The distance learning sector is expanding rapidly. Students who enter distance learning often bring with them a wide range of interests and skill levels, and one of the roles of the tutor is to explore and build on these. This presents a serious challenge, and the difficulties associated with this are perhaps reflected in the high attrition rates for many distance learning courses. However, the new electronic communications media enable an expansion of the range of tutor support which can be provided. For example, face to face tutorials and telephone conversations may now be supplemented with , or replaced by, e-mail and electronic conferencing. Nevertheless, the high expectations of students and tutors on the introduction of e-conferencing have often remained unfulfilled. One possible explanation is the failure of e-moderators to share examples of good practice with colleagues.

The learning process necessarily involves a dialogue between teacher and learner, and also between peer groups of learners. It follows that good e-moderating practice must facilitate all of these interactions. Whereas such discourse may occur naturally in face to face environments, some serious planning is required of teachers who wish to make this happen in distance situations. Moreover, much of the commercially available software does not facilitate this approach. We will use a range of examples, including one in which Colloquia has been used to deliver modules to off-campus students, to explore the impact of different e-moderating practices. We will suggest ways of evaluating the impact of e-moderating methods on student engagement and learning, and consider how this information might be used to develop a framework for good e-moderating practice.