

Online Course Etiquette or Netiquette

So, you are ready to take an online course. You are now entering into the world of education and you may never meet your instructor or classmates face to face. But, just as you would not say and do things that would cause problems in a classroom setting, you should avoid saying and doing things that would cause problems in an online setting. Every student should know online course etiquette in order to make online learning comfortable for everyone involved.

A key distinguishing feature of an online course is that communication occurs solely via the written word. Because of this, the body language, voice tone, and instantaneous listener feedback of the traditional classroom are all absent. These facts need to be taken into account both when contributing messages to a discussion and when reading them. Keep in mind the following points:

Watch your tone

Non-verbal communication is not possible in an online format, so written text can easily be misinterpreted. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language and the excessive use of exclamation points. If you feel particularly strongly about a point, it may be best to write it first as a draft and then review it before posting it, in order to remove any strong language and any “oops I should not have said that moment.”

Avoid humor and sarcasm. Things that may seem funny to you while typing may not be read funny by the person reading it. These frequently depend either on facial or tone of voice cues absent in text communication or on familiarity with the reader.

Respect Others

A Web-based classroom is still a classroom, and comments that would be inappropriate in a regular classroom are likely to be inappropriate in a Web-based course as well. Treat your instructor and your fellow students with respect.

Be Forgiving

If someone states something that you find offensive, mention this directly to the instructor. Remember that the person contributing to the discussion is also new to this form of communication. What you find offensive may quite possibly have been unintended and can best be cleared up by the instructor.

What you write often cannot be erased

Think carefully about the content of your message before contributing it. Once sent to the group, there is no taking it back. It may be a good idea to type your text in a word

processing format in order to use the spell check feature and then paste it in the course area. This will prevent misinterpretation of your words or the presence of your lacking basic writing skills.

Netspeak

Although electronic communication is still young, many conventions have already been established. **DO NOT TYPE IN ALL CAPS**. This is regarded as shouting and is out of place in a classroom. Acronyms and emoticons (arrangements of symbols to express emotions) are popular, but excessive use of them can make your message difficult to read. Some common ones include:

Acronyms

FYI = for your information

B/C = because

W/ = with

BTW = by the way

F2F = face to face

FAQ = frequently asked questions

Emoticons

:-) = smiley face: happiness, pleasure

:-(= frowning face: displeasure

;-) = wink

:-0 = shock, surprise

:-/ = skepticism, unease, apologetic

Brevity Is Best

Be as concise as possible when contributing to a discussion. Web-based courses require a lot of reading, and your points might be missed if hidden in a flood of text. If you have several points that you want to make, it might be a good idea to post them individually, in several more focused messages, rather than as a single, lengthy, all-encompassing message.

Don't Waste the Time of Others

Be sure to have a clear subject header and refrain from adding unnecessary information to your posting. Don't waste others' time by going off on irrelevant discussion.

Read First, Write Later

Don't add your comments to a discussion before reading the comments of other students unless the assignment specifically asks you to. Doing so is tantamount to ignoring your fellow students and is rude. Comments related to the content of previous messages should be posted under them to keep related topics organized, and you should specify the person and the particular point you are following up on.

Citations and Other Etiquette Sources

Many of the points made here were taken from *The Core Rules of Netiquette*, excerpted from the book *Netiquette*, by Virginia Shea. The Core Rules of Netiquette can be accessed at <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>.

Further information was taken from Arlene H. Rinaldi's *The Net: User Guidelines and Netiquette*, which can be found at <http://courses.cs.vt.edu/~cs3604/lib/Netiquette/Rinaldi/>.