



# Community Moderation Kit

Tips and Templates for Building  
a Safe, Healthy Space



## If you've always thought of community moderation as removing spam or cleaning up negativity, you're not wrong—but that's only part of it.

Community moderation is the process of guiding and managing member interactions to keep conversations safe, respectful, and productive. It's both a protective function—preventing harm—and a proactive one that helps shape the tone and culture of your community.

In practice, moderation can include enforcing community guidelines, removing inappropriate content, or resolving member disputes. But it also involves designing systems and making decisions that influence what behaviors are visible, rewarded, and repeated. Effective moderation ensures that the healthiest behaviors for your community—curiosity, empathy, and collaboration—become the easiest and most natural ones to practice.

Moderators shape community norms through everyday choices about recognition, visibility, and friction. Highlighting constructive contributions signals that they matter. Recognizing members who welcome newcomers encourages more of that behavior. Adding a gentle prompt before someone posts something heated can prevent conflict before it starts.

On the flip side, when short, snappy comments are the ones that rise to the top, members learn to post more of them. If bullying is permitted, members won't feel safe adding their opinion. What gets visibility sets the tone.

Instead of managing individual incidents one by one, moderators can make deliberate design choices to steadily create a culture where the healthiest behaviors for the community also become the most natural behaviors.

In this guide, you'll learn what goes into community moderation. You'll also learn how to create an effective moderation strategy, including creating guidelines, enforcing them, and training a team of volunteers.



**At the end of the guide, you'll find [templates](#) you can use to set up your moderation program.**

# What goes into community moderation? 5 principles to practice

As a community manager or moderator, you want to create a healthy culture, but what does that look like practically? These five principles below are the foundation of good community moderation.

## **Encourage constructive dialogue.**

Moderation is about stewardship. The goal is to keep conversations moving toward understanding, resolution, or clarification, even when they're uncomfortable. Debate is a sign of community maturity, so don't rush in to shut down a discussion because it's getting tense. That's where the learning can happen. Differing opinions make a community more engaging and worthwhile for everyone.

## **Practice empathy always.**

Acknowledge members' frustration or concern. When something does go wrong, resist the urge to cut off the conversation, and instead, listen. Reaching out personally shows vocal or disgruntled users you care, you hear them, and you're working to solve the problem. Empathy doesn't mean agreeing with every criticism but recognizing that people's feelings are valid and deserve attention.

## **Create clear community guidelines.**

Set clear, accessible rules that define respectful behavior and outline what's off-limits. Explain the "why" behind your guidelines to build understanding and buy-in. Keep them concise, easy to find, and revisit regularly as the community evolves. Clear expectations help members self-moderate and keep discussions constructive.

### Put transparency first.

As a moderator, you'll inevitably have to manage complaints. When members post things you'd rather they hadn't (e.g. product- or company-related criticism), it's best to respond publicly when appropriate, rather than removing posts. While painful for the moment, this transparency builds trust in both the community and your company. Reference your community guidelines to show that your actions are rooted in clear, shared expectations. Always acknowledge concerns openly, but avoid drawn-out debates in public threads. Move the conversation to a private channel to de-escalate and resolve the issue. Once it's settled, circle back with a brief update so others can see the resolution.

### Escalate with context and minimal friction.

Moderators need a clear, actionable pathway for managing negative posts—especially those related to the product or company processes—while preserving trust, transparency, and constructive engagement in the community. Use internal escalation paths when a situation poses risk or requires cross-functional input.

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## Creating an effective moderation strategy

As your community grows, it will create its own social norms and expectations, but moderators play a large part in guiding these. To encourage positive norms, you'll want to:

- 1 **Develop standards for community behavior.**
- 2 **Enforce community guidelines.**
- 3 **Train community members as moderators.**

## Develop standards for community behavior.

Before you can moderate anything, you need to have written-down standards of behaviors. These community guidelines help to set member expectations and give every moderator a consistent foundation for moderation. Without guidelines, members may be unclear on what behavior is encouraged or discouraged, and rule enforcement won't be consistent from moderator to moderator. This kind of confusion is a risk, driving frustrated members away from the community.

(Note: Community Guidelines describe behavioral expectations for the community, e.g., offering guidance on engagement and posting etiquette. They are different from Terms of Use, which are legally binding and define the relationship between the user and the platform owner. They set out what's allowed (or not allowed) from a legal and technical perspective, such as content ownership and intellectual property rights. Members should be required to review and agree to both before joining the community.)

### How to create community guidelines

As you begin drafting your community guidelines, focus on getting all your key points down first. Cover everything your members need to know. Once you've outlined all the important topics, go back and edit for conciseness. Members won't have time or interest in reading something very lengthy, so aim to keep your final version easy to scan and no longer than one page.

## When drafting your guidelines, you should:

### 1. Define the community and its purpose.

Clarify who the community is meant to serve. For example, is it solely for product users? Are vendors allowed to join? State why the community exists and what members should gain from participating (e.g., peer support, product insights, networking). A clear purpose helps guide acceptable discussion and behavior.

### 2. Outline expected member behaviors.

Describe the positive behavior you want to encourage, such as being welcoming to newcomers, engaging respectfully, and contributing constructively. Whenever you can, include concrete examples to make these expectations clear.

### 3. Describe inappropriate behavior and misuse.

Outline what's not acceptable, such as hazing, bullying, harassment, defamation, plagiarism, illegal activity, misinformation, or intolerance of any kind. You should also note what counts as misuse of the community, such as advertising, self-promotion, spamming, thread hijacking, or posting off-topic or misplaced content.

### 4. Set privacy and confidentiality expectations.

Remind members to share only material they have rights to use, to credit others appropriately, and to respect privacy. Specify whether community discussions are meant to stay private and not be shared outside the platform without permission, particularly if they include sensitive or proprietary information.

### 5. Explain moderation and enforcement.

Let members know how moderators put the guidelines into practice—such as editing or removing posts, sending warnings, or suspending accounts—and how they can report problems. Outline what happens if an issue is escalated or appealed. Transparency in your processes helps build trust. Be clear that violations can lead to warnings, temporary suspension, or removal, and that the guidelines may change over time, with members informed of any major updates.

## Enforce community guidelines.

### 1. Make members aware of the guidelines.

To make sure guidelines are a foundation for behavior, ensure everyone joining the community knows about them. Use your community platform's SSO process to require anyone joining the community to acknowledge the guidelines. In your first welcome email, introduce the guidelines again and explain their importance.

For all members, keep guidelines visible. For example, you can place them as a link in your site footer or pin them to the top of a discussion board. For new members, you can even display them prominently on the logged-in homepage—such as through an HTML widget or similar feature—to keep expectations front and center.

When moderating, refer to the specific guideline that was breached, both to remind members of the guidelines and avoid the feel of a personal attack.

### 2. Create an enforcement policy.

Once drafted and agreed to, guidelines have to be consistently enforced. We recommend a three-strike rule to protect the community while giving members the benefit of the doubt. Here's a typical enforcement approach when you use a three-strike rule:



#### STRIKE 1: EDUCATE

Reach out to the member privately to explain what happened. Focus on education first (assume good intent, bad execution) when possible. However, more serious offenses like trolling or bullying should be handled more firmly. Point to the specific guideline that applies and show the member how they can revise their post or behavior.

If the post negatively affects the community—by spreading misinformation, upsetting members, or disrupting the discussion—remove it or hide it from view. If it simply needs clarification, better focus, or minor edits, it's often better to keep it visible so the author can edit it directly.



Half the battle is catching negative posts early. With Higher Logic, you can use automation to help you identify tricky posts before conversations go too far.

[Learn more](#)



## STRIKE 2: DISCUSS

If a member repeats the same or a related guideline violation, it may be time to introduce pre-moderation—a step where their posts are reviewed before they appear publicly. This approach helps prevent further issues while giving moderators a chance to provide timely guidance. In Higher Logic Vanilla, for example, this can be done through the moderation queue, which gives you the option to approve or decline posts before they go live. When you notify the member about the repeat violation, reach out for a conversation to talk through what happened and understand their point of view. Use the discussion to help them see how their expertise and enthusiasm can contribute positively, while staying within the community's guidelines.



## STRIKE 3: REMOVE

By the third offense, or if you receive an unapologetic and angry response to your communication about the second offense, ban the member for a period of time, or permanently, depending on the offense. If an individual needs practice adjusting their tone so it doesn't create strife, you can use moderate individual posts to help them reframe the post in a way that creates healthy conversations.

Internally, make sure you clearly document who will be responsible for moderating and communicating with users, when, and how. Otherwise, you may end up with employees taking it upon themselves to respond to things in the community who may not be aware of the escalation process.

If you manage a B2B community, you should also consider when an account team needs to be notified that moderation or suspension activity is being taken with a customer. If the customer feels they have been wrongly suspended or that critical feedback has been censored or blocked, it can have negative repercussions on an account. CSMs, AEs, or others can also help support the conversation with the customer.



Go to [the templates](#) section for sample private messages you can use to communicate with members.

*Note: Templates are helpful, as are custom GPTs that help internal team members compose responses that fit with the community's tone and style guide. However, it is critical that responses also feel authentic, sincere, and human. Too many repeated responses and customers will lose trust that real people are reading and responding to them, or that their voice actually matters.*





### All your moderation tools in one view

Community managers and moderators just have to visit Higher Logic Vanilla's Community Management Dashboard to review, assess, and take action.

The screenshot displays the 'Escalations Dashboard' in the Higher Logic Vanilla interface. The dashboard is organized into a sidebar on the left and a main content area on the right. The sidebar includes navigation options for 'POSTS' (Triage: 1000+, Reports: 21, Escalations: 12), 'ACTIVITY & REGISTRATION', 'USERS', and 'SETTINGS'. The main content area shows a list of escalated posts, sorted by 'Newest Escalation'. Two posts are visible:

- Persevering maximized database**: Escalated by System on Jul 31, 2024, with 0 English subcategory. Last Reported Jul 31, 2024. Reported by OlivierLC. Message Author: Remove Post.
- Fundamental fresh-thinking neural-net**: Escalated by System on Jul 31, 2024, with 1 Knowledge subcategory. Last Reported Jul 31, 2024. Reported by Unassigned. Message Author: Remove Post.

*Higher Logic Vanilla's Escalations Dashboard*

### 3. Don't eliminate posts just because they're negative.

It can be tempting to eliminate any or all negative posts, even if they don't break the guidelines, especially if the negativity is directed toward your company or product. However, this will eventually backfire. **Consider these reasons why:**

- 1. Erodes trust:** Deleting or hiding all critical feedback signals to members that only positivity is allowed, which can create an inauthentic environment. You also risk driving dissatisfied users to other, less moderated (and potentially more damaging) public platforms like Reddit or social media.
- 2. Suppresses valuable feedback:** Negative posts often contain useful insights for your company. Ignoring them misses an opportunity to identify trends, understand pain points, and ultimately improve products or processes.
- 3. Dampens engagement:** Over-moderation creates a chilling effect. Community members may be reluctant to post honestly, reducing activity and the sense of peer support.

**4. Hinders peer-to-peer support:** Other members may have already solved similar issues. Allowing space for negative posts opens the door to helpful, crowd-sourced solutions.

Comments that are critical or negative in nature should also not be ignored. Engaging in constructive and respectful debate about a user's point of view is one of the most valuable relationship-building activities that happens in a community, and negative feedback can sometimes bring important issues to light.

Having community managers, product managers, and others engage and respond on a regular basis—to both positive and negative comments—will help users feel they are taken seriously and that your organization is listening. This will help prevent some negativity that can arise when organizations are unresponsive or only respond to excessively negative comments.

However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't have a plan for handling the more negative feedback. Set up clear escalation paths and define what actions will occur when tense disagreements, product criticisms, or other negative sentiment occur. It's usually best to bring tense conversations into a private conversation or ticket rather than to keep going back and forth in the public forum. You also may need to bring in a broader team to triage the situation.

#### COMMUNICATION WITH LEADERSHIP TEAM

Get buy-in from leaders on community moderation expectations. This helps prevent your leadership team from moving into crisis mode about a negative, but acceptable, post. It also makes your leadership team feel confident that the community is guided by standards and won't devolve.

Try turning negative feedback in the community into a valuable source of data for the company. Here's a mini-report you could share:

- Volume of negative posts by type and category
- Resolution outcomes (e.g. % resolved, % redirected)
- Product feedback themes
- Impact metrics (community retention, CSAT post-resolution, engagement trends)

When a post does need to follow an escalation path, also have a plan for how this will get reported to the leadership team, and make them aware of that. This will help you to avoid leaders coming across a negative post and getting concerned.

## Sample Escalation Pathway for Negative Posts

Level	Type of Post	Action	Who's Involved	Notes
0	Minor complaints or product confusion (e.g. "Why is feature X broken?")	Respond empathetically, clarify facts, link resources	Community Manager (CM) / Moderator	Treat as support or education opportunity
1	Recurring or widely shared frustration (e.g. "This update ruined my workflow")	Respond publicly, tag product or support liaison if needed	CM + Internal Liaison	Note trends for reporting; offer to pass feedback on
2	Harsh but non-abusive criticism of company/product (e.g. "Company doesn't care about users")	Acknowledge concerns, suggest private convo if needed; escalate to communications and/or product if sensitive	CM + Comms + Product	Avoid defensiveness; keep tone open
3	Personal attacks, misinformation, or coordinated complaints	Remove/flag per guidelines; DM user; document incident	CM + Legal/PR if needed	Use sparingly and carefully; ensure rationale is documented
4	Legal or reputational risk (e.g. threats, data exposure claims)	Immediately escalate, restrict visibility	CM + Legal + Comms + Execs	Follow crisis protocols; prioritize brand safety



Go to [the templates](#) section for different sample messages you can use when responding publicly.



### Escalating is easier with Higher Logic Vanilla

Higher Logic Vanilla lets community moderators easily escalate issues while maintaining transparency:

- Automatically escalate posts based on keywords, flags, sentiment, or inactivity
- Assign moderators to posts and keep internal discussions organized with private notes and @mentions
- Get notifications for all reports and escalations or only those assigned to you

## Empower active community members.

As your community grows and begins to shape its own culture, look for trusted, consistent members who naturally set a positive example. Empower these members to take a more visible role by helping remind others of the community guidelines and by flagging posts that may require moderation.

These members aren't formal moderators, but they help sustain a healthy environment. Often, it's more effective for respected peers—not staff—to remind others of expectations or redirect the tone. When members see fellow participants upholding the community's values, it feels more authentic and less defensive than a top-down intervention.

## Identify when intervention is needed.

These empowered members might spot moments when misinformation appears, conversations start to drift, or dismissive comments arise. In these moments, they can model how to redirect the discussion, remind others of the guidelines, or encourage a more constructive exchange.

If a conversation begins to escalate or becomes particularly sensitive, these members should flag the situation to community staff rather than stepping in directly. Make sure they know when and how to contact the moderation team so issues are handled appropriately without putting the burden on them.

In Higher Logic Vanilla, this can be done using the built-in reporting feature available through the Community Management Dashboard. When viewing a post or comment that may require moderation, members can click the flag icon to report it. They'll be prompted to select a reason (such as spam, abuse, or off-topic content) and can add a brief comment for context. Once submitted, the report appears in the dashboard, where community staff can review and take appropriate action.

### Ensure posts are in the correct place.

Moderators can help you keep community content organized. For example, if a post is made in one category but really belongs in a different area, encourage them to move it to the proper location. Or when members post something that references a resource without attaching it, your moderators can reach out to the posting member and ask them to upload the document. This kind of intervention prevent a lot of discussion posts with “I am interested, here’s my email,” or reactions based on assumptions.

As you can see, moderation is one of the most critical parts of your community strategy. It’s essential to clearly define your approach, map out responsibilities, and ensure alignment across all departments involved. A strong moderation strategy and workflow are the most important factors influencing the success of your community.



#### Better community oversight

Higher Logic gives moderators a unified view to review new posts; flag or pre-moderate content by role, keyword, or category; track reports; and assign or automate moderation tasks. You can streamline oversight with filtering, real-time notifications, and configurable workflows so teams can quickly identify, assess, and act on community activity from one place.

[Request a Demo](#)

# Moderation Response Templates

Use and edit these templates to fit your community's tone and feel.

## SAMPLE PRIVATE MESSAGES ABOUT POST MODERATION

### First Warning - Community Guideline Violation

#### Subject: A Quick Note About Your Recent Post

Hi [Name],

Thank you for being an active part of our community! We truly value your contributions and your voice here.

I wanted to reach out about a recent post/comment you made:

"[Insert brief quote or context here]"

It appears this does not align with our community guidelines, specifically around [insert guideline area, e.g., respectful communication, promotional content, etc.]. We know this can happen unintentionally—tone and intent can be hard to read online—and we appreciate your understanding as we work to keep things positive and productive for everyone.

When you have a moment, please review our [Community Guidelines link] to stay familiar with what helps keep our space constructive and welcoming. No action is needed right now. This is just a reminder so we can continue fostering the kind of community everyone enjoys being part of.

If you'd like to talk through the guidelines or have any questions about this message, feel free to reach out directly. We're happy to clarify anything.

Best,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team

## Final Warning + Ban Notification

**Subject: Community Guidelines Violation – Account Action Taken**

Hi [Name],

We wanted to follow up regarding your activity in the community. After several reminders and a prior warning, we've continued to see posts that don't align with our community guidelines, specifically around [brief mention of repeated behavior or violation].

Because this behavior has continued despite previous outreach, we've made the decision to remove your access to the community. This decision is never taken lightly. We appreciate the time and energy you've contributed here and the positive impact you've made in past discussions.

If you believe this action was taken in error or would like to request a review, please reply directly to this message. Our team will review your case and follow up with next steps.

We understand that sometimes communities evolve and aren't always the right fit for everyone. We wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Take care,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team

## Request to Edit Post for Guideline Compliance

**Subject: Quick Update Needed on Your Recent Post**

Hi [Name],

Thank you so much for your recent contribution to the community! We really appreciate members like you who take the time to share and participate.

We wanted to reach out because part of your post appears to be out of alignment with our community guidelines, specifically around [insert issue, e.g., self-promotion, sensitive content, etc.]. No worries; this happens sometimes, and it's an easy fix.

To keep your post live, could you please make a quick edit?

1. Go to your post [insert link].
2. Edit the section [insert suggestion].
3. Let us know once you've made the change, and we'll review and approve it right away.

Thanks again for helping us maintain a great space for everyone. If you have any questions or want to confirm your update before posting, just reply to this message, we're happy to help.

Warmly,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team



## Request to Update Profile Information

**Subject: Quick Update Needed for Your Profile**

Hi [Name],

Thank you so much for being part of our community! We noticed that your [insert profile aspect, e.g., picture, username, signature, bio, etc.] doesn't align with our community guidelines, which help keep our space respectful, inclusive, and welcoming for everyone.

When you have a moment, please update your [same element as above] in your profile settings [insert link]. If you're not sure what's acceptable or want to double-check before making changes, feel free to reach out. We're happy to help.

We appreciate your understanding and your help in maintaining a positive environment for all members. Please don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team

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## Off-Topic Post Moved (Informational)

**Subject: We Moved Your Post to Help It Get More Views**

Hi [Name],

Thank you for your recent post in the community! We've moved it from [original category] to [new category] so it's easier for other members to find and respond. This helps your post reach the right audience and get more of the engagement it deserves.

No action is needed on your part. We just wanted to keep you in the loop. If you ever have questions about where to post or how to get the most visibility for your content, we're always happy to help.

Best,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team

## Appreciation After Resolved Conflict or Reengagement

**Subject: Thank You for Your Understanding and Support**

Hi [Name],

I just wanted to thank you for your recent engagement and how you handled [mention situation—e.g., the post update, the guideline clarification, etc.]. We really appreciate your understanding and care for the community.

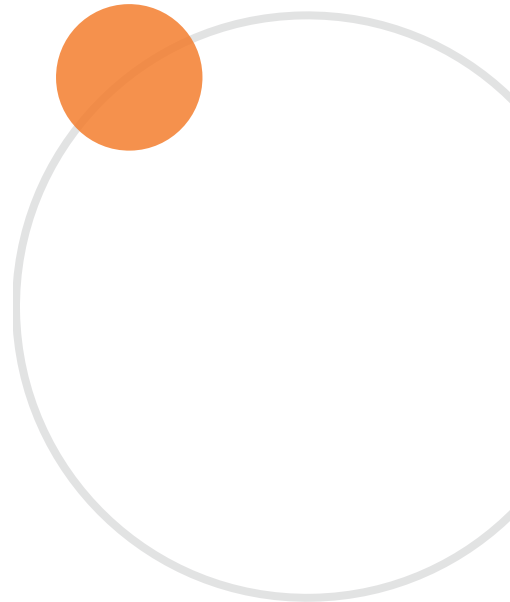
Members like you truly make this space better for everyone, and we're grateful for your continued participation.

Looking forward to seeing more of your insights and contributions!

Warmly,

[Moderator Name]

[Community Name] Team



## Sample public responses to negative posts

### **FOR LEVEL 1-2:**

“Thank you for sharing your experience, [Name]. We know it can be frustrating when something doesn’t work as expected. I’ve shared your feedback with our product team so they’re aware. If you’re open to it, we’d love to learn more through a quick follow-up.”

### **FOR REDIRECTION TO SUPPORT:**

“I appreciate you bringing this up. It sounds like this might need a closer look from our support team. I’ll connect you with them so they can troubleshoot with you directly. They’re best equipped to help resolve this quickly.”

### **FOR DE-ESCALATION IN PUBLIC THREADS:**

“We hear your concern, and we appreciate you taking the time to share it. Let’s keep the conversation constructive and focused on solutions so it stays helpful for everyone involved.”