

Tips for Effective Online Communication

It is essential to learn effective communication strategies if you want to succeed in school, work, and in the communities in which we live. Furthermore, it is especially critical for students in online learning environments to improve their written communication skills and master the art of effective online communication. This way, we can be sure our intentions are obvious and our thoughts are coming across clearly to others.

General Netiquette: “Netiquette” is online etiquette, or the practice of courtesy and respect in an online environment.

1. **Don't be shy!** If you have a question, concern, comment, or suggestion make sure to speak up. Just like you would raise your hand for clarification in a traditional classroom, you can send an email to your instructor, post a message to the discussion board, or ask a question during the weekly seminar. Your instructor will be more than happy to work with you regarding any matter, but it is your responsibility to communicate with your instructor when you have an issue that needs to be addressed.
2. **Participate, participate, and participate!** The most successful online students log into the classroom each and every day to complete learning activities, respond to discussion questions, post comments to classmates, attend the seminar, or even to socialize with classmates in the Cyber Café. The key is to stay actively involved in the learning process.
3. **Use smiley faces (also known as emoticons)** or other ways to express your thoughts and feelings. It is perfectly acceptable to include a happy face or a LOL (laughing out loud) notation after your response to indicate your mood and/or intention. 😊
4. **Keep an eye on word count.** In some cases, your instructor will provide specific guidelines for the length of an assignment or response. Try to stay within these guidelines. The idea is to learn how to communicate your ideas clearly and concisely.
5. **Communicate your feedback!** Teachers and students have been learning in traditional classrooms for centuries. Online learning is fairly new to everyone. It will be extremely helpful for your classmates, instructor, course developer, and school administrators if you can provide feedback on the quality of the course content and teaching practices. If you are asked to complete a survey, by all means, let your voice be heard!

Discussion Board and Seminars

1. **Make sure you read the questions carefully** before responding.
2. **Share your personal experiences.** Be open, honest, and genuine about with your responses. This is how we learn from each other.
3. **Be considerate and appropriate.** Keep in mind you will be communicating with people from all over the country (or even the world!) who may have different beliefs and points of view.
4. **Avoid the tendency to prove your point of view is the right one.** Instead, read and think critically about what others have to say.

5. **Use people's names or nicknames.** This makes for a friendlier classroom experience.
6. **Type your responses onto a Word document first,** and then copy and paste them into the discussion board or seminar. This will help to avoid losing your responses if the system "times you out" and help you save time during seminar.
7. **Include the question on the top of the page** so you can see it while you are typing your response. That way, you will be sure to address each part of the question. (discussion board only)
8. **Think of each response as an inverted pyramid.** Start with the most important statements and follow up with supporting details.
9. **Use sub-topics,** if necessary, to guide the reader through your response.
10. **Include references to your reading assignments** to support your own ideas and statements. Make sure to note where you got the information in order to avoid plagiarism.
11. **Avoid slang and sarcasm,** as they can easily be misunderstood.
12. **Avoid "flaming"**, or flying off the handle and ranting on someone. This is equivalent to having a temper tantrum and is considered inappropriate behavior. Instead, carefully craft a response that expresses your thoughts assertively (as opposed to aggressively). If you find something that strikes you as upsetting or unacceptable, contact your instructor immediately.

Emails

1. **Start with a strong subject line.** When you are writing an email to your instructor, make sure to include your name, class, and section number. This will ensure you get a faster response time.
2. **Keep paragraphs short and easy to read.** People will be more likely to read them.
3. **Be direct and to the point.** Avoid statements that serve no purpose or add little value to the point you are trying to make.
4. **Use your spell check and re-read your message before you hit send.** You will most likely find at least a few errors that you can correct before you send.
5. **Sign your name by including your full name at the bottom.** Make sure your message makes it clear who it came from.