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Good manners when communicating – the world of netiquette

Netiquette is network etiquette, the do's and don'ts of online communication.

Tips for email and discussion forums

Communicating via email or in a discussion forum is very different from speaking to someone face to face. Meanings are conveyed through typed words, so you cannot see people nod their heads or laugh or frown.

Emotions can easily be misunderstood.

Remember the person at the other end – they have feelings like you do.

What you say may have a different meaning for people who can't see you. For example: 'You must be joking' without seeing a smile, or 'I don't believe you' without seeing a grimace.

Bad netiquette

The following are considered bad netiquette:

- ▶ *Shouting*: typing your emails in CAPITALS.
- ▶ *Flaming*: a flame is sent or posted to insult or complain with the intention of causing offence and provoking a response.
- ▶ *Trolling*: a troll is somebody who posts or sends with the intention of annoying someone or disrupting a discussion or environment.



Good netiquette

Always thank, acknowledge and support:

- ▶ ‘Andy, I liked your comment ...’
- ▶ ‘I agree with Julia’s idea that ...’

Acknowledge before you disagree:

- ▶ ‘What I think you mean is ... I hope that’s right? My own view differs as follows ...’

Avoid very impersonal statements like:

- ▶ ‘This is the way it is ...’
- ▶ ‘It’s a fact that ...’

Always include a subject line, title or header indicating the contents of your message. People see this before they see the contents and may use it to decide whether or not to read it.

Make sure your title is clear and short.

Try to make your messages brief (no longer than one or two screens if possible).

A modern dilemma

Nathan sends an email to Amy requesting some information – how should he reply to her message?

Nathan,

I already sent you what you asked for

YOU ARE AN IDIOT IF YOU'VE LOST IT – GET A LIFE !!!!!

Amy

Try to adhere to the same standards of behaviour online that you follow in real life (as long as you're well behaved in real life too!)

Test your netiquette

Albion.com provides a good netiquette resource with tips and a quiz:

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>

Email netiquette

Sometimes taking a minute to reread what you've written before sending an email makes all the difference.

Email 'think before you send it' checklist:

Action	Checklist
Is the tone of your email ok? Is it too casual or vague? If so, amend it.	
Are there insults, swearing or offensive terms in your email? Remove them.	
Would you say the contents of the email to the person's face? If not, rewrite it.	
Could I not just speak to the person (by phone or in person) rather than sending it? If yes, don't send it.	
Would I be happy to receive this email if someone sent it to me?	

Flames and trolls

Choosing how to deal with a flame or troll can be difficult as the wrong approach could lead to further trouble. Your options are:

- 1 Ignore it:** Usually the best method is to ignore trouble, as tutors will normally step in. Ignoring a troll is almost always the best approach as if nobody responds, the troller will get bored and go away. Users will sometimes add a warning: *Do not feed the troll (DNFTT)*.
- 2 Respond rationally:** This can make the flamer look irrational but a troll can be a direct challenge to authority so they are difficult to ignore. A reference to an earlier posting answering the troll's points can be a good way of defusing a situation.
- 3 Flame back:** It is usually a bad idea to respond back in this way as it only shows your own suitability for trolling or being flamed in the future. Flaming back also provokes the flamer into responding again.
- 4 Explain:** If you can remain calm, you could try to respond with an explanation. You could reply to a flamer indicating they may have misunderstood what you said, and give a more detailed explanation in your reply.

Email chain letters and other irritations

Why do people forward chain letters? Don't open an email if you don't recognise the author, especially if it has an attachment, which might be a virus. Think twice before forwarding any email or opening suspect attachments.

If it does not say, 'this is a chain letter' that doesn't mean it's *not* a chain letter. We are all guilty of occasionally forwarding suspect emails. Try to think before you do.

Spam, spam and more spam

Do not respond to a 'remove' facility provided by a spam email – it's a trick to get you to confirm your **email address** as a valid one to which they might send you more spam emails. Delete it from your inbox and also delete it from your deleted items folder if you have one.

Forwarding correctly

There are many email hoaxes, which will probably never die because it is too easy to forward items on to others. With email it is very easy to 'reply to all' without thinking about who will be receiving it.

It is always worth looking at who the email you are forwarding on has been sent to and who you are forwarding it on to. Always check the 'To' and 'CC' boxes before you send an email (especially if the content of your email is private and confidential).

And, if you decide that you must forward an email or funny cat picture, use **BCC** ('blind copy') and remove any previously forwarded email addresses, so you don't share and publicise all of the correspondents' email addresses with a list of people they don't know. With a blind copy, recipients only see their own email address.

BUT remember good netiquette advice: never forward an email without the sender's permission!

Whoever you forward an email to might forward it to someone else, so always be sure that what you send you would be happy for others to see.



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