
Netiquette in blended & online learning

28/10/16

Once you have decided what technology you are going to use it is important to ensure that everyone understands the protocols to be used for communicating. In the online environment this is referred to as netiquette and setting out the ground rules early on is key to success.

If using a videoconferencing system the following rules should be observed:

- **Be punctual** – arrive early and check your room and equipment.
- **Be courteous** and introduce yourself before speaking, at least until everybody gets to know each other.
- **Speak clearly** – do an audio check before starting and speak slowly and clearly.
- **Don't shout** – speak at a normal volume, if somebody can't hear you then they can adjust at their end, if everybody can't hear you then you need to adjust at your end.
- **Don't move about** – too much hand movement and gesticulating can distract your audience. On slower links movement can become jerky.
- **Don't interrupt other speakers** – wait for a natural break in the conversation or agree a convention to indicate you wish to speak.
- **If in doubt** – check you can be heard or seen.
- **Maintain eye contact** – it is not always easy to look at the camera and see the other participants on the screen, however if you are speaking directly to the participants try to look at the camera. Do not spend your time looking down at your notes, laptop or phone.
- **Pay attention to the speaker** - don't carry on side conversations.
- **Mute your microphone** when you're not speaking – always assume you can be heard.
- **Be natural** – easier said than done, try to relax and enjoy the interaction, it will come across in the VC and it will relax your audience.

If using a discussion board for collaboration the following rules should be observed:

- **Express your thoughts clearly and concisely.** Keep your message short and to the point. Make sure it clearly expresses your thoughts and ideas.
- Don't type in ALL **CAPITAL LETTERS** (unless you REALLY want to emphasise something); it's considered the equivalent of shouting.
- **Use line breaks** between paragraphs (white space). This makes the message easier to read (like this document).
- When participating in discussion boards and mailing lists, try to resist the urge to post "I agree" and "me too!" responses to other people's posts. Make your responses meaningful.
- Be professional and careful with what you say in your posting. Never post anything that you wouldn't want to see published somewhere else. Your messages can be forwarded anywhere by anyone who gets them. Don't put confidential, personal or legally sensitive information in messages.

If using a messaging system to hold text conversations the following rules should be observed:

- **Use real names** as this will add a sense of community.
- **Don't assume** that because someone is logged in that they are available, ask them, they may have forgotten to change their status
- **Introduce yourself** if you don't already know each other.
- **Use emoticons to transmit feeling** as the visual and audible cues are not present, but don't overdo it.
- **Use clear language** and adjust your style to match the other person.
- Be considerate of other people's points of view, it is easy to misunderstand in a text only environment.
- **Be careful of jokes** – they don't always translate well.
- **Keep it short** but be careful with abbreviations and shortcuts such as np (no problem) or u (you).
- If your message is slightly long use line breaks to **break it up**.
- If your message is important then consider using email as the recipient may want to keep a copy for reference.
- **Be polite**, avoid barging in.
- **Be patient**, if you don't receive an immediate response
- Close the interaction with a 'goodbye' or 'thank you'.
- Don't type in the **heat of the moment**; you will regret it later. There's a time and a place for flaming (spouting off angrily at someone), but the module discussion board is not it.
- **Be courteous** and respectful of other people. If you use abusive or offensive language, you will be blocked from the conference area and potentially removed from your course. If that is the case, you will not receive a refund for your tuition
- Be careful when using **sarcasm and humour**. Electronic communications can be very impersonal and others may take your words as criticism. "Emoticons" are a widely accepted way of differentiating humour and sarcasm from serious comments. One person's joke is another person's insult. Examples of some emoticons are: smile = :o) frown = :o(wink = ; o)
- **Don't assume** everyone understands your use of abbreviations, acronyms, slang and regionalisms.
- **Be complete**. Writing a post is not the same as talking to someone on the phone or in person. Include context and be specific. Explain things that you think might be obvious because it might not be obvious to the recipient. Take the time to re-read your post before you send it. Use common sense - is this message something that you want to be sent to you? Will you understand it in 3 days if you were to go back and read it?
- **Fill in the subject line or thread name**. Keep the characters in the subject line or thread name short and relevant. This makes it easier for users to find and filter discussions.
- **Restrict the number of topics** that you cover in each message, preferably to one. Use paragraphs if your message must contain more than one subject, but ideally send separate



messages. Whole page emails and/or large attachments are not conducive to good discussions – it's like someone speaking on and on without giving others a turn.

- **Don't feel pressured** to respond to a message immediately; if asked for information, it's better to do some homework to make sure you're providing a good answer than to shoot off on something that may be irrelevant.
- **Participate** in the discussion board. Even if you simply post small messages frequently in order to ask further questions or to agree with previous remarks, this helps to generate a good flow on the discussion board and is more educationally beneficial for both students and tutors.

