

Netiquette - Some important reminders

Leslie Owen Wilson

The following have been adapted and tweaked from work developed by both Jim McCluskey and Holly Hassel of UW-Marathon and used with permission. I thank them for these helpful tips and resources.

A course is a course

You may be familiar with many of the following points if you have participated in other forms of electronic learning in the past. But web-based courses have some added constraints not present in other arenas. Keep in mind these additional important points:

1. **Remember your place.** 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. And most folks appreciate humor even in a two dimensional learning environment, but make sure it is clear that you are using humor or kidding, remembering that your professor and your peers cannot see your facial expressions or hear the tone of your voice – that is unless you are Skyping!
2. **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 or in rambling ideas. If you have several points that you want to make, it might be a good idea to post them individually, bullet them listing short response afterward, or use lead in summary words as headings or **bolded headings** similar to this posting. Or you may wish to consider breaking your responses or ideas down into smaller segments with interjected postings, rather than as a single, lengthy, all-encompassing message.
3. **Stick to the point.** Contributions to a discussion should have a clear subject header, and you need to stick to the subject. Don't waste others' time by going off on irrelevant tangents.
4. **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.
5. **Excessive waiting is really annoying.** Check your course posts regularly. It is easy to fall behind if there is a rousing discussion and you are MIA. Additionally, in sharing ideas, sitting around waiting for others to get back to you after you have posted something you consider important is really annoying. While wait time is a given in a web-based course, waiting days and days for others to respond is extremely frustrating. If you are out of town or excessively busy, just let folks know what is going on.

New electronic horizons require new rules for interactions

You may have taken some electronic courses before, and you may also have had experience with some form of electronic communication, but a web-based course is a new area of social interaction for many, and as such it has its own rules for FORMAL social engagement. This brief guide and reminders are intended to be an overview of appropriate etiquette (or more appropriately *netiquette*) for interaction in this new environment.

Note: While I want you to grow into a learning community - one that readily communicates and exchanges exciting and interesting thoughts and ideas - it is important to remember that it takes others a while to get to know you in person too. Online, folks may not know you well and have only your written responses to go by. Here are a few things to consider when responding.

Short list of reminders:

- * Treat everyone with respect.
- * Use appropriate language for a classroom setting.
- * Do not make derogatory comments to a classmate either directly or implied.
- * Do not post reams of trivial comments.
- * Do not use the online forums as a "soap box" for personal or political opinions.
- * Do not post long and rambling commentaries to a discussion. If you need to write 300 words or more use an attachment and briefly describe the contents of the attachment in the comment box.
- * Do not "cut and paste" materials from other websites into your postings. If you feel that that a website offers valuable information, then provide the URL for the website and brief explanation regarding its contents in your contribution.
- * Use the other mechanisms available (mainly e-mail, or text to an individual or selected group, or the "chatter" strand of D2L) to communicate with your fellow classmates for exchanges that are off the topic.

Details:

Discussions are disembodied:

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

1. **Use appropriate language:** Given the absence of face-to-face clues, written text can easily be misinterpreted. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language. If you feel particularly strongly about a point, it may be best to write it first as a draft and then to review it before posting it. This way you can edit your ideas and remove any offensive or strong language.
2. **Keep a straight face.** In general, try to avoid low humor and sarcasm. These frequently depend your familiarity with the audience as well as reading body language, intended tone, facial or voice cues, and these elements are absent in text communication. If you are teasing or being humorous, let someone know up front so they won't take offense (examples: *just kidding*, or comment followed with ;-)) which implies a wink and a smile.)
3. **Be forgiving.** Remember that the person contributing to the discussion is also new to this form of communication. If someone states something that you find offensive, reread the passage to make sure you read it correctly, and then if you are still offended, mention it me first. Another pair of eyes can

sometimes see different things or point out contexts. What you find offensive may quite possibly have been unintended and may be best approached by me to avoid direct confrontation.

4. **The recorder is on.** If you want to speak with a classmate personally about something, send an e-mail. Within the formal on-line discussion remember you have an audience; so think carefully about the content of your message before contributing it. Once sent to the group, **there is no taking it back.** Also, although the grammar and spelling of a message typically are not graded, they do reflect on you, and your audience might not be able to decode or interpret misspelled words or poorly constructed sentences. It is a good practice to compose and check your comments in a word-processor, then reread them before posting, and then cut and paste - highlighting and then using commands the copy command Ctrl C, and then pasting, Ctrl V, or the mouse and the icons.

5. **Test for clarity.** Messages may often appear perfectly clear to you as you compose them, but turn out to be perfectly obtuse or garbled to your reader. One way to test for clarity is to read your message aloud to see if it flows smoothly. Or, **let it sit and then come back later**, rereading carefully before cutting and pasting it into the discussion. I often write things, read them seeing what I intended to write, only to be horrified at how they really came out afterward. Too, it is good practice to have another read it before posting.

6. **Netspeak:** Although electronic communication is still young, many conventions have already been established. Some PERCEIVES TYPING IN ALL CAPS AS SHOUTING. (Personally, I perceive it as special emphasis unless it is followed by lots of exclamations!!!!) Acronyms and "emoticons" (arrangements of symbols to express emotions) are popular, but excessive or over use disrupts the flow of your ideas and can make your message difficult to read.

Some common ones are listed below:

Acronyms	Emoticons
FYI = For your information B/C = because W/ = with BTW = by the way F2F = face to face	:-) = smiley face: happiness, pleasure :-(= frowning face: displeasure :-O = shock or oops! ;-) = a wink

Citations and other netiquette 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://www.fau.edu/netiquette/net/index.html>.