

# Netiquette

What is Netiquette? Simply stated, its network etiquette -- that is, the etiquette of cyberspace. And "etiquette" means "the forms required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be required in social or official life." In other words, Netiquette is a set of rules for behaving properly online.

1. **Remember the Human:** When you communicate electronically, all you see is a computer screen. You don't have the opportunity to use facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice to communicate your meaning; words -- lonely written words -- are all you've got. And that goes for your correspondent as well. Remember the Prime Directive of Netiquette: Those are real people out there. Ask yourself, "Would I say this to the person's face?" If the answer is no, rewrite and reread. Repeat the process till you feel sure that you'd feel as comfortable saying these words to the live person as you do sending them through cyberspace.
2. **Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life:**
  - **Be ethical:** if you encounter an ethical dilemma in cyberspace, consult the code you follow in real life. Chances are good you'll find the answer.
  - **Don't break the law:** If you're tempted to do something that's illegal in cyberspace, chances are it's also bad Netiquette.
3. **Know where you are in cyberspace:** When you enter a domain of cyberspace that's new to you, take a look around. Spend a while listening to the chat or reading the archives. Get a sense of how the people who are already there act. Then go ahead and participate. In this case, you are in an online classroom, and you should behave the same as you would behave in a live classroom.
4. **Respect other people's time and bandwidth:** When you send email or post to a discussion group, you're taking up other people's time (or hoping to). It's your responsibility to ensure that the time they spend reading your posting isn't wasted.
5. **Make yourself look good online:** You won't be judged by the color of your skin, eyes, or hair, your weight, your age, or your clothing. You will, however, be judged by the quality of your writing. For most people who choose to communicate online, this is an advantage; if they didn't enjoy using the written word, they wouldn't be there. So spelling and grammar do count.
6. **Share your expert knowledge:** The strength of cyberspace is in its numbers. The reason asking questions online works is that a lot of knowledgeable people are reading the questions. And if even a few of them offer intelligent answers, the sum total of world knowledge increases. The Internet itself was founded and grew because scientists wanted to share information. Ask questions when you need an answer, and always share what you learn with your classmates or help answer their questions.
7. **Help keep flame wars under control:** "Flaming" is what people do when they express a strongly held opinion without holding back any emotion. It's the kind of message that makes people respond, "Oh come on, tell us how you really feel." Tact is not its objective. People are welcome to their opinions and strong emotions. Flame wars result when contrary opinions are argued

back and forth in a flaming manner. Agree or disagree professionally, and if you can, support your opinions with facts. Respect the opinions and emotions of your classmates.

8. **Respect other people's privacy:** do not share your classmate's private information in any open communication in an online classroom. This includes discussions, or group emails. And do not share a classmate's private information with your instructor. That's just tattling, and nobody likes a tattletale.

## 12 Ground Rules for Online Discussions

**Participate:** This is a shared learning environment. No lurking in the cyberspace background. It is not enough to login and read the discussion thread of others. For the maximum benefit to all, everyone must contribute.

**Report Glitches:** Discussion forums are electronic. They break. If for any reason you experience difficulty participating, please call, email, or otherwise inform me of the issue. Chances are others are having the same problem.

**Help Others:** You may have more experience with online discussion forums than the person next to you. Give them a hand. Show them it's not so hard. They're really going to appreciate it!

**Be Patient:** Read everything in the discussion thread before replying. This will help you avoid repeating something someone else has already contributed. Acknowledge the points made with which you agree and suggest alternatives for those with which you don't.

**Be Brief:** You want to be clear—and to articulate your point—without being preachy or pompous. Be direct. Stay on point. Don't lose yourself, or your readers, in overly wordy sentences or paragraphs.

**Use Proper Writing Style:** This is a must. Write as if you were writing a term paper. Correct spelling, grammatical construction and sentence structure are expected in every other writing activity associated with scholarship and academic engagement. Online discussions are no different.

**Cite Your Sources:** Another big must! If your contribution to the conversation includes the intellectual property (authored material) of others, e.g., books, newspaper, magazine, or journal articles—online or in print—they must be given proper attribution.

**Emoticons and Texting:** Social networking and text messaging has spawned a body of linguistic shortcuts that are not part of the academic dialogue. Please refrain from :- ) faces and **c u l8r**'s.

**Respect Diversity:** It's an ethnically rich and diverse, multi-cultural world in which we live. Use no language that is—or that could be construed to be—offensive toward others. Racists, sexist, and heterosexist comments and jokes are unacceptable, as are derogatory and/or sarcastic comments and jokes directed at religious beliefs, disabilities, and age.

***No YELLING!*** Step carefully. Beware the electronic footprint you leave behind. Using bold upper-case letters is bad form, like stomping around and yelling at somebody (**NOT TO MENTION BEING HARD ON THE EYE**).

***No Flaming!*** Criticism must be constructive, well-meaning, and well-articulated. Please, no tantrums. Rants directed at any other contributor are simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The same goes for profanity. The academic environment expects higher-order language.

***Lastly, Remember: You Can't Un-Ring the Bell.*** Language is your only tool in an online environment. Be mindful. How others perceive you will be largely—as always—up to you. Once you've hit the send button, you've rung the bell.

Review your written posts and responses to ensure that you've conveyed exactly what you intended. This is an excellent opportunity to practice your proofreading, revision, and rewriting skills—valuable assets in the professional world for which you are now preparing.

**Hint:** Read your post out loud before hitting the send button. This will tell you a lot about whether your grammar and sentence structure are correct, your tone is appropriate, and your contribution clear or not.