have learned from and been encouraged by my fully digitally connected family, Rod, Glenn, Emily and Paula. Love and thanks, everyone. A special mention to my new granddaughter, Sophia Kate Lily, born in August 2012, to whom this book is dedicated. She can already Skype.

Note on use of shaded text

Throughout this book, I use real online messages from courses that I design or run as illustrations. I indicate a screen message by shading, as in this paragraph. Messages have had to be pruned to reduce the amount of space they take up in the book, but I have not attempted to correct their grammar or informal language. By the way, looking at selected messages in print after the interactive event makes them seem more organized than they really were. Live e-tivities are likely to be messier!



(All e-tivities images by Rod Angood at www.visiondirecting.com)

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Part I:

INTRODUCING E-TIVITIES

2 Introducing e-tivities

Table 1.1 E-tivity framework: the invitation

<i>Numbering, sequencing, pacing</i>
Title
Purpose
Task summary
Spark
Individual contribution
Dialogue begins
E-moderator interventions
Schedule and time
Next

Table 1.2 E-tivity framework: how to create an invitation

<i>Numbering, pacing and sequencing</i>	<i>Number as follows: week.sequence of task (e.g. 2.4 would be week 2, task 4)</i>
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enticement to open the invitation to take part. • Very brief descriptor. • Be inventive and creative, but keep it very short.
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain. If you complete this activity, you will be able to . . . • You will understand better how to . . . • You will find it essential for assignment X . . . • Use verbs! • Link directly with your outcomes and/or objectives for the unit, module, course and programme.
Brief summary of overall task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you find you have more than one major activity or question, divide into more e-tivities. • Clear, brief instructions on how to take part and what to do. • One question or task per message. • When you have written this part, check that the task is self-contained.
Spark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spark to light the fire for the topic, interesting little intervention. • Directly link with topic for this week. • Opportunity to expose 'content' but with the purpose of a spark to start a dialogue with others.
Individual contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give clear instructions to the individual participant as to what he or she should do in response to the spark. • Specify exactly what you are expecting the participant to do and in what media (e.g. wiki, discussion board, audio file, etc.) and by when (i.e. the day and date). Tell them the length of contribution expected. • Create a link from this part of the invitation to the location for posting.
Dialogue begins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request response from an individual to others, what kind of response, how long, where and by when. • Key point: students come online to see if others have read and responded. Make this happen. • Create a link from this part of the invitation to the location for posting the response to others.
E-moderator interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly indicate what the e-moderator will do and when. • Explain that the e-moderator will summarize, give feedback and teaching points and close the e-tivity, and when this will happen.
Schedule and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total calendar/elapsed time allowed for this e-tivity. • Completion date. • Estimate total study time required (e.g. 2 x 1 hour).
Next	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to next e-tivity. • You can suggest additional resources to help with the task—indicate whether they are required or optional, place the links at the end of the invitation.

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Chapter 1

E-tivities for active online learning

You can bask in the glory of happy, engaged and achieving online students. This book explains and explores e-tivities, the name I give to frameworks for enabling active and participative online learning by individuals and groups. E-tivities are important for the online teaching and learning world because they deploy useful, well-rehearsed principles and pedagogies for learning as well as your choice of networked technologies.

E-tivities do not remove the help and input of more knowledgeable humans—the people I called the ‘e-moderators’—but make their work more focused and productive. They focus on the learners—the people I call the participants, who are contributing, providing, reworking, interpreting, combining most of the knowledge. They overturn the idea that learning depends on one big expert and his/her conveying of knowledge.

E-tivities enable enjoyable and productive online learning for the greatest number of participants at the lowest cost. E-tivities are highly scalable. They are based on the strong idea that knowledge is constructed by learners through and with others. Such processes can happen through online environments just as well as in physical or formal learning and teaching environments, probably better. They work well combined with real-life and real-world environments.

You will find here the original e-tivities research and the learning that has emerged from extensive and intensive 12 years of practice, so you can design and deliver e-tivities for yourself—easily, quickly and effectively.

6 Introducing e-tivities

E-tivities were first developed using text-based computer-mediated environments such as bulletin boards or forums. That's the easiest place to start. I go on to describe how to use them for many other platforms. Once you get the idea, you will be able to use them in many different ways.

Learning resources and materials (what people once called 'content') are involved in the design and delivery of e-tivities, but these are to provide a stimulus or a start (the 'spark') to the interaction and participation rather than as the focus of the activity. So e-tivities give us the final break point from the time-consuming 'writing' of online courses.

Introducing e-tivities

The boxes below give you a quick introduction to e-tivities: who they're for, what they can be, where they are valuable, what their purposes are and what you need to produce them.

E-tivities are for:

- at least two people working and learning together in some way, and usually many more;
- participants who are not in the same locations. But e-tivities are also easily combined with location-based learning and teaching activities;
- a wide range of people, including those with disabilities who can be assisted through the technologies. The more diverse, the better the e-tivities work;
- everyone: e-tivities have attracted the interest of learning designers, academics, teachers and trainers from many sectors and levels of education.

E-tivities are:

- designed in advance of the participants' online arrival;
- quick and easy to produce, making the work of the tutor, or the person I call the e-moderator, much faster, easier and more productive;
- suitable for entirely online programmes, for integrated and blended learning, mobile learning and everything in between;
- cheap to create and run;
- scalable and customizable;
- efficient for designers, participants and e-moderators;
- reusable and easy to try out, recycle, reuse and change: they improve the more they are deployed and adapted.

E-tivities are valuable for:

- forming a whole course or programme when sequenced with care; also useful if you want to try out one or two online activities;
- encouraging a very wide variety of contributions and perspectives and for tapping into participants' up-to-date ideas and authentic experiences;
- replacing or supporting all other learning and teaching methods;
- any discipline, professionals or field of learning and for all topics.

The purposes of e-tivities are to:

- enable academics, designers, curriculum developers and teachers to design for online participation by their students;
- provide learners with an effective scaffold to support them in achieving the learning outcomes;
- enable learners and e-moderators to work together on key learning resources;
- promote a learner-centred, task or problem-based approach to online learning (moving away from content-centric design);
- challenge and motivate participants to critique, contribute, review and consolidate ideas in a focused way;
- increase learner engagement;
- save staff time;
- make the course productive and fun;
- easily deploy the newer technologies such as social media;
- easily find purposeful ways of using freely available, topical and/or fun resources within the learning design;
- quickly incorporate sound pedagogical principles into teaching and learning, including into large-scale online approaches such as MOOCs (massive open online courses).

To design e-tivities, you need to:

- have a way of thinking about the purpose and process of each e-tivity, and get it into draft format (the storyboard);
- work out how to place it ultimately into a learning sequence (the scaffold);
- write it in such a way that it can be placed online and participants can follow it (the invitation).

Who's who in e-tivities

Participants

I refer to all online learners, students and contributors taking part in e-tivities by the term 'participants'.

E-tivities designers

Designers create the future! The person who understands the purpose of the online encounters through the learning outcomes and objectives needs to be involved in designing. This person might be the learning designer, academic or teacher who is setting up the online experience and who ultimately may also be the e-moderator. Sometimes there are two or three people and others working together—e-tivities get designed well with three!

Students can also help with design. When they become experienced, they too can become e-tivity designers.

Or, if large numbers of online participants are involved, the person or small team doing the designing of the e-tivities may be different from the person or persons delivering the course. Sometimes one small team can design and prepare e-tivities and then many e-moderators may be needed to deliver them.

Small multiple professional teams can work together on e-tivities—we call this process 'Carpe Diem' (see Chapter 5, page 73 and Resources for Practitioners, page 186).

E-moderators

I call the trainers, instructors, facilitators or teachers 'e-moderators' because they intervene and support the e-learning. The name describes the different role that each adopts online when compared to teaching face-to-face. There is much more about e-moderators in my 2011 book, *E-moderating*.

The role of the e-moderator is the promoter and mediator of the learning through e-tivities, rather than a content expert. The e-moderator needs to know enough about the topic to weave (adding value by pulling contributions together), summarize (closing off a topic, giving teaching points), give feedback and support and enable development, pacing and challenge to happen.



Stories from the front line I

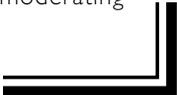
Swinburne Online (swinburneonline.com.au) in Australia provides university programmes based on e-tivities and the five-stage model (see Chapter 2), creating an immersive online experience for participants. Chapter 5 describes more ways of designing e-tivities through collaborative teams, which form the basis of Swinburne Online's design work.

Professor Kay Lipson, Academic Dean for Swinburne Online, tells us more:

In order to ensure that students are exposed to a consistent, pedagogically sound online learning experience, Swinburne Online has successfully developed an explicit set of principles that guide both learning design and delivery.

The learning design process is a collaboration between academics who are the university's discipline specialists and a learning design team with expertise in online pedagogy, educational technology, online resource acquisition and copyright. Together they design and develop an online learning experience for students that is scaffolded by e-tivities. Each e-tivity is carefully created to ensure that students are engaging meaningfully with their learning materials, their learning advisors and each other.

Learning delivery is conceptualized as a learning journey undertaken by the students and their learning advisors, taking a path navigated by e-tivities. The learning advisors take the role of e-moderators. They facilitate, question and encourage their participant groups. They aim to develop in each student and group an understanding of the relevant knowledge domain as well as a capacity for reflection and self-evaluation. Many of the learning advisors are not traditional academics, but experienced practitioners in their field, trained for their e-moderating roles.



Technology for e-tivities

E-mail, chat groups, bulletin boards and computer-mediated conferencing were developed to enable interaction between people. If a voice or text message is sent, the writer expects a response from some other person. This key characteristic can be harnessed for the purpose of interaction and engagement.

Some of the tools and platforms that we deploy are multipurpose, such as learning management systems (LMSs) and virtual learning environments

(VLEs). Throughout this book I refer to them interchangeably as LMS/VLE. Many others were developed for social purposes or for entertainment, communication or business. More about those in Chapter 4, page 57.

I hope to show you that the technologies for e-tivities can promote engagement and activity if they are appropriately used. Promoting robust and usable knowledge through engaging learners in authentic tasks and situations is critically important (Herrington, Reeves and Oliver, 2010).

Combining new ideas about mediation for learning and teaching through technologies and well-established learning theories results in fantastic possibilities, but they need a little human time and energy to get them to work. High-quality interaction, full participation and reflection do not happen simply by providing the technology; hence the need to design e-tivities carefully, to reduce barriers and to enhance the technology's potential.

Many teachers and trainers at all levels of education are influenced strongly by how they themselves were taught. Most have not grown up learning to take an active part in remote or scattered groups, nor those spanning many different time zones. Many educators miss opportunities for working comfortably and effectively online because they assume that online co-operation and collaboration need to follow similar patterns to classroom interaction (Ehrmann, 2012). The patterns and processes of e-tivities are different, although they draw on the best traditions of active group learning.

Some students are concerned about learning online, even those who are familiar with social media. They see reduced social contact in learning contexts as a real threat. They are anxious about the lack of stimulus and fun from their 'buddies' and the potential loss of a special relationship with their teachers, trainers and professors. Somehow, without them, they believe a little magic seems lost! Hence learners need support to develop the skills of working together through interactive technologies of all kinds as well as online contact with leaders and teachers. E-tivities are an answer because they focus on contributing and achieving together.

Creating the future through learning design

E-tivities are best designed and produced in advance of the participants arriving online. Good design processes result in more explicit and higher-quality activity by the participants and enable the development of more effective learning environments and interventions (Conole, 2012). By becoming an e-tivity designer, you are building in a *quality* learning experience.

E-tivities acknowledge teaching ‘as a design science’ based on continuous collaborative improvement and adaption in practice (Laurillard, 2012, pp. 8–9) and are a way of accessing and digitally applying teachers’ creativity, vision and inspiration (Scharmer, 2009). E-tivities are very firmly rooted in learner-centred and technology-enhanced design in an increasing complex, rapidly changing digital world (Sharpe, Beetham and De Freitas, 2010). E-tivities are a way of actually taking part in the ‘game changing’ that is gathering pace across all types of educational provision (Oblinger, 2012; Bonk, 2009; Ellis and Goodyear, 2010). They offer a viable, principled and practical approach. They acknowledge human systems for learning by developing and evolving; they tend towards order and organization, but via messy experimentation rather than forced imposition. Order arises out of shared values and common interests (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009).

Preparing effective online learning material is a very expensive business in terms of both actual and opportunity costs. It’s brought many organizations to their knees! Few academics or teachers have all the necessary skills, the time or the desire to spend months creating texts and video. Usually there will need to be an ongoing project with one or more subject experts, instructional designers and Web developers. If innovation is required, then add mobile app developers, information specialists, video developers and more.

Some people are very interested in comparisons between working online and traditional face-to-face learning. Others want to talk about the differences between online and print-based distance learning. In practice the benefits and costs are very different compared to campus-based learning. One thing we do know is that the cost of traditional ways of producing materials for online courses is very high, but savings can be made on ‘delivery’ (Rumble, 2010). E-tivities help with saving costs because they use existing resources, are reusable and adaptable and are based on the participants’ exchange of knowledge.

Quality assurance and evaluation processes are essential too, but they add time and require extra effort. Surprisingly, many teaching and learning organizations still start by developing resources of this kind, as they seem to be the safest ‘way in’ to e-learning. Then they find that there are no quick fixes, only expensive experiments and ‘pilots’ that fail to lead to ‘scale-up’.

Rather than pursuing such developments, organizations should know that e-tivities are lower risk, lower cost and a better place to begin—they inform prototyping and decision making too. If e-tivity development is built into a structured local team process, then capability is built up across the organization (see Chapter 5).

The participants' experience of learning through e-tivities

Working with others online can be playful, liberating and releasing. Online participants are often more willing to try things out in a dynamic way than they would be face-to-face, which means that e-tivities can be more fun and still promote learning. Emotions can often surface and be expressed when they could not do so in face-to-face situations. We know that involving emotions helps to promote reflectiveness (Moon, 2006).

In the search for engagement of learners, e-tivities have proven to have a special place. New online participants wrote to me about their experiences:

It is a very special and unique experience for me. To send a message to our online conference is like talking (writing) right out in the air—to everyone and no one! I'm just crawling about online . . . And when I get an answer back . . . I'm amazed! KO

Excuse me where exactly am I? Do I go through a new kind of looking glass into my lecture hall? Why do my words dance as if on a stage? MO

Thank you for the invitation to take part. I know what I'm meant to do, and even who I am meant to do it with . . . but tell me, where are the drinks? PP

It's fun, it's new. I like being involved. Before, the telephone was the master, now its text on the screen. My own personal access to the world! So much contact, so much at my fingertips. I feel skippy inside. It's so unexpected sometimes. It's cool. PS

Participants who are working in a language other than their own have a particularly sharp learning curve. This participant reported her experience:

Last year I felt that before I could post anything, it had to be perfect! Then sometimes I was too late, simply because the discussion had moved on. This year, I saw native speakers make mistakes too. They mistype

words or they write as they would speak, and then I felt more self-confident! I said to myself, 'It needn't be perfect, why don't you just try and join in?' And this is what I did! Maybe sometimes it was nonsense, but at least I tried, and I think text communication can only work online if you say something and somebody else says, 'yes, but' . . . and then maybe make you think again. So it was also new to me that you can write something and it's still like speaking to somebody, and you can always correct yourself or add things. GB

Teachers as e-tivity designers

Many traditional teachers are surprised at how much learning can go on through structured online networking. You might be interested in this e-mail I had from a colleague, a very experienced distance learning teacher in the UK Open University Business School.

Stories from the front line 2

Transforming the group experience

Don led a team that produced a residential weekend school; then, with a colleague, he turned to the task of preparing an online equivalent of the residential school. He e-mailed me about his experiences.

We thought our job was to write the programme for the residential school. If we thought about the online version at all, we saw it as something that would be an imitation of the residential. We never said 'pale imitation', but I sense that the categorization was there in our minds.

How wrong we were. How much the preparation—the design, the reworking of the residential material—and the observation of the online school in action have changed my mind. The online school revealed itself as a remarkable event. As we worked on the design, and as we subsequently observed the virtual exchanges, so the remarkable features of the online environment came into view, one by one.

At residential schools, the contributions by the students are oral, short and immediate. During the sales and marketing role-play exercise, students air their initial thoughts on the task, and the only sources of

14 Introducing e-tivities

ideas, concepts and models from the course are the students' own memories. One member typically captures these ideas, in abbreviated form, on a flip chart. By contrast, online, everyone has a full record of everything that has been 'said'. The contributions are considered in a way that is not possible at face-to-face schools. There is scope for thoughtfulness and for reflection.

The role of the face-to-face tutor also differs from the role of e-moderator. At the residential school, the tutor may join a group for a while, sense what's going on and contribute as judgement directs, then leave. The tutor also acts as a 'postperson'—to deliver the handouts! Because the e-moderator hears (reads) everything that is said (written) and can contribute, in an equally permanent fashion, without disturbing the discussion, the online experience challenges this familiar model. A student posts a thoughtful message, which is read not only by the group but by the e-moderator too. Another follows this. The e-moderator acts more as a commentator than a facilitator in such a circumstance. Online, not only does the e-moderator post the handout but he or she can also comment on it—act as a mediator between the content and the learning.

Don Cooper, Open University Business School



Accepting the challenge

The work from which this book is derived is very much in the action research tradition. Action research involves the exploration of many aspects of online teaching through research into practice and experience. You can read about my methods in Salmon (2002b, 2004 and 2011). I have tried as much as possible to weave the principles into practice-based advice and examples.

To be successful in designing and running e-tivities you will need some passion and commitment. Designing for online involves shifting time about and changing patterns of how you work with colleagues and students. It involves setting up a computer and getting the software to work to your satisfaction, which may include going cap-in-hand to others for help. You may need to rethink your teaching and consider what is really important about the subject matter you want to teach. I hope to shine a light on a pathway for making all this more manageable and productive. It's great fun when it works. It has its own momentum. Just try it—it'll turn you into an action researcher, collaborating with your learners. Indeed, I think it's time to harness the power of online learning for our purposes. You may think this fanciful, but read on and then try it and see. This book is full of the magic of those who have trodden the path just Internet moments before you. Just try it.

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