

## Student Guidelines for Online Etiquette

As an online student, communication is a bit different than in a face-to-face setting. We pride ourselves in providing several opportunities for social interactions, but the difference is that most communication is via written text in an online environment. Because this means you are missing body language cues and immediate feedback from your “listener,” it is very important to understand some common rules for good online etiquette. This ensures that the message you intend to convey is received correctly.

- 1. Be respectful.** While it is easier to say hurtful or disrespectful things without standing face-to-face with someone, it is important to remember that your classmates and teachers are real people who are affected by the words you say and write. It is essential to keep in mind the feelings and opinions of others, even if they differ from your own. If you would not say it to someone’s face, do not say it online either.
- 2. Be aware of strong language, all caps, and exclamation points.** It is easy for written text to be misread and misunderstood. Have you ever sent a text message with good intent but your recipient thought you were being rude? If so, then you’ve experienced this firsthand. By being cognizant of strong language, you can identify potential confusions before sending messages. Tip: Read everything out loud before you send it.
- 3. Be careful with humor and sarcasm.** Certainly, you shouldn’t avoid being funny. We love to see your personality shine through in online classes. Many of our teachers are exceptionally funny too. As mentioned in Rule #2, make sure that it is clear you are being funny and not being rude. Emoticons and smileys can be helpful when conveying humor or sarcasm so that it is read correctly. Just remember to keep the smiley faces away from academic papers.
- 4. Yes, grammar and spelling matter.** While texting, textspeak can be great for your friends. In an educational setting (even online) however, keep it formal. Your written communication should be professional and reflect proper writing style. Save written shortcuts and less than stellar grammar for parent-approved social media, if you must, but follow grammar rules for school.
- 5. Cite your sources.** Whenever you are sharing an idea that originated from someone else (even if it is not word for word), it is good practice to cite that source. This applies to discussion forums too. If you read a great thought in your text, share it, but be sure you let your audience know where you saw it first.
- 6. Don’t post or share (even privately) inappropriate material.** Enough said there. Nothing is truly private online.
- 7. Be forgiving.** Remember that not everyone will know these rules before posting. Try to be understanding of others when they struggle with written communication. It is very different from simply talking to a person face-to-face.
- 8. Consider others’ privacy.** Ask for permission if you want to forward someone’s email messages to third parties. Keep in mind that all private email mail is considered copyrighted by the original author.
- 9. Think before you hit the send button.** Think carefully about the content of your message before contributing it. Once sent to the group, there is no taking it back. Grammar and spelling errors reflect on you, and your audience might not be able to decode misspelled words or poorly constructed sentences.
- 10. Brevity is best.** Be as concise as possible when contributing to a discussion. Your points might be missed if hidden in a flood of text.
- 11. Stick to the point.** Contributions to a discussion should stick to the subject. Don’t waste others’ time by going off on irrelevant tangents.
- 12. Do not type in all caps.** Typing in caps is considered shouting or screaming online. Various studies on the topic reflect that it is more difficult and takes longer to read text that is typed in all caps.
- 13. Frivolous email. Don’t forward jokes, “chain letters” or unimportant email to other students without their permission.** Not only does it fill up their mailboxes but may offend people who do not share the same sense of humor or who are tired of these types of email.