

Five rules for participating in Moocs

Having embarked on several Moocs recently, **Matt Holland** searched for a guide to Mooc etiquette. Not finding anything, he decided to write a 'five rules' guide himself as part of his E-Learning and Digital Cultures online course with Edinburgh University.



Matt Holland (Matt.Holland@nwas.nhs.uk) is Librarian, North West Ambulance Service Library & Knowledge Service, supported by the Health Care Libraries Unit, NW.

THIS five rules guide answers the question of how we participate in Moocs as library and information professionals and as individual students joining a community of learners. They come from the experience of participating in five Moocs, in particular the E-Learning and Digital Cultures (Coursera) EDCMOOC2 from Edinburgh University. My initial participation in a Mooc, Networked Life (Coursera) was a personal experiment – to learn about Moocs by doing one. It prompted a search for a guide to Mooc etiquette. Nothing came up, and so my digital artefact for EDCMOOC2 was the guide I had hoped to find, the five rules guide.

1 Be who you are

No alias, no anonymous posting, be one hundred percent genuine. Academic endeavour after all seeks the truth, it further tries expose the fake and the fraudulent. We need to be assured of the identity of the person behind those we meet, even in a virtual world. Anonymity or disguise degrades and restricts the quality of discourse.

2 Be civil

Treat each other with consideration, courtesy, politeness and respect. Being civil is not the same as agreeing with those whom you secretly disagree with in order to be polite. It means being able to disagree, and yet maintain the tone and language of polite dialogue. Between people, civility both allows and invites a response. It allows people to build a dialogue that is informative and instructive to participants and others who may read it. It creates an exposition of a subject that, through the medium of the Mooc, reaches far beyond the initial exchange.

3 Support other people to learn

You get back more than you give. The temptation of the Mooc discussion environment is to post in isolation from other people. We say what we have to say but do not relate it to other posts or enter into discussions. In a sense, it is a form of personal advertising. Flashing up a relevant opinion and then rolling onto the next. Help add texture and build the learning landscape up. Take a comment and add some value. Call for a response from the poster. Help them to learn something new today.

4 Additionality, bring gifts, links and clicks

Crowd source the resource base. The best gifts for a Mooc are those of an intellectual kind. An interesting theory, website, book or video that is germane to the topic can have great and unpredictable value to some or many participants. The gift is not all in the link etc. but in the process of assessing and reviewing its relevance to the topic in hand, perhaps even adding a commentary. Add something to your posts that extends the resource base, perhaps quirky, esoteric and open (access) but also relevant, informed and additional. Surprise, extend and challenge.

5 Be engaged

Don't be a spectator – engage on your own account. Of course, they engage who also sit and watch. The question of engagement is interesting since it is a personal/private act. One might not know if a person has engaged until they show some sign, a post in a forum for example. In the Mooc, to read the resources and monitor the discussion boards has value, it is a personal engagement with the subject matter. Better though to engage with the other students, they might know something you don't.

E-learning from the Coursera website.

The screenshot shows the Coursera website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Courses', 'Specializations', 'Institutions', 'About', 'Sign in', and 'Sign up'. Below the navigation is a search bar with the text 'What would you like to learn about?'. A prominent banner reads 'Take the world's best courses, online, for free.' and 'Join 6,769,614 Courserians. Learn from 604 courses, from our 100 partners.' Below the banner is a grid of course cards, each with a thumbnail image and text describing the course, including the university and the teaching language. The courses listed include 'Crafting an Effective Written Text: Tools of the Trade' from San Jose State College, 'Analysis of Algorithms' from RWTH Aachen University, 'The Music of the Beatles' from the University of Rochester, 'Interprofessional Healthcare Informatics' from the University of Illinois, 'Student Thinking in the Clinic' from York University, 'Reason and Persuasion: Thinking Through Three Classics by Plato' from the University of Exeter, 'Introduction to Clinical Neurology' from the University of California, 'Latin American Migration' from The Ohio State University, and 'Citizenship and U.S. Immigration' from Emory University.