

Sample Netiquette Guidelines

Netiquette Guidelines address communication behaviors that are particular to an online environment. Below are some general Netiquette Guidelines for online discussion boards:

Be inclusive. It's important to be intentional about making sure we "see" each other in an online community. You can do this by making sure that everyone has at least one response.

Tip: If you are unsure who to respond to, try looking for posts that have not yet received a reply. Also, be sure to reply back to people who post questions or comments to you.

Be on time. Your contributions to our discussions are important, but our learning community will not benefit from them unless you post on time.

Tip: Set calendar reminders to make sure you contribute on time.

Disagree respectfully. Disagreement and different ideas are essential parts of learning, problem-solving, and creativity. However, in order for different ideas to be heard and shared, it is important to maintain a respectful stance even through vehement disagreement, otherwise communication may break down.

Tip: You might start the conversation with a question to clarify or get more information before you explain your different perspective. For example, "Nathan, can you tell me more about by what you meant when you said that recycling programs are a waste of public resources?"

Tip: Refrain from using judgmental evaluations of what someone posted and instead present your own perspective supported by factual information. For example, instead of "Jamal, your analysis makes no sense" you can say, "Jamal, I interpreted the results of the study differently. As I see it, since there was no statistically significant difference in the children's test scores, which implies that the new program is not working."

Be concise. Lengthy paragraphs are difficult for readers to digest. Keep your paragraphs short and your writing concise.

Tip: Consider using bullet points to help highlight your main points or headings if your post needs to be lengthy.

Stay on topic. Off topic comments can derail our conversation. You can post off-topic comments in our open discussion forum or one of the other communication modes we are using in the course.

NO YELLING. When you write in upper case letters in online communication, it is usually interpreted as yelling.

Add some emotion :-) Sometimes it helps communicate the tone of your message when you add an emoticon. However, only do so as necessary for it can end up being annoying to readers if you have too many (which is probably the opposite of your intention).

Use humor carefully. Sarcasm in particular does not translate well in an online environment. It's best to avoid the potential pitfalls of misunderstood messages.

Example Guidelines for Challenging Discussions

Some subjects lend themselves to more emotionally charged or challenging discussions. Be sure to preemptively address this possibility in your guidelines. Here is an example of guidelines that might be useful for course content that might be sensitive or personal in nature:

Demonstrate respect for differences. We all come to the table with differing experiences and viewpoints, which means that we have so much to learn from each other! In order to get the most out of this opportunity, it is important that we don't shy away from differences. Rather, we should show respect for differences by seeking to understand, asking questions, clarifying our understanding, and/or respectfully explaining our own perspective. This way, everybody comes away with a new way of seeing the issue and respecting others with different values or beliefs.

Respect confidentiality. While it is fine to talk about the things you are learning with your peers outside of class, please do not share what other participants post without their explicit permission.

Assume good intentions. If someone says something that bothers you for any reason, craft a response based on the assumption that they did not mean to be offensive and ask them to clarify what they meant, then explain the impact it had on you. For example:

“Anita, in your post you said that the young black man in the video looked suspicious. To me, he looks just like my son. So, when I read your comment, it really surprised me.”

If someone tells you that something you wrote bothered them, assume that they are not attacking you, but rather that they are providing an opportunity for you to learn something that could be important for you to know. For example,

“Morgan, thank you for that feedback; I can now see why my comment was concerning and I appreciate your telling me. I will be more thoughtful in the future.”

Be generous. Your discussion board posts are not simply requirements for participation; they are your contributions to group learning. Please be generous to your peers by being thoughtful, open, and honest.