

Online Role Play

Tips collected from Australian online role-playing designers during an email ice-breaker activity preceding our *National Summit on Online Role Play* in October 2002.

Tips for Moderating Online Role Play**A. Life Cycle of Online Role Play**

PRE ROLE PLAY

Establish boundaries in using outside contacts (including the real person if the role-play is based on real people)

Mark Freeman, UTS

Explain total approximate time learning activity should take including research as well as connection and interaction.

Mark Freeman, UTS

Show video of student feedback from previous role-plays.

Mark Freeman, UTS

ROLE PLAY SET UP

Establish if students should play roles anonymously.

Mark Freeman, UTS

Establish if students should be assigned into roles as individual or as a team.

Mark Freeman, UTS

Base your decision about how to allocate roles (eg self selected by students, allocated by you, randomly) on the your reasons for using a role-play (do you want to participants to go outside their boundaries? stand in someone else's shoes? expand their own expertise?)

Denise Kirkpatrick, UNE

Anonymity for the role-players provides a perfect opportunity for participants from socially reserved cultures to become proactive.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Have participants suggest their realistic capacity for role-play interaction on a scale. Assign the most important interactive roles to those who can commit reliably.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Confirm the benefits of experiential learning to the participants and how the role-play outcomes can reflect real-life scenarios.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

BRIEFING

Induct players well. Be clear about purpose, learning outcomes and process. Make sure they can use the technology you have chosen.

Marie Jasinski, DMIT

Differentiate between melodrama, acting and role-play!

Marie Jasinski, DMIT

Consultative groups: The use of consultative groups can provide a useful support mechanism for less confident students. These groups work together (prior to the action) to explore and discuss the role they have been allocated.

Elizabeth Devonshire, USyd

In the briefing period, play an email brainstorming game to generate and process issues players may have about the role-play. It'll provide you with very good information that you can use in a briefing session or as a

handy reference during the course of the role-play.

Marie Jasinski, DMIT

Experience as many role-plays as you can as a player – it really sensitizes you to what goes on from that perspective. Participation helps to hone both your design and moderation skills.

Marie Jasinski, DMIT

DEBRIEF

Collect useful anecdotes and other evaluative data (aided perhaps even by a video or an independent researcher) for future role-plays.

Mark Freeman, UTS

It may be necessary to have a secondary debriefing session if one wasn't enough for some players. This may be an informal forum but the appreciation and satisfaction of the players will be well worth it.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

The debriefing may take directions that you would not anticipate, let it. Learning, reflection and client satisfaction all occur here.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Make sure enough time is set aside for the debriefing process to occur.

Elizabeth Devonshire, DMIT

At the beginning of the debriefing process make sure that time is set aside for participants to de role (disengage from the action). At the end of the action and beginning of debriefing move the discussion to another forum. It may be a useful strategy to help signify moving to the next stage of the role-play process. In the classroom situation I have used simple strategies like removal of name tags/other role-play props or physically moving away from where the action took place).

Elizabeth Devonshire, USyd

B. Moderator's Roles

ADMINISTRATOR/TECHNICIAN

When assigning roles to learners polarise the genders, and job descriptions of the learners with the characters they will play. (A manager will learn much by being a cleaner.)

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

IMPROVISING STORYTELLER

Role play hinges on learning by discovery, so as the direction of the role-play winds/twists the moderator needs to be imaginative and flexible to follow/guide the play. [Holding a canary in your hand]

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

GUARDIAN ANGEL

When you feel the need to step in (as a moderator), don't. Try nudging other characters to do the work you need to do on the 'needy one'. Remember ownership of the role-play by the players deepens their commitment and their learning experience.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Consider carefully if the role-play may require psychological support services, eg sexual harassment role-plays, domestic violence, etc and provide obvious and reliable support services. This may be by hyperlink initially, with a process for real-world contact.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Duty of Care: Be prepared for the unexpected! Give players options - to change roles, withdraw, access a moderator out of role should some buttons be pressed.

Marie Jasinski, DMIT

RESIDENTIAL LEARNING RESOURCE

A hyperlink or good working relationship with your Learning Resource Centre (Librarian) will provide excellent learning support for your participants.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

MANIPULATIVE DEVIL

Don't hesitate to use 'value stretch' (defensible fibs) to fire up the players against each other. Some questionable suggestions can get new directions happening.

Simon O'Mallon, DMIT

Be a manipulative devil when assigning roles. Remember that if players don't participate, there is no game! A great design can come unstuck if the players don't bring it to life!

Marie Jasinski, DMIT