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Using Electronic Communication Effectively in your Teaching

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This document has been prepared by Shirley Reushle, a lecturer in flexible learning with the Department of Further Education and Training, Faculty of Education, USQ.

(Please note: It is acknowledged that you will face a variety of learning environments and that some of this advice will not apply to your situation.)

1 Using an electronic discussion facility

The University of Southern Queensland has offered online units via the Internet since 1997. The content of this document is based on current literature and the professional and personal experiences and opinions of some online teachers at USQ. We recognise that the issues which have emerged are a result of only 'scratching the surface' of teaching and learning online. Your experiences within your context will add to this body of knowledge.

1.1 What is an electronic discussion facility?

An electronic discussion facility is a form of computer mediated communication (CMC), **which** enables communication via the Internet. This document discusses **asynchronous** communication where learners can participate at any time of the day or night and **synchronous**, or real time, discussion.

The main difference between using electronic discussion facilities and the interactions that would be available to you and your students in an on-campus tutorial experience is the lack of contextual cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and body language. Interaction (teacher/student; student/student; student/content) is an important factor in facilitating the learning process.

2 Advantages of using an electronic discussion facility

- 2.1 Collaborative learning
- 2.2 Promotes critical thinking
- 2.3 Flexibility
- 2.4 Reflective thought
- 2.5 Constructivism
- 2.6 Access and equity
- 2.7 Interaction
- 2.8 Social presence and community online
- 2.9 Assessment
- 2.10 Immediacy of feedback
- 2.11 Currency and permanency

<i>TOPIC</i>	<i>DISCUSSION/SUGGESTIONS</i>
2.1 Collaborative learning	Students work as a team to help each other learn. This enables the 'expertise base' to be distributed amongst the members of the learning community. Aim for both teacher and student to be part of the learning community. Enables group discussion, brainstorming, sharing understandings, clarifying misconceptions, and developing knowledge in a collaborative way. Provide opportunities within the electronic environment for learners to form collaborative groups, both homogenous (e.g. interest/need) and heterogeneous. Learning is both social and intellectual.

<p>IDEAS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative tools - see Curtis Bonk's site http://php.indiana.edu/~cjbok • Resources for Moderators and Facilitators of Online Discussion at http://www.emoderators.com/ • Strategies to Build an Online Community - see Appendix 3 	
2.2 Promotes critical thinking	Learners can work together to solve problems, argue about interpretations, gain multiple perspectives, share understandings and negotiate meaning
2.3 Flexibility	Can enable a sense of flexibility; an important consideration for those participants with multiple roles and obligations Participants can connect to a host computer from the comfort of their own homes and at a time that is most convenient to them.
2.4 Reflective thought	Asynchronous communication offers opportunities for reflective thought and reasoned response Provides a chance to consult outside reference materials prior to providing comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schon, D.A. 1991, <i>The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action</i>, Arena, Basic Books, New York. 	
2.5 Constructivism	Can promote a constructivist approach to teaching and learning - where students build their own base of knowledge and understanding. Negotiation enables learners to construct knowledge and modify existing knowledge structures.
2.6 Access and equity	Can promote a sense of equality among participants. Each participant has an equal voice (whether students take advantage of this is another matter). This may not happen in a traditional classroom where there may be competition for 'air time'. Responses have a greater likelihood of being judged for their substance and merit. However, as in any learning environment, individuals can dominate an electronic discussion and the facilitator requires skill in order to 'control' this. Can provide greater access to learning opportunities for those students at a distance.
2.7 Interaction	Enables the engagement of a learner with content, teacher, other learners through technological interfaces. Important to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish learner needs and goals early in course. • Provide personal constructive comments, suggestions, feedback, observations, etc. • Maintain a 'co-learner' relationship with students. Learner-instructor interaction is one of cognitive-apprenticeship. Learner-learner interaction promotes collaborative learning. Learner-interface interaction requires operability, ability to engage, ease of use and functionality.

<p>2.8 Social presence and community online</p>	<p>Social presence refers to the degree to which participants (teachers and learners) are perceived as 'real' persons through online 'encounters' and interactions.</p> <p>Social skills of learners and instructors contribute to the building of a learning community where each person and their contributions are accepted and valued. This helps reduce the feeling of isolation in the learner. An 'intimacy' among participants can emerge from using the groups.</p> <p>Sometimes consider personalising your introductory message by mentioning what is going on around you (the weather, a current festival e.g. Carnival of Flowers). Providing a home page web site of your local area e.g. Toowoomba has a site at http://www.toowoomba.qld.gov.au/ is a useful welcoming strategy.</p> <p>Students need to be familiar with online etiquette (or 'netiquette' – see Appendix 1).</p> <p>Important to provide opportunities for formal and informal communication, both synchronous and asynchronous</p> <p>Important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure students have gained access to course materials • Ensure students introduce themselves to the learning community - perhaps use a Student Profile form • Respond promptly to students' queries • Maintain a 'visible' presence online, through frequent communication • Model appropriate means of communication i.e. 'netiquette' • Encourage participation in on-line discussions and tasks • Provide timely feedback • Provide summative syntheses of discussions • Conduct periodic progress checks on students individually (by email) • Provide warmth and friendliness when communicating with students
<p><i>IDEAS:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use of introductory discussion forums</i> • <i>Unit leader maintain a personal home page</i> <p><i>Lani Gunawardena, University of New Mexico has done a lot of work in this area</i></p>	
<p>2.9 Assessment</p>	<p>When contributions to online discussion are assessable, learners will tend to contribute meaningfully to group discussions</p> <p>Examples of assessment instruments, with students participating in set discussion tasks, include adding constructive comments to a discussion on a set topic, critiquing other students' work, participating in reflective activities - need to consider different cohort groups and different modes of delivery</p>
<p>2.10 Immediacy of feedback</p>	<p>Electronic discussion facilities enable reasonably immediate comments, responses etc. on student contributions - enables students to initiate corrective action, reinforces the positives and focus on how performance can be improved in the future</p>

2.11 Currency and permanency	Can provide a medium that is current, uses today's issues and resources and not just those available months previously (when study materials may have been initially prepared). The permanent transcript that is created provides participants with a record of all the discussion points that may be saved for further study.

3 Some teaching and learning strategies

- 3.1 More learner-centred approach
- 3.2 Reflective thinking
- 3.3 Supportive environment and confidentiality
- 3.4 Facilitation of learning
- 3.5 Consider your communication style
- 3.6 Setting parameters
- 3.7 Using a virtual (synchronous) chat facility
- 3.8 Other hints
- 3.9 Wrapping up

TOPIC	DISCUSSION/SUGGESTIONS
<p>3.1 More learner-centred approach</p>	<p>If your teaching style is primarily didactic (teacher at the front giving lectures), you may end up using the discussion area as a way of giving those lectures. As a result, you may find that learners will not actively participate in discussion with each other and only use the group/s to download your notes. This will not take full advantage of the opportunities for discussion and the shared building of knowledge. Perhaps provide learners with a package that includes your notes, some annotated web sites as additional resources, etc. (print/electronic) and use the discussion area to discuss issues that arise from the notes.</p> <p>Encourage students to share resources. Set up a Shared Resource area - learners and teachers can share resources (web sites, books, journal articles, etc.) with brief annotations. These resources can be evaluated by others and used for future re-developments of the materials.</p> <p>Use an approach that is more learner-centred - one that shifts the focus from you to your learners. For example: "Jayne and Jeff have helped us focus on three of the five issues that are critical to the point we are discussing. Let's now discuss the remaining two issues before we move on to the next topic. Can we hear from Neil and Denise?"</p> <p>This approach not only recognises the contributions of those who have already participated, but also encourages other participants to become involved in the discussion.</p>
<p><i>Resources from Uni SA at http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/learnng/index.htm</i></p>	
<p>3.2 Reflective thinking</p>	<p>Learners often find difficulty in applying their learning and theoretical knowledge to practice. They often miss opportunities to relate experience to prior learning. Most learners are confronted on a daily basis with incidents that present learning opportunities and have to be helped to recognise learning opportunities. A learning opportunity is an incident or event that presents a learner with an opportunity to reflect "on/in action".</p> <p>You can do this by having students keep learning logs or reflection records. Integrate assignments or class activities into the unit design that will stimulate the processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, such as analysing case studies, designing a project or critiquing a piece of literature. These can be done independently or in groups.</p>

<p>3.3 Supportive environment and confidentiality</p>	<p>The learning environment needs to be welcoming and supportive and learners need to know that their thoughts will not be shared outside the class unless permission of the writer is obtained - learners need to feel safe. It is important to establish guidelines at the beginning of the unit that are consistent with the area in which you are engaged. For example, when discussing personal or professional experiences in the health or law areas, referring to patients or clients by their real names would not be acceptable. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are critical.</p>
<p>3.4 Facilitation of learning</p>	<p>You may feel that you need to jump in immediately and answer questions or respond to student submissions. However, hold back. If you encourage dialogue among class participants, you will probably discover that someone in the group has an appropriate response or will at least begin. In other words, you may be pleasantly surprised at how effectively learners use each other as resources. Think of your role as a facilitator of learning. Although you may be the content expert (not to mention an advanced learner), learners benefit from an approach which involves them in the learning process - in other words, active learning. You may also choose to reply with questions/prompts to other ideas or perspectives.</p>
<p>3.5 Communication style</p>	<p>Encourage learners to ask questions if they don't understand and be thorough in your explanations. It is likely that if one person is unclear, others may be as well. Model and reward this kind of behaviour in order to reduce the element of fear. Positive reinforcement is critical to generating a safe learning environment and a climate that promotes learning. Learners, especially in an online medium, are very concerned that what they write may appear stupid or not be of a high enough quality for the class. Your approach, your communication style, and the message that you are trying to convey are all very important in reducing the pressures that often accompany learning experiences. Try to send private messages as well to reinforce the point that you are interested in the learner. However, encourage learners to post most of their questions and comments to the appropriate discussion area. Most questions are not of a personal nature, and others may benefit from reading them and the responses to them. It is also possible that someone else in the class will have an answer. Try to respond to your learners in a short period of time; usually within 2 to 3 days is recommended as the outside timeline. If learners do not receive a response in a reasonable time frame, they may get unnecessarily frustrated, especially those who are new to the technology and nervous about messages being 'lost in cyberspace'. If you do not have time to send a full reply immediately, consider posting a brief note - 'Thanks for your comment, Sandra - I'll get back to you soon'.</p>

<p>3.6 Setting parameters</p>	<p>Let learners know how often you expect to be online and when you will not be available. If possible, let learners know your 'office hours' in case they wish to reach you by phone. It is also good netiquette for participants to let you and each other know if they plan to be offline for an extended period of time.</p> <p>Suggest how often you expect learners to participate. It is important to outline, from the very beginning, your expectations of the learners and what they can expect of you.</p>
<p>3.7 Using a virtual (synchronous) chat facility</p>	<p>Provide the ground rules in an email or announcement prior to the chat session.</p> <p>Frequently prompt for feedback from all students.</p> <p>Ask topic specific questions to individual students.</p> <p>Use humour and light heartedness.</p> <p>If possible, have two tutors/instructors in the chat - one dealing with the main thread; the other picking up the student questions. This allowed the former to prepare the next line of chat text while the other dealt with the questions.</p> <p>Provide multiple chat sessions on the same topic. Not everyone can make specified times/days.</p> <p>Set aside 10 minutes to answer questions at the end of a chat session.</p> <p>Use emoticons such as :-) ;-) %`) =) to indicate light heartedness/smiling. This helps avoid misinterpretation of statements - especially if statements are directed to individual students.</p> <p>The smaller the chat, the better.</p>
<p>• Time converter: <i>A useful site is at http://www.timezoneconverter.com/ which shows a map of the world and related times. This is an important consideration once you are teaching across time zones.</i></p>	

<p>3.8 Other hints</p>	<p>Encourage learners to post most of their questions and comments to the appropriate discussion forum/thread/group and not to you as a personal email. Most questions are not of an individual, personal nature, and others may benefit from reading messages and the responses to them. It is also possible that someone else in the class will have an answer. Beware - if you do build regular email correspondence into the unit, particularly a unit with large numbers, you may get a flood of emails that you cannot possibly handle. Group discussion can facilitate interaction without the need for you to respond personally to every posting.</p> <p>Keep an eye on the activity level of each of the participants, especially at the beginning. If learners have not logged in for a while, you may wish to phone them as opposed to sending them another email message.</p> <p>Keep moving the discussion forward.</p> <p>You may want to place a limit on the length of messages. This helps students think through their messages and to be concise. However, allow for elaboration when it is necessary.</p> <p>Avoid solid screens of text. Break up the screen by using line spaces, 'dot' points or numbering, etc.</p> <p>To boost confidence and help learners feel respected as contributing and valued members, refer to them by name and use their responses as a basis for further discussion. Refrain from being critical of a student's performance on an activity. Instead, offer another perspective and ask for further comment or elaboration. When possible, share a personal experience that might illustrate a better response to an activity.</p> <p>There are times when a message warrants being sent more than once and communicated in a different way.</p> <p>Use mailing lists and other bulk mailing devices. The timesavings are obvious.</p> <p>Build a personal response library of often-used comments.</p> <p>Delegate - you are not the only person capable of teaching the student. Many students ask their teacher technical questions (how do I send email? How do I find Yahoo?). Set up online units so they receive this support locally or centrally (e.g. through online FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions or links to the Student Help Desk).</p>
<p>3.9 Wrapping up</p>	<p>And when the unit comes to an end...? You might wish to send a final message to the class as a whole and share your views on how the unit had gone and thank them for their participation. The sense of community in an online environment can be surprisingly strong and if the group has bonded well, it may be hard for some participants to say goodbye.</p> <p>Encourage student evaluation of the unit - their input is critical in order to inform redesign decisions.</p>

4 Other considerations and issues

- 4.1 Analysis and planning
- 4.2 Vulnerability of participants
- 4.3 Adult learners
- 4.4 Multiple cohorts
- 4.5 Managing groups
- 4.6 Access/user interface issues (download times, etc.)
- 4.7 Vicarious learners

ISSUE	CONSIDERATIONS and PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
<p>4.1 Analysis and planning</p>	<p>Learners will vary in their experiences with computer technology. Some will be novices, others will have had some experience while still others may be highly competent, challenged and excited by the technology.</p> <p>You need to be able to use the technology yourself. Make sure you have a good understanding of the problems that learners might face. If they have any questions you cannot answer, consult with someone who can. You should not be expected to act as a technical adviser. Mechanisms are in place to help learners with technical problems. There is online help and FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) available as well as a student help desk.</p> <p>Plan, but be flexible. It is not unusual to spend the first week or two having participants introduce themselves, get comfortable with using the technology, and organise themselves while slowly getting into the content of the unit. If you planned to get into the content of the unit immediately, you may need to rethink that. You may need to adapt your approach in order to meet the diverse needs of the group. The 'help' process is so important as is the willingness among participants to share ignorance to learn more!</p> <p>Know who your learners are. If this is not possible, you may suggest at the beginning of the unit that the learners introduce themselves and comment upon their knowledge and experience. Of course, you should do the same by describing your interests, educational background, and experiences. Introductions work well as icebreakers. This also comes in useful if and when you wish to establish groups. Some participants who discover that they share common interests may wish to work together. Encourage learners to share further thoughts with each other and not necessarily direct all their responses only to you. Students can indicate their country/state/town as a way for them to form study circles. Use templates for submissions to impose some order and structure on the discussion area. Consider providing templates that delineate the key items to address and request a response header that will enable a quick search of the discussion.</p>

<p>4.2 Vulnerability of participants</p>	<p>It is common for those new to the online environment to feel vulnerable and/or inadequate. Educators and learners alike may not be skilled at keyboarding and feel somewhat frustrated with having to type out their thoughts. In addition, once their thoughts are recorded and forwarded to others online, the submissions may reflect ideas that have since changed. Commitment to ideas documented in writing can sometimes contribute to a sense of risk or vulnerability for the participant.</p> <p>Learners may worry about whether their contributions will be well received and respected by the teacher and their peers. Make it clear that asking questions is not only acceptable but also highly encouraged. We can all learn from each other.</p> <p>Try not to make a big deal of spelling mistakes - these are, more often than not, keyboarding errors. If learners become paranoid about their typing and spelling, they may become reluctant to share at all. Encourage learners to compose their messages offline and then 'upload' or cut and paste their messages to the discussion group. This also allows them to spell check the document before submission.</p>
<p>4.3 Adult learners</p>	<p>Your learners will be adult learners. There is a lot of literature about the characteristics of adult learners and you need to be aware of these characteristics. Malcolm Knowles (1996) has written a great deal on the concept of andragogy, that is, teaching adults.</p> <p>These adults may have been away from an academic setting for a long time and may never have been exposed to a learning environment such as this. They may feel intimidated or vulnerable.</p> <p>Assumptions about adult learners that you should consider when designing your units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adult learners have life experiences to which they like to relate their learning; • they value the practical and like to see that what they are learning is relevant; • they want to understand and know the whys and hows about what they are learning; • as adults with previous knowledge and experience, they value recognition and respect; • adults normally have multiple roles and responsibilities in their lives and the course in which they are involved may not be their first priority; • adults appreciate being involved in the learning process and like to take responsibility (to varying degrees) for their own learning. <p>Positive, ongoing, and genuine reinforcement will go a long way in building a sense of confidence and competence. Of course, these points apply to all learners, regardless of the medium.</p>
<p>4.4 Multiple cohorts</p>	<p>Consider different cohorts - different modes, different access, different entry requirements, different assessment requirements.</p>

<p>4.5 Managing groups</p>	<p>You may consider using multiple discussion groups to deal with different topic areas. Some teachers have found this particularly useful but the general advice is do not have too many. You may consider having one forum/group for the discussion of issues and topics of general interest to students. This can also be a great place for students to introduce themselves and meet others with similar interests. Another forum/group may focus on assessment items and issues. The design of the electronic environment will be determined by discussion objectives, personal preference, the content area, numbers of students, staff allocations, and so on. As examples, some units taught at USQ have set up discussion groups named Introduction, Coffee Lounge, Content and Assessment.</p> <p>With large groups of students, perhaps adopt a general strategy of interacting on an as-needed basis. With some students, you will interact only a few times. Others will require more. Do not design units on the lowest-common denominator level (e.g. do not plan believing that 'some people need to have all their work marked or they won't do it, so I'll mark all of everybody's work').</p> <p>Consider how you propose to use the various communication facilities. How you organise and manage groups of learners will depend on your learning/teaching philosophy and:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. your target audience (size, location, cultural considerations, experience) and the nature of the subject area. b. whether you wish to conduct structured or guided discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • these may be based around different purposes or topics within the discussion area, e.g. one thread for General Discussion, another for Social Chat and a third for Suggestions for Improvement; • a different thread/forum may be set up for each period of time over the semester, e.g. Topic 1 for weeks 1-3, Topic 2 for weeks 4-6, etc.; • a thread/forum may be set up for each group with homogenous interests, e.g. based on assignment choice, or workplace experiences, or perhaps mode of study. c. whether participation is an assessment requirement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where students are "required" to participate (what does this mean and how will it be measured?); • students required to submit certain tasks - e.g. reflections to the discussion area; • expectation for collaborative work, and submissions from the group (skills needed to fulfill roles) d. whether you are teaching novice or more mature learners; e. whether you plan to use independent, interactive and/or collaborative learning strategies.
<p>4.6 Access, user interface</p>	<p>Ensure students are able to access course materials. Ensure students have access to technical support if and when required. Ensure that the technological interface is capable of data exchange among diverse formats and technologies.</p>

<p>4.7 Vicarious learners</p>	<p>Some learners may want to 'lurk', that is, just read the messages and not contribute. Consider the different preferences of learners. There is quite a lot of literature on learners who may be considered 'vicarious learners'.</p> <p>To determine why some learners are not participating, you might want to send a general message to the class or personal messages to individuals in order to encourage them to speak and share their thoughts. A strategy might be to write a message that says, for example, 'Thank you for your thoughts, Sandra and Kathy. It looks like we haven't heard from Jayne and Neil yet. What are your views on the issue? Let's hear from you soon'. Most learners appreciate being mentioned by name.</p>
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5 Practical examples

- **Example 1: Guidelines for introductory messages in electronic discussions**
- **Example 2: Using reflections**
- **Example 3: Question-based exercises via the electronic discussion**
- **Example 4: Case study activity**

Example 1: Guidelines for introductory messages in electronic discussions

- Welcome - who you are and who else will be involved
- Purpose of the discussion
- What activities will be covered
- Expectations - of both you and your students
- Guidelines to size of message, message conventions (title, etc.)
- How often you, the teacher, will access the discussion
- The nature of the discussion - are students meant to respond only; how involved will the teacher be
- Technical issues about the software and where to go for help
- Be aware of privacy issues, netiquette, Code of Practice, Disclaimer (if applicable)
- What is the first activity

Example 2: Using reflections

(Note: This example is from the online unit I teach, *Designing Instruction for Flexible Learning* which requires reflection records to be provided as part of the assessment).

You are required to submit reflection records on a regular basis (a total of three reflection records will be submitted worth 10% each) based on either an examination of the literature or a critical experience/episode from the workplace. These reflections will relate to the topics listed below:

1. *learning needs assessment, learner/learning context analysis;*
2. *procedures for knowledge, content, task and skill analysis;*
3. *procedures and perspectives on sequencing and synthesising content;*
4. *matching content, instructional strategies, and instructional media;*
5. *assessing learning outcomes and evaluating the courseware material.*

Practitioners have generally been found to be somewhat restricted in applying their training and theoretical knowledge to practice. They often miss opportunities to relate experience to prior learning. Most practitioners, such as nurses, teachers, and engineers are confronted on a daily basis with incidents, which present learning opportunities. Learners have to be helped to

recognise learning opportunities. A learning opportunity is an incident or event that presents a learner with an opportunity to reflect "on/in action".

You can do this by keeping learning logs or reflection records which is a record of learning opportunities that you have encountered as part of your work and studies (of the content and additional literature) in this unit. This record will show how you may have approached the tasks and activities, your successes and any issues that needed to be resolved (e.g., things not fully understood, or concepts that 'don't make sense'). Try to focus this on the project, which will be completed towards the end of the unit.

Most Important: Endeavour to relate the reflections to the development of the design project in your work context. Consider the issues the readings present and the insights you make into the task of design in relation to the development of the project in the work context in which it will be implemented.

This assignment task requires you to post the reflection records into the discussion group. Note that each one of the reflection records will be read by all students and teachers involved in the unit because each one of you is also expected to make meaningful comments and observations of the records. This will allow asynchronous interactions within the group to lead to a sharing of ideas and experiences with one another.

Example 3: Question-based exercises via the electronic discussion

(Note: This example is from a large unit where not all students have the electronic discussion facility. There is feedback on the questions given in unit material for those without discussion access).

Purpose: To encourage regular and ongoing dialogue via the electronic discussion facility about unit content and promote active learning.

What you need to do: Set questions to be addressed at regular intervals with focus on particular parts of the unit e.g. these may be at the end of module self assessment questions, or exercises from the text, etc. Nominate specific questions for discussion during periods of the unit.

For example, 'During weeks 3-6 we will address the question of xxxxxxxxxxxxxx, (given as question 3.2 in the unit material). Post your response to the discussion area. Sharing your response will help to clarify the unit concepts and let you broaden your own understanding of the unit content'.

Example 4: Case study activity

(Note: This example is from a unit where not all students have the discussion group facility, so the activity covered in the discussion is covered in other interactions - telephone tutorials, residential school sessions.)

Purpose: This activity encouraged students to practice their skills of case analysis before attempting the assignment tasks.

How was this achieved: The case analysis process was undertaken on a 'directed basis' early in the unit, which attempted to set the scene for fruitful and productive discussion on a more non-directed basis later in the unit. A selected case was proposed for analysis and discussion (this was provided in printed material for all students) - then responses and comments on the case were shared in the discussion area before a general consensus was reached on aspects of the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. This demanded a reasonable amount of moderation and pulling together of the arguments by the lecturer but did encourage a very fruitful and invigorating discussion/argument.

A timetable was established for the directed discussions - week 2 - reading of the case and case analysis guidelines, then weeks 3-5 applying the case analysis strategy and discussing perspectives. This took students through the required case analysis process as a practice run for their assignments.

6 To sum up

Consider the following:

- who you are as an educator;
- who your learners are;
- the characteristics of the medium chosen (e.g. the strengths and limitations);
- your plan for the unit;
- your design for the unit;
- the environment you wish to create;
- strategies that will promote the construction of knowledge;
- strategies that will promote a meaningful learning experience;
- the supports you have e.g. technical/library.

Working with an online unit is more than simply converting a face-to-face or distance unit for delivery online:

- you may find that you may need to be **more flexible** in the way you plan to cover specific topic areas or concepts;
- the potential volume of contributions that is generated through discussion of a specific topic, especially if everyone is actively participating, as they should, may be extensive. You will probably find that topics and concepts will be covered in greater depth than in a face-to-face unit;
- teaching online can be quite labour intensive, especially if it is your first time. **Budgeting your time is an important consideration in any unit in order that you may successfully meet your multiple obligations.**

Appendix 1: Netiquette

General advice to facilitators and participants

- Avoid writing in capitals since it implies you are SHOUTING;
- Avoid language that is condescending, hostile, inflammatory, racist or sexist;
- Personalise words with the use of emoticons;
- Don't assume that everyone will know what you are talking about;
- Compose your thoughts clearly;
- Be respectful of others' opinions, beliefs, and values;
- Do not dominate discussions;
- Be supportive of others by encouraging and praising contributions;
- Model the expected behavior yourself with courteous but friendly, respectful, and informal messages and responses;
- Post messages, which only relate to the theme of the EML or discussion facility;
- Ignore flaming or provoking messages;
- If a message irritates you, reply privately to the author.

e-mail do's

- Check your mail regularly. Ignoring a mail message is discourteous.
- Always reply quickly, even if a brief acknowledgment is all you can manage. At least the sender knows you have received the mail.
- If mailing files to more than one person (i.e. mailing list), send text only (i.e. do not send attachments).
- Keep messages remaining in your electronic mailbox to a minimum.
- Include your correct email address on all your correspondence.
- Make sure that the "subject" field of your email message is used and is meaningful.
- Try to restrict yourself to one subject per message.
- Try to keep email messages fairly brief - a maximum of one or two full screens.

e-mail don'ts

- Don't extract and use text from someone else's message without acknowledgment. If you do not acknowledge the source, this can be considered plagiarism.
- Don't make changes to someone else's message and pass it on without making it clear where you have made the changes.
- Don't reproduce an email message in full when responding. Be selective in the parts that you reproduce in order to respond.
- Don't pretend you are someone else when sending mail.
- Don't send frivolous, abusive, or defamatory messages.
- Don't send chain letters.
- Don't use global electronic mail for advertising or promotional purposes.
- Don't attach excessively large files as this will result in an overflow of server disk space.

Some of these activities are illegal. Action may be taken if you are found to be involved in one or any of the illegal activities.

Caution

It is advisable not to send confidential information that you would mind becoming public knowledge. Due to the nature of the communication medium, it is quite feasible that Internet communications may be intercepted by external entities and agencies. Also, any electronic mail that is incorrectly addressed may be received by a third person or may be bounced to a "Postmaster" in an external organisation for redirection.

Often you will have access to the email addresses of participants in a course of study. This access is a **privilege**, and not a right, and must not be abused.

Emoticons and Acronyms

An emoticon is a graphical display or symbol used to express emotion when corresponding electronically. Acronyms serve a similar purpose. These symbols help a user (reader) to understand the tone of what is being written.

Common emoticons include:

,-)	A One-Eyed Wink
:'-(Crying
: -)	Happy
:-(Sad

Common acronyms include:

<g>	Grin
ROFL	Rolling on the floor, laughing
LOL	Laughing out loud, or lots of laughter
IMHO	In my humble (honest) opinion
IMO	In my opinion
BTW	By the way

Although emoticons and acronyms help "bridge the distance" between electronic participants, we advise you not to overuse them as overuse can irritate others.

Appendix 2 Strategies to build an online community

Element	Comment
Initial student profile and staff information	Opportunity to get to know the group and see the diversity and experiences of others
Cafechat - social discussion avenue	Provides for social interaction separate from the content related interactions
Tone of initial messages	Establishes the nature and flavour of the exchanges and encourages others to follow suit
Clear expectations and protocol	Sets explicit guidelines for how exchanges should occur and the 'netiquette' to follow
Response to interactions	Prompt and focused reply to questions encourages ongoing exchanges. Keep the tone informal and encouraging
Weaving	Provides some synthesis and summarising of messages so the process stays focused and on track
Starter/wrapper (Bonk 1998)	Selected student is asked to begin the discussion on set topic and then another to 'wrap' or summarise the discussion points
Problem solving	Have the group, or small groups, join together for a task and share perspectives
Reflective practice	Gives the opportunity to reflect on own learning, and the application of content to workplace context
Mapping knowledge and concepts	Provide your view, or have as student activity - builds relationships between content and background knowledge and assists visual learners
Active learning approach	Engage learners in stimulating and motivating inquiry and tasks – need to be meaningful and relevant. May be related to reading or web site

(Adapted from: Cottman, C. 1999, 'Creating an online culture', *ODLAA 14th Biennial Forum*, Deakin University, Geelong, 27-30 Sept.)

Appendix 3 Glossary

amazon.com:

"If it's in print, it's in stock", that's the motto of amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>) which offers over one million book titles over the Internet for you to purchase. It's worth a visit just to search the titles.

Animation:

The imitation of movement produced by showing a series of images on the screen.

Artificial intelligence:

Computer hardware and software packages that try to emulate human intelligence in order to solve problems using reasoning and learning. First conceived as computer intelligence in 1950 by Alan Turing, it was renamed artificial intelligence in 1955 by John McCarthy. One of the earliest and most successful applications were computer programs that could play chess. In 1990, a computer named Mephisto surprised the public by checkmating Grand Master Anatoly Karpov.

ASCII (text) files:

An ASCII (American Standard for Code Information Interchange) file is one which is composed

entirely of characters that can be typed from a keyboard. It contains no graphics or special codes for printing.

Bandwidth:

Literally, the frequency width of a transmission channel in Hertz, kiloHertz, megaHertz, etc. Often used as an expression of the amount of data that can be sent through a circuit. The greater the bandwidth, the greater the amount of data that can travel in a given time period.

Bells and whistles:

A jargon term used to describe extra features added to hardware or software.

Bit:

A Binary Digit either 0 or 1. The smallest possible unit of information.

Bookmark file:

An HTML file where the URLs of the sites you bookmark and any annotations you make are stored.

Browser (Web browser):

Software program that lets you read electronic information stored on the World Wide Web. It allows you to "surf" the Internet. Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer are examples of browsers.

Byte:

A sequence of bits (Binary Digits) which are treated as a unit. It is usually made up of eight bits.

Cookie:

A cookie is a short file put on your system by a browser which includes information about your usage and facilitates the current interaction. For example, it may include the information that you have logged into a passworded area already in the current session and don't need a second password check. There are many uses for cookies - they may be erased at the end of a session or retained until the next session, and they may be encrypted or in plain text.

Domain Name:

The Internet name assigned to an organisation. USQ's domain name is "usq.edu.au". All Internet addresses include a domain name.

Electronic mail (email):

Electronic mail enables you to send and receive electronic text messages (to one or more people).

Emoticon:

An emoticon is a happy face or other expression formed with typed characters, usually viewed by tilting your head to the left. These are used in place of real facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice when writing e.g. :-) the basic smiley ;-) a wink, etc.

FAQ:

Acronym for Frequently Asked Questions. FAQ files are collections of common questions and answers for a particular subject area.

Frames:

Frames are a technique used in web pages to divide the page into multiple windows, where each window is called a frame and can contain its own separate page. The advantage of frames is that one window can be scrolled or changed while other windows remain fixed for such purposes as keeping a menu in view all the time. One disadvantage occurs if frames have not been properly created. You may not get a history which makes bookmarking difficult.

FTP - File transfer protocols:

The method by which files are transferred to or from a host computer. Protocols usually refer to error-correcting procedures that check for problems during transfer and resend incorrect data.

Gigabyte:

1 billion bytes (or a thousand megabytes).

Home Page:

Official or logical "top" page in a Web site, or connected set of pages.

HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) :

The coding applied to text files that allows them to appear as formatted pages on the World Wide Web.

HTTP:

HyperText Transfer Protocol is the main protocol used on the World Wide Web that enables linking to other web sites. Addressing to other web pages begins with "http://" and is followed by the domain name or IP address. **See URL.**

Hypertext:

A form of text which includes visible links to other pages of text or media, accessible by clicking or selecting the links.

Icon:

A small graphical image displayed on the screen to represent an object that can be manipulated by the user.

Internet:

The global collective of computer networks.

Intranet:

A local area network utilising Web software which has a "fire wall" (security barrier restricting access to members of an organisation). This is a more secure environment than the Internet and therefore allows confidential information to be made available to members.

IRC:

Internet Relay Chat. An Internet protocol that allows people all over the world to meet in conference groups (called channels) and chat with each other by typing.

ISP:

Internet Service Provider.

LAN:

Local Area Network.

Link:

A word, phrase or picture that when clicked on with the mouse, displays further information. Used mainly in web pages, but is also becoming more widely used in other software. The links are often blue and underlined.

LOGON:

The sequence of events which occur when the caller connects to the host system.

Lurk:

Listening in to a mailing list, message base, chat room, or newsgroup without participating. Newcomers are encouraged to lurk for a while as they get the feel of things. The term "lurker" is sometimes used negatively to refer to people who take from discussions, but never give.

Mailing Lists (listservs):

Email distribution lists (usually moderated [managed] by the instructor) which students and instructors can subscribe to; messages sent by subscribers are distributed to all other subscribers on the list. Discussion threads are linked visually.

MB:

Abbreviation for megabyte (1,048,576 bytes), the measurement used when displaying the sizes of computer files, software and hardware, e.g. hard drives.

Menu:

A list of options displayed on a screen from which a user selects further program actions.

Mirror site:

A duplicate site. Popular sites are often "mirrored" to cope with high traffic volumes or provide duplicates in different parts of the world.

Modem:

MODulator DEModulator - The device that connects a computer to a phone line and allows data to be transmitted.

MUD:

Acronym for Multi-User Domain, Multi-User Dimension, or Multi-User Dungeon. An online interactive computer game or exploration medium. Early MUDs were Dungeons & Dragons-like games in text-only forms, but they have grown into many other forms, too. They are now used for social gatherings, interactive learning, chat rooms, and much more, as well as games. Originally accessible only through telnet, some of them have migrated to the web, and even appeared in graphical virtual reality forms. Variations are known as MUSHes, MUSEs, and MOOs.

Netiquette:

Short for net etiquette. The basic principles of courtesy and consideration for others that can keep communication on the Internet a pleasure for all.

Network:

Two or more computers connected by communication lines in order to share data.

Password:

A secret code you type into a computer system to prove you are who you say you are, much like the number you use to access your account at a bank machine.

PDF:

Portable Document Format. You need Adobe Acrobat Reader for pdf files.

PIN number:

Personal Identification Number. Password made up of numbers, e.g. SQUIREL pin number.

Plug-in:

Extra software that enhances an application's use, e.g. Real Audio, and Shockwave are plug-ins for

Netscape Navigator.

Processor:

Computer chip that handles all tasks created by the operating system and application software.

Protocol:

A set of rules for how two computers speak to one another through a modem or network. This ensures that the message gets through. Both the sender and receiver must use the same protocol.

USQ uses TCP/IP protocol for modem dial-in access to USQconnect.

Proxy server:

Computer system that keeps a copy of information previously requested, so that if another request is made for the same information, it will be delivered more quickly than if delivered from the source.

RAM:

Random Access Memory, e.g. 16 MB of RAM. Electronic memory that temporarily stores information inside a computer. Memory works like a blackboard that is constantly overwritten with new data. The amount of memory, or memory size, in a computer determines the number of programs you can run at once. Memory size also determines how fast your programs will operate. The data stored in memory is temporary. If you do not save the data, it will disappear when you turn off the computer.

ROM:

Read Only Memory - A type of high speed memory that can be accessed but not erased or written in.

Search Engine:

A tool which can assist you in searching the Internet for the information you require.

SMTP:

Simple Mail Transport Protocol.

URL:

Stands for Uniform Resource Locator - the 'address' for a site on the internet.

http://www.usq.edu.au

Hyper Text Transfer Protocol - the language of the World Wide Web	Don't leave these out	This shows the location as part of the World Wide Web	The "Domain Name" for the address. Most large organisations have their own domains. Individuals usually use ISPs domains	Shows this is an education site. Others are networks, government, commercial and organisation	Country, in this case Australia. If there's nothing, it's in the USA (where the Internet began)
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Web Site:

A collection of related hypertext documents administered by a single organisation. A Web site has a Home Page which serves as the root document for the entire collection of documents. USQ's home page is located at <http://www.usq.edu.au>

World Wide Web (WWW):

A hypertext system linking documents, FTP sites, gopher sites, WAIS, and telnet.