NETIQUETTE GUIDE

Network etiquette (commonly known as netiquette) is the ‘golden rules’ or do’s and don’ts of online communication. The Core Rules of Netiquette by Virginia Shea (2003) is a good place to start. Shea describes ten rules that cover both how to be courteous online as well as some of the informal ‘rules of the road’ of cyberspace.

1. Remember the Human

   Communicating online is different from communicating face-to-face. You don’t have the luxury of gestures, the tone of your voice or facial expressions to support you – you only have words. However, if you organise yourself well you may find the discipline of online discussions more productive than many face-to-face situations. Be respectful to your fellow students. Before you respond to a posting think to yourself – would you say it to their face? If no, then you need to edit your posting. As a rule always read what you have written before you send it.

2. Adhere to the same standards of behaviour online that you follow in real life

   Do not lower your own ethical/personal behaviour standards just because you are in cyberspace. You must never belittle, harass, or vilify other students. No discriminatory comments (racist, sexist or homophobic) will be tolerated. This is not just about being polite it is about abiding by the law. If you come across any inappropriate postings in your course you must contact your lecturer. It is their responsibility to take the appropriate action.

3. Know where you are in cyberspace

   Not all online discussion groups are the same. What might be perfectly acceptable in one domain may not be appropriate in another. The Bb discussion board in your course at UoN has its own rules. For example some text language or emoticons might be acceptable in some unmoderated discussion groups but not in moderated ones. You will need to find out what your lecturer finds acceptable, especially if your discussion is to be assessed.

4. Respect other people’s time and bandwidth

   Don’t ramble – get to the point succinctly and don’t post multiple copies of the same response to different threads in the same discussion board. Many students have limited bandwidth access on dial-up so you don’t want to waste their time unnecessarily. Opening new threads or attachments can be time-consuming so make it worthwhile for the reader.

5. Make yourself look good online

   When participating in online discussions, you will be judged on your ability to express yourself effectively in writing. Spelling and grammar do count so brush up on your skills. Pay attention to the content of your message and make sure you have researched your material so that you know what you are talking about. Make sure that your argument is clear and logical. Keep it simple — be polite — you want to avoid creating any potential misunderstandings.

6. Share expert knowledge

   Don’t be afraid to ask questions and don’t be shy about sharing expert knowledge. The Internet itself came about because scientists wanted to share knowledge (Shea, 2005) and its rapid growth is due to more of us wanting to share our knowledge. You need to remember to cite your sources and not plagiarise. Do not share information that you do not have copyright permission for. It is your responsibility to find out more about the relevant University policies.

7. Help keep flame wars under control

   Flaming (the posting of strongly held opinions that may be deliberately provocative) is a long-standing network tradition. However, flaming as part of your studies will not be tolerated. Flame wars may be amusing at first but they can become boring quickly and do not contribute constructively to your learning environment. Avoid offending others and inform your lecturer if you see it happening.
8. Respect other people’s privacy

Respecting other people’s privacy is good netiquette so be careful about the content of your
messages. Don't forward sensitive information to others without the writer’s permission. Your course
discussion boards are confidential spaces and you need to be sensitive about what you and your
fellow students contribute. You might want to think of using a direct email instead if you want to
address a comment to an individual rather than the whole group.

9. Don’t abuse your power

As a student this rule might not directly apply to you. As a number of the rules state it is important
to respect your fellow students and their opinions. It is good to acknowledge a different point of view
and also be able to present your point of view. Avoid SHOUTING (using capital letters) and being
dogmatic.

10. Be forgiving of other people’s mistakes

Everyone was a discussion board beginner once. Try not to show off or put people in their place
by correcting them publicly (especially spelling mistakes). Inform them privately if they have done
something that is a real no-no but it's best to assume that they don't know any better, rather than
they have done it deliberately.

Reference:
http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html