

Student Guidelines for Communicating in Digital Courses

Digital communication lacks verbal and non-verbal cues such as intonation, gestures, stance, and facial expressions that are a regular part of face-to-face communication. The absence of these cues can quickly lead to misunderstandings in the digital environment. Netiquette is all about the code of behavior established for communicating online. The rules for netiquette will vary, depending on the context (formal/informal); the people (known/unknown to each other) and the activity. Here are some tips and suggestions for good communication:

What Do We Want to Achieve through Digital Communication?

There are a variety of reasons why digital communication is important in the context of a course. Some of these reasons will be important to you, some to your instructor and hopefully a few to both.

Digital communication can help you:

- Collaborate on a project
- Share information/ideas
- Explain an assignment or activity
- Connect (socially) with other learners
- Create a community of learning
- Provide encouragement to students
- Offer feedback to students, peers
- Show appreciation
- Make sense of content

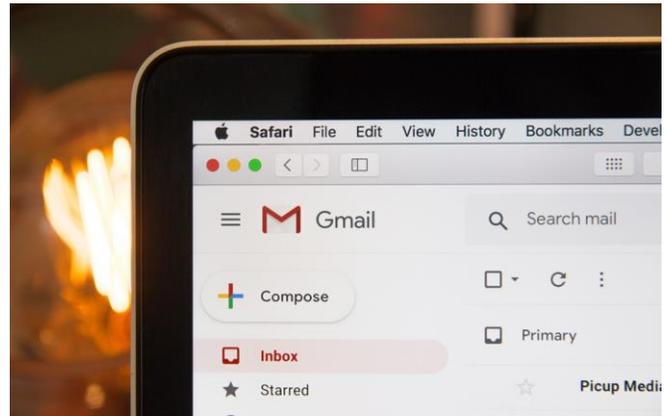


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Know Context and Situation Before Responding

- Remember that culture influences communication style and practices
- Stay open and ask questions – avoid assumptions
- Instructors will usually set the tone and provide guidance/guidelines
- Try to find your own answer first before responding
- Familiarize yourself with NIC Policy 5-08 Acceptable Use of Information Technology - [Link](#)

Always Treat Others with Respect

- Address your instructor by their preferred name
- Use the preferred names of your classmates
 - If someone signs their name as “Melanie”, don’t address them as “Mel” in your response
- For those individuals who have indicated preferred pronouns (such as “he”, “she”, or “they”) use those preferred pronouns when referring to them
- Be respectful of other’s opinions. Be open to new perspectives

Text has Permanence

- What you say online is difficult to retract later – once in print
- Before you write something, ask yourself: “Would I say this out loud in class?” - if not, do not write it
- Consider your responsibility to the group and to the learning environment
- If you are working collaboratively – agree on ground rules for text communication (formal or informal; seek clarification whenever needed etc.)

Remember the Human Component When Communicating

- We all come with personalities - remember there is a person behind the words - ask for clarification before making judgement
- Check your tone before you publish - set a respectful tone
- Respond to people using their names
- Culture and even gender can play a part in how people communicate
- Remain authentic and respect the same of others
- People participate in different ways – some just by reading the communication rather than jumping into it
- Avoid jokes and sarcasm – they often do not translate well to the online environment

Research Before You React

- Think before you type
- If you are angry about something, wait a day (to cool off) before you communicate with the person or persons who have angered you
- Accept and forgive mistakes
- Consider your responsibility to the group and to the learning environment
- Seek clarification before reacting
- Ask questions rather than make statements in situations where you are not sure
- Ask your instructor for guidance*

** Sometimes, online behavior can appear so disrespectful and even hostile that it requires attention and follow up. In this case, let your instructor know right away so that the right resources can be called upon to help.*

Use Professional Writing

- Write in a clear and concise manner
- Do not use informal statements
- In professional communications, you should endeavour to use correct spelling and grammar
- Avoid using short forms such as “u” instead of “you” (those abbreviations are fine when texting friends, but not in a professional context) - avoid use of “ROFL” and “WTF”
- Avoid using all capitals because it can be interpreted as “yelling”
- Be careful about using humorous or ironic statements - they are often misinterpreted and may cause offence

Respect Privacy and Original Ideas

- Always be kind and professional
- Do not share personal information pertaining to others (and be prudent about personal information you share about yourself)
- Always quote if you are responding to a specific point made by someone else
- Ask the author of an email before forwarding it
- Ask your classmates and instructor for permission before you record a live class using video conferencing



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