

Directing and Follow-up: Role of Online Trainers as Facilitators

How do we assure that we efficiently direct movement toward our learning goals? By the way we *process or manage the learning flow*. How do we do that?

Encourage Participation

The use of various learning options can stimulate learner participation and interaction—aside from chat rooms and bulletin boards, small group discussion, debates, polling activities, two-way learning partnership exchanges, and one-on-one message exchanges recognizing trainee messages, are some of the activities to use when encouraging participation.

Request Responses

The online trainer may ask particular learners for comments on a topic or question, then give them time to respond... It is imperative to ask questions that probe for trainee responses that guide the discussion toward the learning objectives.

Find Unifying Threads

By careful, thoughtful monitoring of participant contributions, trainers can weave

random strands of conversation into a summarization that may prompt people to pursue the topic further.

Present Conflicting Opinions

By drawing attention to opposing perspectives, differ-



ent directions, or conflicting opinions we can create debate and peer critiques.

Do Not Rely on Offline Materials

Always summarize an assigned text reference online so that the discussion in interactive sessions remains mostly self-contained.

Use Simple Follow-Up Activities

Follow-up activities are

appropriate to this media, but an over-complicated design in them is not... Designing opportunities for private conversations among two or more people who you suspect have similar interests in the content, promoting exchange of e-mail and using the bulletin board for continuing

exchange of ideas are a few good ways to keep in touch and further develop ideas, interest and learning.

Before closing, a couple ideas: In required programs especially, trainees can be required to sign on and contribute substantively a certain number of times. With some computer conferencing systems, it is possible

and may be appropriate to require a participant to respond to the topic or question under discussion before he or she can access the answers posted by other participants.

And, finally, we may find it appropriate and stimulating to Invite Visiting Experts to our learning sessions. Guest experts may join the conference with participants to respond to posted contributions, or so participants can ask questions of the guest.