What Is Netiquette and Why Is It Important?

Netiquette means etiquette on the Internet (or net). The rules of netiquette may vary significantly across different settings. Many schools use their own netiquette guidelines to provide direction to their students. Failure to follow netiquette rules can have long-term negative effects on your relationships with both instructors and fellow students.

Netiquette Guidelines

In general, the same rules apply in netiquette as in face-to-face communication. Here are some general netiquette rules for an online education environment.

**Be friendly and positive. Think before you write.** You can hurt the feelings of others and have your own feelings hurt when you or others are not careful with their communication. Tips include:

- If you are writing something you feel may cause others to react negatively, such as a critique or what is likely to be a very unpopular opinion, edit carefully before you post. Write in a way that makes it as easy as possible for others to consider your views. Re-read what you have written to be sure it is as positive as you can make it. Ask others to read what you have written and to give you their opinions about whether your post is acceptable to send.

- Don’t respond when you feel angry. Wait. Write down your response, but don’t send it. Come back later, re-read the original post, and then decide if you still feel the same way before you send.

**Use proper language.** Never use profane language in an online education environment. Go by the rule, “When in doubt, leave it out.” Avoid slang to better communicate with students less proficient in the English language. Address your instructors and students in the manner they prefer to be addressed. Capitalize only single words for emphasis; using all capitals for writing online implies yelling, which can hurt others’ feelings and give them the wrong impression of you.

**Use effective communication.** Write clearly at all times. Re-read your posts before you sent them and edit for content, clarity, and tone. Define and re-state your words when necessary. Correct a
misunderstanding right away. Chances are, if one person felt a certain way about what you said, another may feel the same way. Be mindful of word choice and joking. For example, the slang term, “get out!” can be interpreted in several ways, either positively or negatively.

**Be professional.** Don’t use emoticons or instant message abbreviations. They may hinder rather than help communication and may appear unprofessional. As in any civil communication, always say please and thank you when called for.

**Ask for clarification.** If you are unsure of what an instructor or fellow student means, ask for clarification. It’s difficult for everyone to communicate perfectly when writing online. A simple way to do this is to write, “I did not understand...Can you please explain…?”, Always keep the responsibility for the misunderstanding on yourself.

**Ask for help.** If you are ever offended or uncertain about the tone of the communication in an online activity with your classmates, don’t hesitate to consult with your instructor.

*What Is Netiquette and Why Is It Important?*

*Netiquette Guidelines*